

IMPACT-se

Researching Schoolbooks of Societies in Conflict: Suggested Study Questions

By Arnon Groiss, PhD, Princeton University

Presentation of the conflict

- The essence of the conflict from the point of view of the "self": Is it a struggle for independence, territory and resources, national glory, religious supremacy, mere survival, other goals?
- Duration: Does the conflict have specific beginning/ending points or is it an eternal struggle from time immemorial?
- Level: Is it a simple conflict over worldly affairs or a metaphysical struggle on all levels between the forces of good and evil?
- Responsibility: Who is responsible for the emergence of the conflict – the "self", the "other", a third party – separately or together, and to what extent?

Presentation of the "self" within the conflict

- Definition: How is the "self" defined in the context of the conflict – a national-ethnic entity, a religious group, a civil society, other?
- Argumentation: What are the basic arguments of the "self" in the context of the conflict and in what fields (historical, religious, national, etc.)?
- Justice: Is the "self" the only just party in the conflict?
- History: How is the history of the "self" presented in this context?
- Geography: What are the boundaries of the territory claimed by the "self"?
- Victimization: Is the "self" presented solely as a victim of the "other" or is it an active party contributing to the conflict as well to a certain degree?
- Self criticism: Is there any self criticism of the "self" in respect to its attitude to the "other" or its behavior in the conflict?

Presentation of the other party to the conflict

- Definition: How is the "other" defined in the context of the conflict (see possibilities above)?
- Argumentation: Are the basic arguments of the "other" mentioned? In what way? Is there an attempt to treat them objectively? Is there an attempt to understand/annul/refute them wholly or partly?

- Presence: Is the "other" present or absent historically, geographically, demographically and religiously in the disputed territory – in text, photographs, graphs, charts or on maps?
- Legitimacy: Is the "other" treated as a legitimate or illegitimate party politically? Is its political entity officially recognized?
- Equality: Is the "other" presented on the same footing as the "self" in terms of definition (i.e., a nation vs. a nation, etc.), interests and rights (i.e., it has interests and rights of its own) or is it denied such a status?
- Portrayal: Is the "other" portrayed as a society of ordinary human beings or is it stereotyped, prejudiced, demonized, dehumanized as a group and/or as individuals? Are individuals of the "other" mentioned at all or the "other" is referred to as a group only?
- Objectivity: Does the material about the "other" also contain, alongside possible negative description, objective information about its history, society, culture, religion, political structure, etc.?
- Terminology: Does the material about the "other" include denominatives and phrases that could create a positive/negative impression of the "other"?
- Emotions: Is the "other" presented in a way that may create emotions of affinity/aversion, love/hatred, respect/derision, friendliness/vengeance, etc.?
- Level of threat: What exactly is the threat to the "self" posed by the "other", if any?
- Accusation: What particular accusations are directed at the "other" (how many and in what fields)?
- Empathy: Is there any degree of empathy on the part of the "self" regarding the pain of the "other"?
- Friendship: Are friendly relations between individuals of the "self" and the "other" mentioned? Are such relations encouraged/discouraged?
- Are there explicit expressions in favor/against prejudice and stereotypes as far as the "other" is concerned?

Reference to peace/violence in the context of the conflict

- Peace vs. war: Is there an open call for peace/war/violent struggle with the "other"?
- Conflict resolution: Is a peaceful/violent resolution of the conflict advocated?
- Limits: Does a promoted violent struggle against the "other" have territorial/operational/moral or other limits? Does a promoted peaceful resolution of the conflict have any limits? If so, in what fields?
- Future horizons: Does the material present a future vision of peaceful relations with the "other"? If so, in what fields? In case of complete victory over the "other" as a result of a violent struggle, does the material speak of the fate of the vanquished "other"? If so, in what terms?
- Future and past violence: Are there any violent expressions against the "other" in the text? What is the attitude to past violent actions against the "other" on the part of the "self" or of a third party?
- Legitimacy: To what extent, if any, is peace/violence justified and/or promoted logically, legally, morally, religiously, etc.?

Dr. Arnon Groiss began his academic career at Hebrew University studying the history of the Middle East and Arabic language and literature. He holds a PhD from Princeton University in Near Eastern Studies and an MPA from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. Along with a distinguished career as a journalist with the Voice of Israel's Arabic Radio, he also served as IMPACT-se's director of research from 2000 to 2010. Dr. Groiss has focused much of his research on Middle Eastern school textbooks, publishing numerous reports on peace and attitudes toward the "Other" in the schoolbooks of Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Tunisia and the Palestinian Authority.

The Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education

London: FKGB, 2nd Floor, 201 Haverstock Hill, London NW3 4QG, UK

Ramat Gan: Amot Atrium Tower, 18th Floor, 2 Jabotinsky Street, Ramat Gan 5250501, Israel

Library: Seymour Fox School of Education, Hebrew University Jerusalem, 91905, Israel