



## **Sounds of Sirens**

**Topic** Yom HaZikaron

**Grade Level(s)** 4<sup>th</sup> and above

### **Goals for the Lesson/Activity**

#### **Students will:**

- Learn about the tradition of the siren and moments of silence in Israel on Yom HaZikaron
- Practice sitting (or standing) in silence
- Create brief rituals for these observances that suit the culture of their setting

### **Materials needed**

Pens and Paper

A timer

### **Technology needed**

A laptop or tablet to show videos of the siren in Israel and to play the siren sound

### **Background for Teachers**

Yom HaZikaron is a day of remembrance for all Israeli soldiers who died protecting Israel's residents and the country's freedom. It is observed on the 4<sup>th</sup> of Iyar, directly prior to Yom Ha'Atzma'ut, the celebration of Israel's independence.

Yom HaZikaron is quite different from Memorial Day in the United States. In Israel, schools are open, and students attend assemblies to remember those graduates or neighbors who died in service to their country. In addition, theaters, bars, dance clubs, and other similar places are closed. TV and radio stations devote their programming to documentaries of famous soldiers, stories of heroism, a scroll of names of the dead, and somber music. There are public prayers at military cemeteries throughout the country.

One of the more iconic features of the day is a siren signaling moments of silent remembrance. The siren sounds twice, once in the evening, for one minute, as the holiday is beginning and another at 11 a.m., for two minutes, before cemetery services begin. The sirens can be heard all over the country. All activity stops when the sound starts; some people stop their activity in preparation. School children stand up at their desks, pedestrians stop in place on the street, and drivers pull over and get out of their cars. For two minutes, the majority of the activity in the country is put on hold. When the siren is over, people continue on with their scheduled activities.



## **Sounds of Sirens**

### **Description of Activities**

Let students know that you are going to start the lesson with a challenge.

Split students into pairs. Tell them that the challenge is to talk for two minutes without stopping. Each student will speak for two minutes while the other listens.

- The speaker must continue to speak from the moment the facilitator says “go” until the timer goes off.
- The listener cannot say anything. They must listen intently and can show their interest by leaning forward, nodding, etc.
- After the speaker is finished, students should change roles and repeat the process.
- Choose the topic or allow students to do so. To make the exercise more challenging, you may want to preclude students from telling stories, as narratives flow somewhat more easily.

After both students have had a chance to try both roles, ask:

- How was the challenge easier or more difficult than you thought it might be?
- Was it more difficult to be the speaker or the listener?
- Did two minutes feel like a long time or a short time? Did this change depending on your role?

Now that students have experienced a verbal activity for two minutes, challenge them to sit quietly for two minutes.

- They should keep their heads up—no resting their heads on their desks or closing their eyes.
- Their hands should be empty, no drawing or fidgeting with pencils, paper, or other classroom materials. (If a student must fidget, ask them to sit in an inconspicuous spot, if possible, and give them the least intrusive or attention-grabbing fidget you have.)

Process:

- Was it easier or more difficult to sit quietly than it was to talk or listen in the earlier exercise? Why or why not?
- Was it easier to be quiet when everyone was quiet or when another person, or people were talking?

Ask students to be silent for one last time, this time with a siren sound in the background. A sustained tone begins at the three-minute mark of this video:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ikIn\\_vRxAwQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ikIn_vRxAwQ)



## Sounds of Sirens

Let students know that the challenge was meant as an introduction to the commemoration of Yom HaZikaron. Solicit any information students may know about this day. Fill in any details they may have missed. Be sure to include:

- Yom HaZikaron is the day before Yom HaAtzmaut, Israel's Independence Day.
- TV and radio stations change their programming.
- All "entertainment" venues are closed.
- Schools hold assemblies to honor fallen soldiers.
- There are public ceremonies in every military cemetery in the country.

Tell them that one of the most well-known aspects of this holiday in Israel is the siren. Show them one or more of the following videos of people stopping after hearing the siren.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QSzdCLenTrI>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aUnkjHZFNn8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0G1mVdDms0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5g6Vda7n-s>

Ask students to describe what they see. They might notice that most people—though not everyone—participates, or that some people seem moved by social pressure. If they don't offer it, mention the following: people get out of their cars, many people bow their heads, the commemoration is not limited to one group of people—men, women, young, old, Sephardi, Ashkenazi, traditionally observant, and secular—nearly everyone stops.

Let them know that the siren is also sounded on Yom HaShoah.

Discuss: Given what they now know about the siren, does it change their feelings about how easy or difficult it might be to stand quietly for two minutes.

Let them know that most "moments of silence" in the United States last for 30 seconds or less.

Invite students to brainstorm a list of things that are similar and different about Yom HaZikaron and Memorial Day. This list could be written on the board or large pieces of paper taped to the walls.



## **Sounds of Sirens**

Discuss:

- Which aspects of Yom HaZikaron do you think could “work” in your setting?
- Israel’s Memorial Day was purposefully set to be the day before its Independence Day. Do you think that those holidays in the United States, or your setting, would be more meaningful if they followed one after the other?

Split students into small groups. Given what they know about Yom HaZikaron, ask them to create a one-to-two minute ritual for Memorial Day in their setting.

Invite students to share their ritual.

Let students know the date of Yom HaZikaron for the current year. Challenge them to participate in a quiet remembrance on that day.