

Unit 8

World War I: Conflict in the Middle East

GRADES 6-12

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The Great War, as it was originally called, was worldwide. During this conflict between 1914 and the complicated Armistice in 1918, combatants were pitted against one another on all continents. Although most people think that the war was solely fought on the Western or Eastern Front, bloody engagements took place far distant from here in the heart of the Middle East, Europeans fought the Central Powers along with the Turkish Empire for control of lands, which promised oil and strategic access to the Suez Canal and shorter routes to Asia.

PROCESS

Read excerpts from Hendin's autobiography in order to investigate the shaping of the Middle East in the 20th century, in particular the settlement of Palestine or present-day Israel. For a curriculum with a more extensive focus on Middle East or Jewish history, have students read the entire Hendin account.

OUTCOMES

Through hand-on work with this document and related activities, students will have an opportunity to expand their studies of the Middle East and better understand the complexities of history of this volatile region.

Private Benjamin Hendin, The Jewish Legion: 38th Battalion of London's Royal Fusiliers in Jordon, 1918

Benjamin Hendin's autobiography provides a summary of his experiences in Egypt and Jordan. Hendin was born to a Jewish family in Krasnopol in Byelorussia or Poland in about 1894. After a pogrom in 1906 when rioters destroyed the family store, the Hendin family immigrated to the United States. In 1916 Hendin worked in a shoe store in Detroit, Michigan. In 1917 when America joined the war, Hendin was torn between helping in the war effort in America or by joining the newly formed Jewish Legion in England, which would allow him to fight with other Jews for a new homeland in Palestine. He joined the latter and was soon off to the Middle East via England, Italy and Egypt.

Excerpts from Hendin's autobiography are ideal for investigating the shaping of the Middle East in the 20th century, in particular the settlement of Palestine or present-day Israel. Begin reading with the preface to "The Jordan Valley" (page 56, II), and conclude on page 61 from "After the Armistice".

Language Arts

- Have students take turns reading Hendin's account aloud. *What are your impressions of Hendin's use of language and writing style? Discuss why his language usage seems awkward. What might account for this? Does his style of writing hinder or enhance his story?*

Social Studies

- *Who are the important players in the settlement of Palestine? What role did the British government have to play? What about the Ottoman Empire?*
- *Complete a timeline for Palestine beginning prior to the Balfour Declaration and ending with the Versailles Treaty settlements in 1920. Include important events and personages connected to this history.*
- *Map out the locations mentioned in Hendin's account. Track his travels from Egypt through the Jordan Valley until he was sent home for demobilization.*
- *Make a list of all of Hendin's impressions regarding travel, places, food, people, etc. What were Hendin's impressions of Egypt, Jewish settlements, the Turks and Germans, etc. Does he have specific prejudices? What was Hendin's attitude about his wartime experience?*

Additional Activities:

Watch some of the following movies: The made-for-television movie *A Dangerous Man: Lawrence After Arabia* (1990), provides more information on the restructuring of the Middle East after World War I. In this movie the former British officer T.E. Lawrence (Ralph Fiennes) travels to the Paris Peace Conference with Emir Feisal. Another option is to watch the PBS investigative documentary about the life of Lawrence, and his efforts to shape the Arab region into its present incarnation [add the PBS website here]. There is also the 1962 cinematically spectacular movie, *Lawrence of Arabia*, which features Lawrence's military exploits in the Middle East during World War I. This is an excellent movie, although quite long and some parts are not appropriate for younger audiences. *Can the students make observations or connections with Hendin's experiences and those of the British soldiers serving in Palestine?* For more background on the British efforts to dislodge the Ottoman Turkish Empire, there is also the movie *Gallipoli* (1981), which also has parts that may not be suitable for younger audiences.

Expanded curricular focus:

For program with a more extensive focus on Middle East or Jewish history, have students read the entire Hendin account.

In order to expand student involvement in their study of this region, a variety of activities can be included: from a speech competition to a History Fair.

Topics such as those listed here are merely suggestions, but would allow students to delve more fully into something that is of particular interest to them. Following a history fair format, students can present individual reports (oral or written, via essays, PowerPoint presentations, or web quests, etc.) In order to pull together a common thread from these disparate themes, there should be a broad topic, such as "What a Mess! Can the problem be solved?" Students would be given the responsibility of investigating the early history of the Middle East, seeing where and when conflict was created, and they can also research how contemporary groups of their peers are working to eliminate the old prejudices and bring a peaceful solution. This is an ideal opportunity too for current events reports.

Topics that may be of interest include:

- History of the Jewish Legion within London's Royal Fusiliers
- Bolsheviks and WWI
- Balfour Declaration
- Mandate of Palestine
- Vladimir Jabotinsky
- Colonel J. H. Patterson of the Royal Fusiliers
- General Allenby
- Ben Zivi

- Ben Gurion
- Mule trainers at Gallipoli
- Map report including sites: Nablus, Jericho valley, Transjordan, Rafah, Sarafend, Rishon Le Zion, El Arish, and Petah Tikvah
- History of settlement at Petah Tikvah

Selected Bibliography:

Banks, Arthur. *A Military Atlas of the First World War: A map history of the War of 1914-1918 on land, at sea, and in the air*. Heinemann Educational Books, 1998).

Gleichen, Lord Edward, ed. *Chronology of the Great War 1914-1918*. (republished by Stackpole Books, 2000). For a day-by-day account with a British-Colonial perspective on all fronts. Use index for locations of engagements; also useful for Middle East.

Hughes, Matthew and William J. Philpott. *The Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of the First World War*. (Palgrave, 2005). See especially the following maps: Map 4 Battle of the Marne and the Aisne, Map 16 Mesopotamia, Map 17 The Dardanelles Campaign, Maps 27 & 28 the Somme Offensives, Map 34 The Arab Revolt, and Map 44 The American Operations on the Western Front.

Pope, Stephen & Elizabeth-Ann Wheal, ed. *The Macmillan Dictionary of The First World War*. (Macmillan, 1995).

Stokesbury, James L. *A Short History of World War I*. (reprinted Perennial, 2002).

Strachen, Hew. *The First World War*. (Viking, 2003).