

## **Promises DVD and Discussion**

**PROMISES** by the Promises Film Project, 102 minutes, English subtitles

Show the movie *Promises*. This movie has been cited by many as the most memorable resource for them as teenagers; it made them pay attention to the conflict. You can show it at the beginning, middle, or end of your unit of study. There are so many aspects of the conflict and the cultures in this movie that it could also be a great jumping-off point for individual research projects.

Tell students that *Promises* is a documentary filmed in 1997-2000, which was between the two Intifadas (Uprisings) by the Palestinians against the Israeli occupation. As the opening lines say, it was a time of relative peace for Israelis, but the opening lines fail to mention that many Palestinians during that same time were being thrown out of their homes as settlement activity ramped up. Checkpoints, arbitrary detention, and the strangulation of the Palestinian economy deprived many families of their livelihood. Thus it was not a time of peace for Palestinians. The film has subtitles, so you should not ask students to take many notes. The movie sections are presented below with detailed notes for the teacher. Five general questions for the students are also included. Tell them the questions in advance and discuss them with students at the end. The last two questions can also be assigned as Homework/Response.

### **Problems with this film:**

- The film maker starts by characterizing the Mideast as a place of war and perpetual conflict. Actually, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict dates from the 1920s when Zionist Jews began arriving in British-ruled Palestine in significant numbers with plans to displace Palestinian Arabs and create a political nation-state for Jews.
- The film does not compute settlers in E. Jerusalem when it gives numbers of settlers (the numbers are out of date anyway; tell students that there are over half a million settlers in the Occupied Territories, which include E. Jerusalem).
- Many of the people in this movie use “Arab” when they mean Palestinian, and “Jew” when they mean Israeli -- you may want to warn students about this.
- The relative poverty of the West Bank and refugee camps compared to Israel is not explained; it is actually the direct result of Israeli occupation, dedevelopment, land confiscation, and lack of funding of the Palestinian economy.
- The movie doesn't explain that Israel illegally annexed (not just occupied) E. Jerusalem after 1967.

### **Teachers' notes:**

#### **The People:**

The Twins: Yarko and Daniel (Jewish Israelis)-- live in W. Jerusalem, fear terrorists on buses

Mahmoud -- (Palestinian Muslim) lives in E. Jerusalem, says Jerusalem belongs to the Palestinians

Shlomo -- lives in W. Jerusalem, observant Jew with American Rabbi father, feels safe because there are both Arabs and Jews in the city

Sanabel -- (Palestinian) brief history of 1948, maps, 1967, Deheishe Refugee Camp, dad is journalist, in PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine), and in jail (arbitrary detention = no charge, no trial, just kept in prison), nondelivery of letters

Faraj -- (Palestinian) Intifada footage, tells of his friend Bassam who was shot dead for throwing a stone, we see Faraj a year later and he justifies throwing stones against bullets and nuclear power, lives in Deheishe Refugee Camp

Moishe -- (Jewish Israeli) settlement history, encouraged by government, Moishe is part of a religious settler family living in Beit El (near Ramallah in West Bank), says land belongs to descendants of Abraham (Jews), says that settlers are people who fight Arabs,

Raheli -- (Jewish Israeli) Moishe's sister, notice the difference in girls' roles in the family, discusses what happens on Shabbat/Sabbath, the "chair girl"

### **The Issues:**

Checkpoints-- between W. Bank & Israel, between different areas in W. Bank, need permits issued by Israeli military, humiliate Palestinians, make Israelis feel safer

Somewhere Safer-- twins' grandfather reminisces about the Holocaust and moving from Poland to Israel to become safer; he seems to be an atheist but tells the twins to decide for themselves

Al-Aqsa Mosque --in E. Jerusalem in an area holy to both Jews and Muslims, praying at the Mosque

The Western Wall -- holy to Jews, praying at the Wall, division between secular and religious Jews

The Palestinian Dance -- Sanabel in Deheishe is part of a dance troupe (Ibda'a) that celebrates culture and history and dream of Palestinian statehood; they sing that the pen and the sword are their symbols

The Jerusalem Finals -- the twins in a volleyball tournament; notice that the off-duty soldier in stands has a rifle slung around his shoulders

Faraj the Sprinter -- notice the kids in army fatigues; he cries when he comes in second; the twins say they cry too

Ashkelon Jail -- Sanabel and her family get up very early and ride on a bus to visit her father in prison, notice Santa Claus over the bed, go through checkpoint, soldiers seek

translation from Hebrew to Arabic, bus goes into Israel to Ashkelon Prison, takes about 8 hours for a 30 minute visit, no visitors other than immediate family (even though he has not been charged or convicted but is an “administrative detainee”)

Our Land -- both Israeli and Palestinian kids say that the land is theirs. They have different explanations: religion, or conqueror’s rights, or land deeds (1931, 1942), or keys to houses

This is our House -- traveling to Ras Abu- Ammar, Faraj’s family’s house inside Israel (Faraj & grandmother are snuck in by filmmakers); village is completely destroyed and erased but they find stones from their house; grandmother discusses why they left: massacres in Dir Yassin (Deir Yassin), and fear of rape; says they sought refuge in Bethlehem; Faraj says that he has the right to live without checkpoints and to return to his ancestral village; parade for refugee rights against colonialism and Zionism and Israel; Faraj says he’ll pass the key to his children

All of Jerusalem -- Jerusalem schoolteacher contrasts captivity with freedom; children draw pictures of what it feels like to live as Palestinians; all the kids weigh in on how they feel about Jerusalem and why; settlers in Jerusalem march through Muslim Quarter guarded by soldiers; celebration and provocation; kids on both sides discuss how the other side should be killed

Murdered -- Moishe tells of a terrorist shooting of his Israeli friend Ephraim and his mother; Israeli memorial day for fallen soldiers and those killed by terrorists

Hadassa Hospital -- the twins visit their babysitter in the hospital: Matan has been hit by a missile while serving in the army; they are not sure they will join the army, they don’t want to shoot people; religious Jews are exempt from the army

Burping Contest -- Shlomo and Palestinian neighbor; Shlomo says he doesn’t want to make friends, but then joins in burping contest

Why Don’t We Meet Them? -- the kids continue discussing whether they could meet and befriend kids on “the other side” (notice the range of opinion on both sides)

Invitation -- the children record why they want to meet each other and talk on the phone with each other; they discuss whether they have pizza or hummus in the camp, international soccer teams; the Israeli children come to the camp because checkpoints prevent the Palestinians from going into Israel; parents worry about the meeting

The Meeting -- (notice that only the twins visit; we can wonder why the other Israelis did not visit, but it’s not explained) they meet in Deheishe, explain areas where there were clashes, ask that the twins don’t speak Hebrew, play games, eat, teach each other martial arts, play soccer, use slingshots, learn the Dubke (traditional Palestinian dance)

Our Day Together -- then they sit down and talk about issues; Ahmed remembers his brother Bassam shot by Israelis; fear that they will forget each other when BZ, the filmmaker, leaves

Respect Will Grow -- two years later, they talk about not being able to meet again, and about the situation; movie shows babies in a hospital with both Palestinian and Israeli parents

*PROMISES* by the *Promises* Film Project  
filmed in 1997-2000

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What are the hopes and fears of the Israeli children? How do they live?

2. What are the hopes and fears of the Palestinian children? How do they live?

3. What range of opinion do the children show in discussing each other, the situation, and whether to meet?

4. What thoughts and feelings did this film evoke in you?

5. This film has been praised for showing humans on all sides of the conflict, but it has been criticized for not revealing enough about the power imbalances between Israelis and Palestinians. What are your thoughts?