



Terrorism in a Global Context

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Grade level: 11-12

Length: 14 weeks

Introduction

In order to understand the impact that September 11th had on the world and how the attacks have shaped our future, students are encouraged to view them in a global context. As demonstrated in this excerpt from the HBO documentary [What Happened on September 11](#), teachers can present their students with this complex historical subject in a variety of ways.

Watch the [Placing 9/11 In A Global Context](#) excerpt, then explore this lesson plan to see how teachers have framed 9/11 within the scope of global history.

Objective

To develop a working definition of the term terrorism, understand the motivations behind terrorist acts, explore how it has been used by different actors in various historical eras, evaluate its effectiveness as a political tool, and understand how terrorism has affected the communities in which we live.

Common Core Standards

Comprehensive Common Core Alignments at end of lesson plan.

Reading Standards for Informational Text: 1, 2, 3

Reading Standards for Literacy in History/ Social Studies: 3, 5, 9

Resources

- [Placing 9/11 In A Global Context](#) Excerpt
- [“What Happened on September 11”](#), HBO
- [The New York Times](#)
- [The Economist](#)
- “The Looming Tower: al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11” by Lawrence Wright (2006 Edition)
- “Inside 9/11” Documentary, National Geographic, 2005

Activity: Unit 1, Terrorism Lens (2 weeks)

While the 9/11 attacks were some of the most spectacular and violent terrorist acts in history, terrorism is by no means a recent development. Terrorism is a concept and a tactic that has been employed for well over a hundred years. Given its deep historical resonance, it seems appropriate that we use terrorism as the first lens through which to view 9/11. Within this unit, students will 1) develop a working definition of the term terrorism; 2) understand the motivations behind terrorist acts; 3) explore how it has been used by different actors in various historical eras; 4) evaluate its effectiveness as a political tool; and 5) appreciate how terrorism has affected the communities in which we live.

Students will analyze instructor curated readings on each of three key topics (terrorism introduction, motivation, and suicide terrorism). Additionally, they will supplement these readings with a quiz, partner work, and group discussions. Key questions to include:

- What is terrorism?
- What motivates terrorists or what prompts people to commit acts of terror?
- How has terrorism been used by different actors in various historical eras?
- How effective is terrorism as a political tool?



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Assessment/Reflection: Unit 1

"Terrorism Near You": Create a case study briefing for the FBI.

The student will examine an incident of terrorism that is connected to his/her local area. The event could have happened locally, or it could be an event with any kind of connection to the student's local area. The student will create a briefing to the Director of the FBI on terrorism and the impacts of terrorism in his/her locale (FBI field office). Goals for the assignment: conduct original research, using a range of research tools and sources; gain an understanding of the complexities of terrorism and the extent to which it is present in global culture; test and refine definitions of terrorism; compose a brief and effective briefing paper.

Activity: Unit 2, US Foreign Policy Lens (2 weeks)

For much of its history the United States had little or no meaningful interaction with the Middle East. Focused on westward expansion and preoccupied with sectional divisions, the U.S. was not a strong presence in the international arena. When the U.S. did exert itself outside its borders, it tended to be closer to home, i.e., in the Caribbean and Central America, or as part of its effort to extend economic influence in East Asia. WWII changed this. It brought the U.S. military to the Muslim world, it demonstrated the need for reliable access to energy resources, and it led to global rivalry with the Soviet Union. After 1945, the U.S. would have real national security interests in the Middle East.

Students will explore U.S. interests in the Middle East after 1945 and the policies put in place to help advance them. They will also begin analyze geopolitical history for evidence of resistance to these policies and the potential for "blowback." The class will read various examples related to the relations between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia and the U.S. and Israel. The students will supplement their knowledge with a class discussion, a formative quiz, and a video reflection. Key questions to include:

- What was the turning point for American involvement in the Middle East? Why?
- What were the key American interests in the region from WWII on?
- With which countries did the U.S. ally itself during the post-WWII period? What have been the costs and benefits of those relationships?
- What is your opinion on American foreign policy in the Middle East? Has the U.S. been a force for good?

Assessment/Reflection: Unit 2

Evaluating U.S. Foreign Policy: Position Paper on America's Middle East Policy

Students will develop a position on this question, pro/con/or somewhere in the middle, and build a case to support their stance. They will present their argument in the form of a video submission. After making the video, watch 2 classmates' videos. Students have the opportunity to comment on each other's submission to give peer feedback. Here are the details:

- No longer than a 4 minute post
- Develop a point of view at the outset
- Include evidence from the unit to support your stance
- Go beyond the materials in the unit by introducing one idea/example that was not covered

Activity: Unit 3, Israel-Palestine Lens (2 weeks)

The Israeli-Palestinian dispute is one of the most sensitive and controversial issues in all of world politics. It is also linked to many of the forces and actors associated with the 9/11 attacks. Students will explore the history of this conflict and seek to discern the ways in which this issue has shaped developments in the modern Middle East, entangled great powers in the region, and generated tremendous backlash among so many Arab-Muslims. Through reading, viewing, and discussing a wide range of primary and secondary sources representing a myriad of

viewpoints, students will be able to evaluate the importance of Israel-Palestine as a contributing factor to Islamic terrorism and 9/11. Key questions to include:

- What is the historical background for the Israel-Palestine dispute?
- What were the circumstances surrounding the creation of the state of Israel in 1948?
- What have been the animating forces behind the conflict in the years since 1948?
- In what ways do the historical narratives of each community differ in critical ways? Are there any areas where their narratives overlap?
- What role have outside powers, particularly the U.S., played in this conflict?
- To what extent was the Israel-Palestine dispute a contributing factor to 9/11?

Assessment/Reflection: Unit 3

“Primary Source” Interview & Reflection Project

Identify someone who has been affected by the events in Israel-Palestine (or whose family has). Begin by asking parents, teachers, and friends if they know someone. Make an audio recording of the interview. Provide a brief 1-2 page write-up of the interview.

Activity: Unit 4, Political Islam Lens (2 weeks)

There are a variety of terms for what students will be exploring in this unit. “Militant Islam,” “fundamentalism,” and “Islamism” are all used to convey movements that seek to integrate Islam and governance and push back against Western influence. While there may be a good deal of interchangeability among these terms, and while each may have descriptive power in some ways, the phrase students will use in this unit is political Islam.

Students will do some background reading and discussion before moving into a group project that evaluates the key actors in political Islam. The objective is to understand the origins of the movement, become familiar with some key thinkers and activists associated with it, and discern the links between political Islam and terrorism. Key questions to include:

- What are the key ideas associated with political Islam?
- How did this movement originate? What historical forces in the 20th century contributed to this development?
- Who are the main actors and thinkers within this movement? What roles did they play in pushing a closer connection between Islam and politics?
- What similarities and differences exist between and among these individuals?
- To what extent would these individuals endorse or approve acts of terrorism such as 9/11?

Assessment/Reflection: Unit 4

This assignment will ask you to synthesize and analyze the material in this unit, particularly the pages created by each group in the assignment above. Students will reflect on each group’s work by responding to the following questions:

- All but one of these individuals was active in the 1960s, a decade known for political action and social movements in various countries. Do you see any connections between political Islam as a movement, and other movements of that time, e.g., the counterculture, antiwar protests, civil rights movement? Why or why not? (~2-3 paragraphs)
- All of the figures profiled in this unit suffered some sort of persecution and four of them were executed or murdered. What does this tell you about their ideas and their goals? (~1-2 paragraphs)
- While each thinker had some particular ideas, there is great overlap among them. In one sentence, please craft a statement that best summarizes the views of all 5 thinkers in this unit. (1 sentence)
- Which of these five individuals had the greatest impact? Why? (~1 paragraph)



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- How would the five individuals profiled in this unit have viewed 9/11? Would some/all/none of them have approved of the attacks? (~2-3 paragraphs)

Activity: Unit 5, al Qaeda Lens (2 weeks)

In assessing al Qaeda and its founder and public face, Osama bin Laden, students will attempt to understand how and why the 9/11 attacks were carried out. Students will read and discuss the Hamburg Cell, Osama bin Laden, and the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan. They will watch videos to both further their knowledge, but also to analyze and evaluate different source material. Key questions to include:

- What is Osama bin Laden's personal story, and how did he become radicalized?
- What was the context for the emergence of al Qaeda? Why was the group formed and what are its objectives?
- How did al Qaeda grow to become a global force and an antagonist of the U.S.?
- How was the plot developed and executed?

Assessment/Reflection: Unit 5

Who were the 9/11 Hijackers?: Wiki Creation on the 9/11 hijackers

Find out some very basic information about the four pilot hijackers and provide information and resources. What are the hijackers' names? Where were they from? How did they meet? What were their particular motivations for carrying out this attack? How/where/why did they become radicalized? How did they become affiliated with al Qaeda? Reflect back on what was learned about terrorism in the first lens of the class. Remember the lessons on personal, psychological, and political motivations for terrorists. Try to apply that information to the 9/11 hijackers and arrive at some conclusions to this question: to what extent were they likely or unlikely terrorists?

Activity: Unit 6, Responses to 9/11 (2 weeks)

Attempting to make sense of the 9/11 attacks, historians and other observers searched for context and parallels. In terms of sheer casualties, Sept. 11, 2001 was the deadliest day in American history since the Battle of Antietam. With regard to the surprise nature of the attacks, many connections were made to Pearl Harbor in 1941. And, as the terminology of the event unfolded in the days after 9/11, the World Trade Center site became known as "Ground Zero" — a direct reference to the atomic bombing of Japan.

In the midst of this search for context and understanding, individuals, families, journalists and even artists responded to 9/11 in their own unique ways. This unit will highlight many of these responses. Students will also have the opportunity in this unit to converse with others about their recollections of 9/11 and their reactions to these materials. The unit will conclude with a turn toward the policy responses to 9/11, as the "war on terror" began in Afghanistan and Iraq. Students will use both primary and secondary sources to construct knowledge on this topic.

1. Read the front page articles of the *New York Times* from Sept. 12.
2. Read "The Day the World Changed" from the *Economist*
3. Read World War III – op-ed by Thomas Friedman on Sept. 12.

Assessment/Reflection: Unit 6

The First Draft of History: Letter to the Editor, 14 years later

After you finish the sources, step back and reflect on what you've read. Ask: how well do these "first drafts" of history stand up 13 years later? Do these sources capture the essence of 9/11 or would that only come with time and distance? Provide a 1-2 paragraph "letter to the editor" to respond to the resources seen. In it, state what was appreciated about these articles and/or what needs to be amended.

Activity: Unit 7, The ISIS Lens (2 weeks)

Explore the rise of a new force in the Middle East - ISIS. Not only has this terrorist group executed a number of Westerners in horrific videos and carried out violent attacks against Shia and other religious groups, it has also claimed something that previous terrorist groups could only dream of: an actual state. In this way, the name "ISIS" may be misleading or outdated, as it prefers to call itself the "Islamic State" a direct reference to its control of territory in Iraq and Syria. In this unit, students will learn about ISIS' beliefs and actions, as well as the threat it poses to the Middle East and the wider world. They'll also be comparing ISIS to the threat of al Qaeda, pre and post 9/11. Key questions to include:

- What is ISIS, what do they want, and what have they done?
- How are different actors responding to the rise of ISIS?
- In what ways do al Qaeda and ISIS represent similar/different threats?
- Do you think the use of terrorism will increase, decrease, or stay about the same in the next few decades? Will it change in any significant way?

Assessment/Reflection: Unit 7

The Future of Terrorism Written Response

Students will reflect on the major themes and ideas in the course and make some projections about the years ahead. In particular, students will bring back to the very first unit in the class (terrorism) and speculate on how this issue will play out in the future. In a 1-2 paragraph post, students will respond to this question: Do you think the use of terrorism will increase or decrease in the future? Will it change in any significant ways? How and why?

Common Core Alignments

These alignments were written for the 11th-12th grade level. However, this lesson can easily be adjusted for use in other grades and corresponds to the following Common Core Standards. Student assessments and expectation may vary depending upon grade level and ability.

Reading Standards for Informational Text

Key Ideas and Details

- Standard 1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain
- Standard 2: Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text
- Standard 3: Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

Reading Standards for Literacy in History/ Social Studies

Key Ideas and Details

- Standard 3: Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

Craft and Structure

- Standard 5: Analyze in detail how a complex primary source is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text contribute to the whole.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- Standard 9: Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.