

Lesson 8: Language and Faith

The activities in Lesson 8 are designed to explore the role of language as it is specifically used for and interpreted by mass audiences in contemporary times. While in most cases, language's intrinsic purpose is to clarify meaning, often the role of language referencing religion and war is reversed to one which results in confusion, misinterpretation and misunderstanding.

Objectives:

- Students will identify traditional and contemporary interpretations of key religious concepts.
- Students will analyze, interpret, compare and contrast primary and secondary sources.
- Students will analyze religious concepts as interpreted by the media and other public mediums of interpretation.
- Students will examine the use of language describing and categorizing armed conflict by different parties to the conflict.

Grade Level/Subject: History. Originally used in 7th (World History) and 8th (American History) grade classrooms, this unit can be used at the middle or high school level in any history or social science class that includes study of specific wars or conflicts in which religion played a role.

Note: The lessons in this unit were originally developed for use with digital classroom networking software that allows teachers to post assignments, and students to post work as well as engage in on-line discussion with each other. It can easily be used in any classroom where students can access the internet to listen to/read the NPR and PBS materials upon which it is based.

Materials:

Part I: NPR's series, "Exploring the Language of Post-Sept. 11 U.S. Policy" *Part I: The War on the Word Jihad* and *Part III: Defining the War on Terror*

"The impact of Sept. 11, 2001, forced America to engage in a kind of national "cramming session." Within weeks, such terms as "jihadist" and "war on terror" entered the American English lexicon. It wasn't long before Islamic extremists became "Islamofascists," and within months, America's publicly-stated Middle East policy became one of "democracy promotion."

"Every political generation spawns a new set of terms -- ideas, words, rhetoric to help explain, simplify, advance or destroy a cause. In a five-part series, Guy Raz explores the political language of our times. Below, political thinkers comment on some of the terms explored in our stories.."

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6406405>

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6392989>

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6416780>

Part II: The reading, "Revolutionaries or Terrorists?" from the PBS Online NewsHour
<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/terrorism/terrorism2.html>

Text of reading is attached for teacher's information.

PART I. THE POLITICAL LEXICON OF OUR TIMES

Procedure:

1. Explain to students that they will be examining the different ways words that have religious associations are utilized for political purposes during times of conflict. Specifically, we will be examining the way some of these words have been used in the United States following the events of September 11, 2001, using a series produced by National Public Radio.
2. Assign *Part 1. The War on the Word 'Jihad.'*
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6392989>

Options:

- Students access the site as homework; *or*,
- Teacher provides print-outs of the transcript so students may read along as they listen to the broadcast in class.

Part 1. The War on the Word 'Jihad'

Khaled Abou el Fadl teaches Islamic law at UCLA and is the author of *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from Extremists*. He argues that using the term "jihad" to describe al-Qaida extremists "slanders" the theological concept of jihad and alienates many Muslims.

- Using the information and ideas presented, students create a "plus – minus" chart on the positive and negative meanings/connotations of the word 'jihad.'
- Students discuss the results on-line, or in class.

Task: Create a +/- chart on the term Jihad

Positive	Negative

2. Assign *Part 3. Defining the War on Terror.*
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6416780>

Options:

- Students access the site as homework; *or*,
- Teacher provides print-outs of the transcript so students may read along as they listen to the broadcast in class.

Part 3. Defining the War on Terror:

Richard Perle, former Pentagon adviser and a neoconservative who advocated for regime change in Iraq, says "war" is the appropriate term to use in the struggle against Islamic extremists.

- Conduct a Socratic Seminar based on this segment. (see next page)

Socratic Seminar:

1. Examine the following definition of war. Does it seem a reasonable definition of the term war? Would you add to this definition? Would you delete something from it?

WAR:

- a. A state of open, armed, often prolonged conflict carried on between nations, states, or parties.
 - b. The period of such conflict.
 - c. The techniques and procedures of war; military science.
 - d. A condition of active antagonism or contention: *a war of words; a price war.*
 - e. A concerted effort or campaign to combat or put an end to something considered injurious: *the war against acid rain.*
2. Historically, how has the interpretation of the meaning of the term "war" served leaders and/or certain groups?
 3. How would you define the war on terror?
 4. According to the author, what is problematic about the term "war on terror"?

Optional: The following segments can be used when studying the topics of Fascism and World War II, Imperialism, and the Cold War to help students connect past with present.

Part 2. Islamofascism: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6412169> Paul Berman, a prominent liberal intellectual and senior fellow at the World Policy Institute, is the author of *Terror and Liberalism*. He says that radical Islamists have something in common with fascist movements of the past.

Part 4. Imperialism: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6423000> Historian Niall Ferguson, of Harvard and Oxford, is the author of *The War of the World: Twentieth-Century Conflict and the Descent Of The West*. He says Americans don't like to acknowledge it, but the United States has become an empire "despite its own best wishes."

Part 5. Democracy: Francis Fukuyama, an academic and author of *America at the Crossroads*, became famous for his idea that the end of the Cold War marked the triumph of liberal democracy. That philosophy helped underpin neoconservative arguments for a U.S. policy aimed at spreading democracy across the Mideast. But Fukuyama says he's been misunderstood.

PART II. REVOLUTIONARIES OR TERRORISTS?
PBS Online NewsHour

Materials: The reading, “Revolutionaries or Terrorists?” from the PBS Online NewsHour
<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/terrorism/terrorism2.html>

Text of reading is attached for teacher’s information.

1. Assign the readings, directing students to take Cornell Notes organized around the following topics:
 - Just War
 - International Law
 - Geneva Conventions
 - Proportionality
 - Freedom Fighters vs. Terrorists

2. Questions for Discussion:
 - When is force justified?
 - Is there a difference between a terrorist and a freedom fighter?
 - Who decides?



Revolutionaries or Terrorists?

Throughout history, the world has known political violence and war. For centuries political and religious thinkers from many traditions have wrestled with two key questions. When is the use of force acceptable? What principles govern how force that may be used? These two questions are central to something known as "just war" theory.

These two questions and the concepts of just war theory may also be useful in considering terrorism. In past debates about terrorism, some have suggested that one person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter. Are these terms merely labels that have to do with whether one agrees or disagrees with the cause? Or is the distinction based on more concrete and objective grounds?

Today, just war theory underlies much of accepted international law concerning the use of force by states. International law is explicit about when states may use force. For example, states may use force in self-defense against an armed attack. International law also addresses how force may be used. For example, force may not be used against non-combatants. Despite these laws and norms, there are those who oppose the use of violence under any circumstances. For example, this commitment to non-violence led Mohandas Gandhi to build a movement of national liberation in India organized around the practice of non-violent resistance.

Over the years, the international community has been working to better define the rules of war. The [Geneva Conventions](#) established in the aftermath of World War II introduced new internationally accepted regulations on the conduct of war between states. These rules protect non-combatants, govern the treatment of prisoners of war, prohibit hostage-taking, and respect diplomatic immunity.

In addition, the concept of proportionality-long a part of just war theory-has gained new importance as the weapons of war have become increasingly destructive. Proportionality argues that it is wrong to use more force than is necessary to achieve success.

After the Second World War, the use of violence in struggles for self-determination and national liberation fueled a new aspect of the debate on legitimate use of force-the differences between freedom fighters and terrorists. For example, newly independent Third World nations and Soviet bloc nations argued that any who fought against the colonial powers or the dominance of the West should be considered freedom fighters, while their opponents often labeled them terrorists.

Following the violence at the [1972 Munich Olympics](#), U.N. Secretary General Kurt Waldheim called on the General Assembly to discuss measures to prevent terrorism.

State Terror?

During the U.N. debates on terrorism, some argued that the methods of violence used by states can be morally reprehensible and a form a terrorism.

"...the methods of combat used by national liberation movements could not be declared illegal while the policy of terrorism unleashed against certain peoples [by the armed forces of established states] was declared legitimate."

-Cuban Representative to the U.N.

Waldheim's suggestion provoked furious debate over the nature of terrorism and the role of armed struggle in national liberation.

"...all liberation movements are described as terrorists by those who have reduced them to slavery. ...[The term] terrorist [can] hardly be held to persons who were denied the most elementary human rights, dignity, freedom and independence, and whose countries objected to foreign occupation."

- U.N. Ambassador from Mauritania Moulaye el-Hassan

Critics countered that this argument was misleading because it failed to consider the issue in its entirety. What mattered was not the justness of the cause (something that would always be subject to debate) but the legitimacy of the methods used. The ends, they argued, could not be used to justify the means.

By the late 1970s, significant portions of the international community (though not the United States) had decided to extend the protection of the Geneva Convention to include groups participating in armed struggle against colonial domination, alien occupation, or racist regimes; and to those exercising their right of self-determination. The significance of this change is that it seemed to extend legitimacy to the use of force by groups other than states.

The events of September 11 and the subsequent war on terrorism have led us to consider important questions concerning the use of force. When is force justified? What is a terrorist? How does a terrorist differ from a freedom-fighter? Who decides?

This lesson is excerpted from [Responding to Terrorism: Challenges for Democracy](#) (© August 2002, [Choices for the 21st Century Education Program](#), Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University. All rights reserved.)