

# CHILDREN OF JERUSALEM

ASYA

With a calm confidence that belies her age, 12-year-old Asya tends to sick animals and is a frequent guest on a call-in radio show. Having arrived in Israel less than a year ago from Russia, Asya already speaks near perfect Hebrew.

As part of a relocation program for Jewish immigrants, Asya's family receives government assistance and studies Hebrew. Asya loves Israel and has adapted well. She is an assistant to a veterinarian, takes fencing lessons, and talks to other children about immigration on a radio program. She visits the Old City because she would like to know the Palestinian people better. Whether leading her father through the neighborhood shops or solving moral dilemmas in school, it is obvious that Asya has adjusted well to her new country.

*Children of Jerusalem* is a series of half-hour documentaries that focus on the lives of Palestinian and Israeli children. On different sides of the Middle East conflict, these children live in the shadows of both peace and protest in the much-contested, historical and holy city of Jerusalem. Living within a few kilometers of each other, they can barely imagine how the others must live and can only hope that they will one day learn.

Narrating the films themselves, the children provide an engaging and detailed portrait of their daily lives, hopes and fears.

AN EXTENSIVE RESEARCH AND STUDY GUIDE  
CAN BE FOUND BY PULLING OUT AND UNFOLDING  
THIS VIDEO JACKET.

This video is also available in Hebrew.

Director: Beverly Shaffer

Producers: Beverly Shaffer, Colin Neale

29 minutes 38 seconds

Order number: 9192 122 (Asya)

Series order number: 193C 9194 082

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ASYA

CHILDREN OF  
JERUSALEM



VHS  
9192 122

A NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA RELEASE

# CHILDREN OF JERUSALEM

BY

OSCAR-WINNER

BEVERLY SHAFFER

ASYA



**THE SERIES CAN ALSO BE USED TO EXPLORE MORE COMPLEX ISSUES, E.G.:**

- What forces are at work shaping these children? What will have to be done/undone, taught/untaught in order to encourage and facilitate trust and cooperation between these children as they grow up and mature? Can this generation work and live together any differently than the previous generation?
- What are the demographics of Israel as represented by these children? What effect might this diversity have on the political processes of the country and the city of Jerusalem?

**Ages 8-13**

- Content and context information
- Compare/contrast exercises
- Research questions

**Ages 14-16**

- Historical contexts and consequences
- Religious aspects (spirituality, role of religion and prayer in life)

**Ages 17+**

- Political ramifications
- Economic implications
- Sociological questions
- Demographic studies
- Media representations

Encourage your students to become pen pals.  
For information, contact:

Pen Pals in Israel  
International Culture Center,  
P.O. Box 8009, Jerusalem, Israel 91080.

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**Beverly Shaffer**

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**Serge Godier**

English Voice  
**Maureen Hebert**

Original Music  
**Kathryn Moses**

Music Editor  
**Chris Crilly**

Music Recording  
**Chad Irschick**

Rerecording  
**Hans Peter Strobl**

Producers  
**Beverly Shaffer**  
**Colin Neale**

Executive Producer  
**Colin Neale**

29 minutes 38 seconds  
Order number: 9192 122

## **JERUSALEM**

Jerusalem is a city of three Sabbaths — Friday (Muslim), Saturday (Jewish) and Sunday (Christian). It has been called the Holy City, the Golden City, the City of Light and the City of Peace. It has been regarded as the most splendid city on earth and has lived through some of humankind's most brutal episodes.

The history of Jerusalem dates back thousands of years. Around 1000 BC it was captured by the biblical King David from the Jebusites and made the capital of his kingdom. King Solomon built the first temple there. Jerusalem continued in splendor for approximately 150 years until internal strife split it in two. After 600 BC it was ruled by a succession of groups: first the Babylonians, then the Persians, the Macedonians, Egyptians and Assyrians. By 63 BC it, like many other towns and regions, had fallen to the Romans, who held it until the early 300's AD, when the Byzantine Empire began its reign. By the 7th century AD the new Muslims recovered it from the Byzantines. For a period of less than a century, the European Christians overran it during the Crusades, but Muslim rule resumed under Salah el-Din. When the Turkish-based Ottoman Empire began its rise early in the 16th century, Jerusalem soon fell under its control. This lasted until after WWI, when the British assumed administrative control of Palestine, and the modern conflict between Palestinian Arabs and Jews began to fill the air.

In 1948 the State of Israel was declared and West Jerusalem became its capital. After the Six-Day War had ended in 1967, the mostly Arab East Jerusalem and the Old City fell under Israeli control. In 1980 the Israeli government passed a law that officially stated that the entire city was to be the capital of Israel. This decision is strongly opposed by the Arabs of Jerusalem to this day.

**CHILDREN OF JERUSALEM CAN BE USED IN THE CLASSROOM AT A VERY BASIC LEVEL:**

- Compare and contrast your hopes and dreams with those of the children in the film;
- Compare and contrast your typical day (home, family, school, extracurricular activities, religion, responsibilities, values) with those of the children in the film;
- If you had to move to another country, what would you take and what would you leave behind? Why? How would you choose what country to go to? How would you feel about leaving behind friends and family members? Would the moving experience be the same for everyone in the family? Why?
- Where did your parents or ancestors come from? Were they refugees or immigrants? What kind of life did they leave behind?
- Role-play what would happen if the children met each other and had a discussion: Tamar and Neveen discuss the Israeli army, Yehuda and Yacoub discuss the role of prayer in their lives, Asya, Tamar and Neveen discuss their love of learning, Asya and the other children discuss the moral dilemma presented in her class (which is more important, truth or friendship?).

## **THE OLD CITY**

The Old City is the heart of Jerusalem. Its stone walls, almost 12 meters high and 4 kilometers long, were built in the 1500s by the Ottoman emperor, Suleiman the Magnificent. Within the walls are four quarters — Armenian, Christian, Jewish and Muslim.

Life along the narrow cobblestone lanes has remained much the same for hundreds of years. The busiest streets are the souks (markets), which have small, windowless shops that sell pottery, jewelry, and souvenirs to tourists. Most of the streets are too narrow for cars, and donkeys are used to carry heavy loads. Within the walls of the Old City are Jerusalem's holiest places. They are the Wailing Wall (Jewish), the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (Christian), and the Dome of the Rock (Muslim).

The Wailing Wall, or Western Wall, is all that's left of the Holy Temple built by King Solomon of biblical times. It takes its name from the sorrowful prayers said there in mourning for its destruction at the hands of the Babylonians around 600 BC.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is said to stand on Calvary Hill, the spot where Jesus was crucified. It also houses a piece of the stone that was in front of the entrance to the cave in which he was buried. Winding toward the church is the Via Dolorosa, which is believed to be the route over which Jesus carried his cross. On Good Friday huge crowds trace the route to the church, chanting prayers and reading from the Gospel.

The Dome of the Rock, with its golden domed building, is called the most beautiful structure in Jerusalem. Built in the 7th century, it houses the rock from which it is said Mohammed ascended to Heaven with the angel Gabriel, returning to spread Islam, the new religion. Believed to be on the site of the ancient Holy Temple of King Solomon, the rock is also said to be the one on which Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: GEOGRAPHY AS DESTINY**

Situated at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, Palestine is one of the world's most historic places. Two religions — Judaism and Christianity — originated in Palestine. It is the Holy Land, the site of many events described in the Bible. Muslims, the followers of Islam, also consider Palestine a sacred place.

The land of Palestine has always been a land of farmers. Broad valleys planted with wheat, terraced hillsides lined with olive trees, wide coastal plains dotted with orange trees, and fields of melons, tomatoes and herbs provide a way of life that has changed little since the Old Testament.

By the time it fell into Turkish hands in 1516, Palestine was a thriving market and rich source of tax revenue. With the defeat of Turkey during World War I, control of Palestine was passed to British hands under a mandate by the League of Nations (a precursor to the United Nations).

In Europe, meanwhile, a new hope was inspiring the Jewish people. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Jewish communities of Europe, particularly Eastern Europe, were often treated as second-class citizens and subject to persecution and pogroms (massacres). In Russia, where most of the pogroms took place, a group was formed that would dramatically shape the future of a distant land. That group was called The Lovers of Zion.

Zionism, taken from the Hebrew word for the central hill of Jerusalem, was a spiritual and humanitarian movement concerned with providing a safe refuge for the Jewish communities of Europe. Although other countries such as Uganda, Ethiopia and Argentina were discussed as possible "homes," it was generally recognized that the one true home was that of their ancestral forebears, Palestine.

As this idea took hold, Jewish immigration to Palestine began a significant and steady rise until, by the end of WWII, one-third of the population was of the Jewish faith. But while the dream of a Jewish state was inspiring one group, it was threatening another.

The fall of the Ottoman Empire signaled a new era for many Arabs of the region. Hopes for independence surged and "pan-Arab" nationalism seemed just around the corner. This was particularly strong in Palestine, where the Palestinians believed the British would soon relinquish control of the land to them. But as they began to lose both demographic and political clout, it became clear that

neither the British nor the international community were willing to accede to Arab appeals.

One of the reasons for this was World War II. As details of Nazi atrocities began to be known, a renewed effort was made to provide a homeland for the Jewish refugees who survived German attempts to annihilate them. While the British authorities in Palestine had initially tried to limit their numbers, immigration to Palestine now swelled as the European Jewry set sail for its shores, determined to be victimized "never again."

The new Jewish population in Palestine formed its own militia to fight the British. The Arabs, whose nationalist dreams were in direct odds with Jewish Zionist hopes, conducted raids on the Jewish settlements, and Jewish troops, in turn, attacked the Arabs. In desperation, the British, finding it impossible to please both groups, turned to the newly formed United Nations to settle the matter.

In 1947 the United Nations recommended that Palestine be partitioned into an Arab and a Jewish state, with a special international status for Jerusalem. Intense fighting broke out between the Jewish and Arab inhabitants of Palestine, and with the creation of the State of Israel in May 1948 came an Arab declaration of war on the new state. In the fierce battles, many Arabs evacuated their villages and towns out of fear and by force. In the fighting, the new "Israelis" were victorious and the borders of the new state grew beyond the United Nations Partition Plan. Jerusalem was divided between Israeli West Jerusalem and Jordanian-controlled East Jerusalem.

For Jews, the outcome of the 1948 war was a biblical prophecy fulfilled and a new, modern nation was created. For Arabs, this was the great disaster. Dreams were destroyed and the hope of a modern Palestinian nation was shattered.

In the newly declared Israel a government was immediately formed, with David Ben-Gurion as the first Prime Minister, and a Knesset, or parliament, was established. The citizens of Israel, many of them born and raised in Europe, were determined that this new country would be democratic, free, and productive.

But over 750,000 Arabs had become refugees as a result of the War of Independence, and countless more lost their homes and land. Gaza and the West Bank, once the sites of a future Palestinian state, were now under Jordanian and Egyptian administration respectively.

The new Israeli state flourished as Jewish immigration rose; foreign governments, especially the United States, came to its aid, and agriculture and other industries prospered. But the country was not accepted by her Arab neighbors, who saw it as a symbol of their defeat against outside powers. Israel, on the other hand, felt vulnerable to Arab threats of war and guerrilla attacks. Tension rose to war, first in 1956 and again in 1967, when Israeli planes, in a pre-emptive strike, attacked 25 airfields in Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Iraq, sparking a week of fighting in what was to become known as the Six-Day War. By the time a cease-fire took effect, Israel controlled the Egyptian Sinai, the Gaza Strip, the Jordanian West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Syrian Golan Heights.

The Camp David Peace Accord in 1979 between Israel and Egypt resulted in the return of the Sinai to Egyptian hands. The West Bank and Gaza Strip remained in Israeli control. These territories were viewed by many Israelis as historically part of Israel, but the occupation was condemned by the United Nations in a series of resolutions that urged their return.

The strain on Palestinians and their Israeli counterparts who decried the contradiction of democracy and occupation proved considerable.

Languishing under severe restrictions, maltreatment and poverty, the protracted Palestinian protest which was to become known as the Intifada began in December, 1987. Children and youth, a generation born under occupation, took to the streets throwing stones at the Israeli army. A more organized protest soon evolved which included strikes and tax revolts. The Intifada shocked both Israel and the world, bringing home the urgent need to solve the "Palestinian problem."

In 1991, Mid-East peace talks began between the government of Israel and a Palestinian negotiating team from the West Bank and Gaza. An accord was signed in 1993 between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat. Among other things, this pact singled out the Gaza Strip and the West Bank city of Jericho as sites to be returned to Palestinian authority.

Still new and learning to walk, the fledgling state of peace between the Palestinians and Israelis encourages the possibility that two peoples may yet achieve peaceful co-existence.

## **WHO ARE THE PALESTINIANS?**

Whether described as Canaanites, Phoenicians, Philistines, or Palestinians, the Arab inhabitants of Palestine have traditionally been farmers, shepherds and fishermen. At the turn of the century there were slightly more than a million inhabitants living in the area known as Palestine, five percent of whom were Jewish. The Palestinians were educated and industrious, harvesting citrus fruit and olives for export and manufacturing the region's supply of soap and wool.

When control over Palestine passed from Turkish to British hands at the end of WWI, many Palestinians expected that they would finally be able to control their own destiny. But while Palestinian nationalism began to grow, the British and French were dividing the region between them. In 1917 the Balfour Declaration confirmed that the British "viewed with favor the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people" and designated the Palestinian population as simply "non-Jewish communities" in what was to become Israel.

Palestinians now number close to 5 million persons, only 40 percent of whom still reside inside the boundaries of historical Palestine. The rest were carried away in successive waves of emigration, beginning in 1948, when the State of Israel was declared, peaking in 1967 after the Six-Day War, and continuing to this day. Almost a million Palestinians are registered refugees living in 61 camps dispersed throughout the Occupied Territories, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Whether "at home" or "abroad," the Palestinians are a displaced people seeking the reinstatement of their homeland.

In 1964, Palestinians convened in Jerusalem and established the Palestinian Liberation Organization, a democratic and multi-party parliament with 428 elected members. In 1974, the PLO was invited by the United Nations to participate as an observer. At present, the PLO maintains diplomatic missions in all UN agencies and in 90 countries, including Canada.

## **WHO ARE THE ISRAELIS?**

The Israelis are those persons who live or have lived in the State of Israel since its creation in 1948. While the overwhelming number of Israelis are of the Jewish faith, there are also Muslim, Christian and Druze Arabs who live within its borders.

The Jewish people living in Palestine at the turn of the century were mostly indigenous to that area; that is, they spoke Arabic, lived freely amongst their Arab neighbors and, like the Christian Arabs, were a respected and tolerated minority. But as news of the persecution and slaughter of the European Jewish population during the Second World War was made known, immigration soared until, by 1946, persons of Jewish faith numbered one-third of the population. Finally, after intense negotiations and conflict with the British administrators of Palestine and the Arab inhabitants, the United Nations proposed that Palestine be partitioned into two states. This plan was adopted on November 29, 1947. Today, Israel consists of this land, plus more gained during the War of Independence (1948) and the Six-Day War (1967), including the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Since the declaration of a Jewish state in May, 1948, Israel has become a leading nation with a productive economy and a Western-style democratic government. More closely identified with a European and North American lifestyle than with its Arab neighbors, the country straddles the East and the West, sometimes comfortably, often painfully.

### **JEWISH REFUGEES**

During the years of the rise of National Socialism in Germany, and certainly in the aftermath of the genocide which was the Holocaust, countless European Jewry sought refuge in countries which provided a safe haven from persecution. While many went to North and even South America, a significant number arrived on the shores of Palestine, hoping it held the promise of biblical prophecy. By the end of 1948, one-third of the Palestinian population were of Jewish faith, dramatically altering the social and political future of that tiny country.

### **SOVIET IMMIGRATION**

Fleeing persecution, immigration from the former Soviet Union has steadily trickled to Israel since the early part of the 20th century. In the final years of the break-up of the Soviet state, however, mass emigration ensued with hundreds of thousands of Jewish people traveling to Israel. While former Soviet

Jewry still comprise the majority of immigrants to Israel, the yearly figure has steadied somewhat. To allow the immigrants and their families time to settle, learn Hebrew and find jobs, the Israeli government offers them free housing, medical care and schooling for the first year.

## **HEBREW**

At the turn of the century, Hebrew, the original language of the Old Testament, was spoken by few outside the synagogue. But with the possibility of a Jewish state becoming more and more real, it was clear that a unifying language would be needed for the refugees who came from over a hundred countries.

The revival of Hebrew as a common language is unique in history. The first Hebrew dictionary was compiled at the turn of the century, simplifying its grammar and modernizing its usage. Hebrew is now the living tongue of most Israelis and is the dominant language of the country.