



War Rules

Topic

Challenge and Response

Grade Level(s)

8th-12th

Big Ideas

1. War is a current reality that can be approached from many different perspectives.
2. How we think about different aspects of peace, war, public safety, uprightness, etc. can make a major impact on how we approach conflict and exist as a society.

Learning Targets

Students will:

1. Discuss Jewish wisdom about war
2. Appraise different opinions about waging war
3. Develop an approach to war based on Jewish wisdom

Materials / Technology Needed

- Text Sheets (available as separate download, one for each student)
- Google Slides (optional)

Background for Teachers

While the decidedly non-Jewish [Edwin Starr](#) might have made the definitive modern pop commentary about war (with his eponymous [song](#) about the subject), Jewish wisdom demonstrates a multifaceted and nuanced approach to different kinds of wars and how and when one can and should engage in war. While war is not the ideal (Isaiah 2:4, et al.), sources as early as the Torah prescribe and, sometimes, obligate war in different situations. Sometimes, there is a biblical commandment to wage war against a particular group. Other times, there is permission given to go on the attack for particular reasons. While, at still other times, there is an obligation to defend oneself, though how broadly defense is defined can be debated.

The sources included as a separate download cover only some of the opinions about when and how to wage war. (Providing a fully comprehensive collection of sources would require a semester's course. Students can be encouraged to seek out further sources if they are curious.) Note that these sources refer generally to a Jewish army waging war and not specifically to the State of Israel (except for one source that is from the Israel Defense Forces). While it might be



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necessary to bring up modern examples of war, it is recommended to keep discussions general when possible in order to avoid arguments that might arise from modern political realities.

Note that there are two versions of the sources, one short and one long. The short version provides a brief overview of some of the wisdom that provides a framework for a Jewish approach to war. The longer version provides a wider range of wisdom that students can use as they approach the conundrum of what it means to conduct war.

Prepare in Advance

If using Google Slides, set up a document so that each student has a slide on which to work.

Description of Activities

1. Ask students about the rules of engagement in the video games they play. These games might range from Fortnite to Call of Duty to Angry Birds. In the narrative put forth by the game, what is the motivation for the fight? What limits, if any, exist for conducting the fight? How much does the realism (or lack thereof) of the game affect your enjoyment of the game or your motivation to play the game?
2. Explain to students that they will be writing the guidelines for war in a new video game. Think of the game as a mashup of The Sims, Minecraft, Call of Duty, and Fortnite. Players are tasked with building a world. However, just as war is a reality in our world, so too war is a reality in their game's world; and there must be ground rules for engaging in war. Write those rules based on Jewish wisdom.
3. To go over the texts, students should work in pairs (or small groups). However, for writing the rules of the game, students may work individually if they so choose.
4. Writing the rules. Students:
 - a. Come up with a name for their game.
 - b. Describe a basic goal of their game.
 - c. Compose the rules, based on Jewish wisdom, that will govern war in the game.
 - d. Design cover art for the game.
 - e. **Tech Option:** Students use Google Slides to create the outlines for their games. Students share their games and comment on each other's creations directly on their slides when they are done.
5. If not using Google Slides, students share their rules with each other and discuss why they chose their Rules of War.
6. Show the video for Matisyahu's "One Day"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRmBChQjZPs>
7. Discuss as a class the seeming disconnect between the ideal of peace in the world and the reality of war.
 - a. Matisyahu looks forward to a time when there is "no more war." How can there be a path to get there? What might block that path?



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- b. Do you think that Matisyahu really believes that there will be a time with no more war? What might motivate him to think so? What might motivate him to sing about it even if he does not believe it to be truly possible?
- c. Introduce Isaiah 2:4 (included at the end of the document). Discuss: How might your thoughts about an ultimate peace change given the prophecy in this passage? What about it is meaningful? What about it does not ring true? [Note that students might respond about the content of the *pasuk* (verse) or about the source of the content. It might be worthwhile to have a discussion about the believability of Biblical prophecy in this context, or it could be one of several points to consider.]

Differentiation Options

Knowing that students learn in a variety of ways and modalities, the following options are provided to adjust the above lesson to meet the unique needs of your learners.

For learners who need more assistance

- Students depict their rules with illustrations instead of text.
- Summarize four or five of the sources. (For example, you must offer peace before you engage in war.) Students create their games from the simplified sources and/or students find extant games where these rules apply.

For learners who need extension opportunities

- Students code a basic version of their games.
- Students present a critique of a war game (e.g. Fortnite, Call of Duty) based on their understanding of the sources they studied.

Isaiah 2:4	ישעיהו ב:ד
[God] will judge among the nations and decide for the many peoples and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift sword against nation, and they will not learn war anymore.	וְשָׁפַט בֵּין הַגּוֹיִם וְהוֹכִיחַ לְעַמִּים רַבִּים וְכָתְתוּ חַרְבֹתָם לְאַתִּים וְחֲנִיתֹתֵיהֶם לְמִזְמֵרוֹת לֹא יִשָּׂא גוֹי אֶל־גּוֹי חֶרֶב וְלֹא יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד מִלְחָמָה: