

Operation Rising Lion: Israel-Iran war

The relationship between Israel and Iran and the history of the Persian-Iranian Jewish community is long and complex. So, it is of course impossible to go into great depth or detail in a one-hour lesson. However, we can provide students with some meaningful background to help them begin to understand the reasons and significance of the current war.

**Lesson Outline:**

Understanding the Background of the Israel-Iran War

**Grade Level:**

Middle School (Grades 6–8)

**Length:**

1 class period (approx. 50–60 minutes)

Learning Goals:

By the end of the lesson, students will:

1. Understand that Iran has a long history, including different names and rulers.
2. Understand that the Jewish community has a long history in Iran.
3. Understand that Iran's relationship with Israel has changed over time.
4. Be able to identify Iran and Israel on a map and describe their geographic relationship.
5. Recognize how the Iran-Israel conflict connects with other terror organizations.
6. Understand the significance of the name of the current war with Iran.
7. Describe Israel's stated reasons for entering the current conflict.

Lesson Structure:**1. Opening – "What Do You Know?"***5 min*

- "What do you already know about Iran or its relationship with Israel?"
- Students share or write responses on sticky notes or in notebooks.
- Teacher collects ideas and keywords on the board or in slide presentation.

2. Mini-Lecture with Visuals*20 min***Current Map - what do you notice? (slide #2)**

1. Size - Iran is about 75 times larger than Israel. (if Israel is a lego block, Iran would be a pizza box)
2. Location: Iran is located in between Iraq and Afghanistan; it doesn't border Israel.
3. Distance - About 1,000–1,500 km (2-3 hours by plane, although there are no such flights!)
4. Resources - Iran has oil and borders a sea, Israel borders the Mediterranean
5. Demographics - Israel has about 10 million people, Iran has about 90 million people. (Iranians are Persians, which is a distinct ethnic group (not Arabs). They are also Shias, which is the minority branch of Islam)

Ancient Persia and Jewish history.

We just looked at a map from today... but the relationship between Iran and Israel, or between Jews and the area that is now called Iran has a very long history. Iran only started being called Iran in 1939. Does anyone know what it was called before that? Persia. And Jews have had a presence there since 2500 years ago.

○ **586 BCE - Destruction of 1st temple** - Jews were exiled from Jerusalem to Babylonian empire
(slide #3)

○ **538 BCE (70 years later)** - The Persian Empire conquers Babylonia and “Cyrus the Great” invites the Jews to return to Israel and rebuild the temple. Some of them did (return to Zion), but most stayed in Persia..like Mordechai and Esther! The Purim story takes place in Shushan, Persia or modern-day Iran. (slide #4)

Since those ancient biblical times, there has been a Jewish community in Persia/Iran. We cannot review 2500 years of history, but throughout the centuries there was always a Jewish community in Persia - with ups and downs - periods of greater flourishing and strength and periods of more persecution and discrimination, depending on the ruling empire. (slide #5)

The changing relationship between Israel and Iran

○ **1948-1979** - It is hard to imagine today, but Israel and Iran had nearly 30 years of friendly (if discreet) relations! For the first 30 years of Israel's existence, Iran was under the rule of the (secular) Shah (king), who was interested in modernization and relations with the West. Iran was the second Muslim country to recognize Israel as a sovereign state in 1950. In the 60s, 100,000 Jews lived comfortably in Tehran. Israel and Iran had military, economic, political and cultural ties.
(slide #6)

○ **1979** - Iran's relationship with Israel radically changed starting in 1979 with the Islamic revolution which overthrew the Shah and the new (religious) leader, Ayatollah Khomeini created a government based on strict Islamic law and strongly anti the West, specifically the US (“great satan”) and Israel (“little satan”). Iran cut off all ties with Israel, banned travel, named Israel the “enemy” and called for its destruction. The vast majority of Iranian Jews fled to Israel, Europe, and the US. (slide #7)

“The Iranian Octopus” - Israeli leaders describe Iran as the “head of the octopus” because it is the source/center of financial and military support to terror groups like Hezbollah (in Lebanon), Hamas (in Gaza), and the Houthis (in Yemen) – which are the arms (or tentacles) of the octopus. (slide #8)

Discussion Questions: Do you think this is a good metaphor - why or why not? If an octopus was fighting you, would you attack its arm or head? Can you come up with a different metaphor for Iran's role in the conflict with Israel?

3. What's Happening Now?

10-15 min

On June 13, Israel launched a major attack on Iran. The strike targeted and dismantled parts of Iran's air defense system, destroyed key nuclear facilities, and eliminated several high-ranking military and scientific leaders involved in Iran's nuclear program. Israel acted now because, after months of failed negotiations with the United States and other countries, Iran continued to enrich uranium – a key step toward building a nuclear bomb. Despite repeated international warnings, Iran refused to stop and even hid important information from global inspectors. This year, the IAEA reported that Iran's stock of 60% purity enriched uranium had grown to 408 kilograms - enough, if enriched further, for nine nuclear weapons. Israel felt it had no choice but to act first, to defend itself against a regime that openly threatens its existence. This attack was not directed at the Iranian people, but at the Iranian government and its dangerous nuclear activities. *(slide #9)*

In response, Iran fired hundreds of missiles and drones toward Israel's cities, killing over 20 civilians, destroying residential buildings, and sending the entire nation into alert. Despite this significant damage, Israel has successfully intercepted 90% of Iran's missiles. *(slide #10)*

The name of Israel's operation - which has been in the planning for years - is "Am Kelavi" translated as "a People like a Lion." The name is taken from a verse in Parshat Balak. Bilaam's curse is turned into a blessing about the strength of Israel: 'This nation rises like a lion, stands like a lion.' (Numbers 23:24). But the name has a double meaning. The image of a people rising like a lion may also reference the Iranian people themselves whose national symbol before the Islamic revolution was the lion. The operation's English name "Rising Lion" can be understood as a call to the Iranian people to revolt against the Islamic regime. *(slide #11)*

Optional activity #1:

Have students create a visual image or poster that reflects the name "Am Kelavi" using drawing, collage, canva, or AI. Challenge students to incorporate both images and text that connect to both the name and meaning of this war. Students can present or create a virtual or classroom gallery walk. *(slide #12)*

Optional activity #2:

Chavruta study on the phrase found in the Sanhedrin 72, it says:

"השכם להורגו - הבא להורגך" translated as "He who comes to kill you, rise early to kill him [first]."

Discussion Questions:

- What do you think this phrase means in your own words?
- How does this phrase relate to Israel's current war with Iran?
- How can we balance the Jewish value of peace (shalom) with the need to protect ourselves

4.

Reflection - Exit ticket

5-10 min

- 3 things I learned today
- 2 things that surprised me
- 1 question I still have