

According to Ben Lev-Kadesh a 'tour to the past' is good for both students and teachers. He teaches history in a country with a lot of controversial subjects. What do his lessons look like?

# Ben Lev-Kadesh from Israël



How do they teach History in other countries? Editor of *Kleio* **Lisa Oskamp** tries to figure that out and interviews colleagues from all over the world.

**Name, age, teaching experience?**

*Ben Lev-Kadesh, 36, 11 years.*

**Could you describe an average history lesson?**

*I introduce the subject by telling the students what I will tackle in today's lesson while the students see the main points on screen. Then there is a debate based on the various questions I have posed to the students. We usually start with some historical questions and students will promptly ask questions regarding the connection between the particular historical subject and the present (and some items which are on the news). After some political debate, I switch back to the histori-*

*cal subject at hand. At some point, I will give the students an assignment (mainly to practice their skills to read historical resources), followed by a class debate on that subject.*

**What is your own opinion on the importance of the course history?**

*First of all, it's a platform for a knowledgeable and intellectual adult to invite the students to engage in a conversation about their values, identity, the society in which they live in and the one they dream about. I think that in order to form your identity you should meet other people, other societies and other civilizations. The 'tour to the past' on which I take my students during the years is one that gives us all (teacher and students) better ways to look upon ourselves, understand ourselves better, and have a meaningful conversation about the way we would like to be.*

**Which subject is your favourite subject to explain in a lesson? Why?**

*I like teaching and talking about nationality and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, because I hope to open their eyes from the populist agendas, which they usually have and to show them a more complicated picture of nationalism and the consequences of it, in our region (and the whole world).*

**Which subject is the favourite subject to a lot of students?**

*They also love talking about the conflict.*

**Do you use ICT-applications? In what way?**

*All my lessons are based on a PowerPoint presentation and I show films (as many as possible). But I hardly ask the students to do research on the Internet (though I myself do it all the time).*



**What is the average salary of a forty-year-old teacher who works full-time?**

*I think it will be around 3500 euros.*

**How many students does an average class have?**

33.

**How many hours do you teach when you work full-time?**

24.

**Which training is required to become a history teacher?**

*For teaching at a high school a Bachelor and teacher training course (all in total about five years of studying).*

**If we want to learn something about the history of your country, which book would you recommend?**

*Jerusalem – the biography by Simon Sebag Montefiore.*

**What is the content of the history curriculum in your country?**

*There is a strong regulation. There is a national curriculum and a final test by the Ministry of Education. But no one supervises on what happens in class. The national curriculum is basically one that combines western history with Jewish history. In the fifth and six grade the subjects are The Ancient World, Greece and The Roman Empire, Jews in the Hellenistic world and Jews under the Roman Empire. In the seventh grade students learn about the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Era and Jewish communities during the Middle Ages (both in the Muslim and the Christian world). In the eighth grade it is about 18th-19th century, the creation of the Modern State and Society and the Jews in that process. In the ninth grade it is about 1870 to 1939: European history and the struggle of the Zionist movement in the land of Israel under the British rule (1917-1939). In the tenth grade the subject is Jews in the Greco-Roman world and Nationalism in Europe and among the Jews in the 19th century. In*

*the eleventh grade we deal with Nazism, the Second World War, Holocaust and the history of the state Israel. The final test, which takes place in the eleventh grade, is based on the subjects given in the tenth and eleventh grade.*

**Is there a subject which is considered controversial to teach in your country?**

*So many – hard to pick just one: The Independence War of Israel is one of the outstanding ones. By the way: I am also a tour guide and every*

*year I have a group of Dutch history teachers who come here with CIDI (the association of the Jews in the Netherlands) for a seminar about the Jewish Holocaust.*

*In the first few years my impression was that history classes in the Netherlands have less complexities than here, due to the political conflict we live in. But in the past two years I have met more teachers than before and I have come to the conclusion that their history lessons seem similar to the challenges I am facing.*

**Left: Ben Lev-Kadesh standing in front of the Temple Mount in the Old City of Jerusalem, with the Dome of Rock and the Western Wall ('Wailing Wall').**

**A Palestinian boy and an Israeli soldier in front of the Israeli West Bank Barrier. Photo: Justin McIntosh.**



**Do you have an idea for a nice history lesson?**

*Many. Just yesterday, for example, I was teaching the partition plan made by the UN in November 1947. I showed six different sources, written by Jews and Arabs, referring to the UN declaration. The students were asked to read them and describe the reaction of the two groups to the UN plan and explain why each one of them reacted that way.*

*This not only gave them much better knowledge about the past (and about a major point in the history of the conflict), but also created such an important discussion regarding the fail of trust between the two sides. The best moment was when a student whom you might define as pro-Palestinian, because she always talks about human rights and criticizes the Israeli government, yelled that it is a fact that the Arabs refused to accept the partition plan (and started a war) while the Jews were willing to compromise, and that means that the Arabs are to be blamed for starting the conflict and the failure to settle it down at that point.*

*I am known by the students as left-wing (which means that I am very critical about the Israeli policy regarding the occupied territories) and during many lessons I educate the students in such a way to improve their ability to criticize their own government. I was very happy that I have succeeded to undermine the natural way of thinking of that specific student who tends to blame Israel for any horror in this conflict. The political argument in that lesson was much more interesting because, suddenly, there were new claims and different agendas, that made things much more complicated and not painted in black and white, as most people think of this conflict. This time I have influenced the left-wing students, next time, when we talk about the Independence war of Israel, I will be undermining the right-wing students. ■*