

PROMISES
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PROMISES

A Film by Justine Shapiro, B.Z. Goldberg, and Carlos Bolado

Facilitator's Guide

POV

PROMISES

Facilitator's Guide



DEAR FRIENDS,

To be totally honest, when we started making **PROMISES** we had no idea what we were getting into. We didn't know that it would take almost six years to complete (from 1995-2000), or that it would lead us into parts of Jerusalem that most visitors (and locals for that matter) rarely visit. We didn't know that the kids in the film would open our hearts and minds to the complexity and richness of life in the charged city of Jerusalem. And we certainly didn't know that some of the characters in the film would brave the checkpoints and their own inner boundaries to visit "the other." All we knew was that children in Jerusalem had something to say about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and that no one was asking them. Our journey was guided by our own curiosity rather than by a quest for some kind of "justice."

The conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is one of the most complicated, intransigent, and confusing conflicts in the world today. Our hope is that **PROMISES** will get beneath the confusion of the conflict by looking at it through the eyes of children. In so doing, we hope the film will make people care. And we hope that viewers who are new to the conflict, those who think they understand it, as well as those who feel they have "had enough of it" will be surprised and touched by what they see.

We believe that the enormity of both the September 11, 2001 tragedy in the U.S. and the war in Afghanistan underscores how urgent it is for Americans to understand the human dimensions of conflict in the Middle East and the irrevocable perils of identity-based hatred.

With your help, the impact of **PROMISES** can extend well beyond broadcast. We offer this guide in the hope that you can use the film to inspire profound dialogue in your community, and with confidence that honest and respectful conversation can increase understanding. Thank you for joining us on this journey.

Justine Shapiro, B.Z. Goldberg and Carlos Bolado

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Facilitator's Guide

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PROMISES

PROMISES is a documentary about the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis and seven children who have grown up in its whirlwind. Despite living within 20 minutes of one another, this diverse group has experienced the conflict in profoundly different ways. With the candor of youth, the children share their perceptions of themselves, their presumed enemies, and their views of the future.

Overcoming formidable barriers, some of the children choose to meet. In their visit, viewers witness the hope that springs from increased cultural understanding and a willingness to talk. In their courage, viewers can find inspiration for dialogue.

PROMISES presents many different voices without oversimplifying or endorsing any particular point of view—that makes it a powerful model for discussion and an excellent vehicle for outreach.

THE CHILDREN *(in order of appearance):*

Yarko & Daniel
 secular Israelis, West
 Jerusalem, grandsons of
 Holocaust survivor



Mahmoud
 Palestinian Muslim,
 East Jerusalem, son of
 merchant in Muslim
 quarter of Old City



Shlomo
 Israeli Orthodox Jew,
 Jewish quarter of
 the Old City, rabbi's son



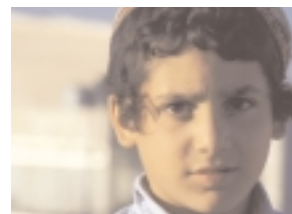
Sanabel
 Palestinian Muslim,
 Deheishe Refugee Camp,
 daughter of jailed Popular
 Front for the Liberation of
 Palestine (PFLP) leader



Faraj
 Palestinian Muslim,
 Deheishe Refugee Camp,
 son of Palestinian
 refugees



Moishe
 Israeli Orthodox Jew,
 Beit-El, settler on
 West Bank



POTENTIAL PARTNERS

PROMISES' themes will resonate with a wide array of people in your community. The film is well-suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- > Mosques, churches, and synagogues, including youth groups and religious school classes (grades 6 and up)
- > Peace and social justice projects and organizations
- > Jewish and Arab Anti-Defamation Groups
- > College level departments of Political Science; Jewish, Islamic, or Religious Studies; Middle Eastern Studies; Peace Studies
- > Interfaith groups
- > News organizations that cover the Middle East
- > Study Circles
- > Community-based organizations with a mission to promote education and learning, such as P.O.V.'s national partner, Elderhostel's Independent Living Centers, or your local library

Because **PROMISES** raises complicated and emotional issues, you may want to partner with someone who has experience fostering dialogue on themes of tolerance. Organizations such as the National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ) may be able to help. Some university professors, clergy, and youth leaders may also be specially trained in facilitation skills.

SETTING GOALS

As you consider how your event meets the goals of everyone involved, be sure to think about the impact of the following:

How large an audience do you want?

Large groups are appropriate for information exchanges. Small groups allow for more intensive dialogue.

Will you bring different segments of your community together or hold separate discussions for various groups?

The former requires a highly skilled facilitator.

Will you focus on inviting new people to join in or reach out to groups already experienced in discussing issues related to bias and tolerance?

The former may require more help from a facilitator; the latter may already be skilled at handling delicate topics.

Will you host a single event or engage in an ongoing project?

The impact of single events to bring lasting change is limited, but it is easier to get people to commit to attending a single meeting.

What will you do to increase the chances that people will leave the event feeling hopeful?

Providing people with a chance to talk is a good start. Helping them find ways to take action alleviates frustration and encourages hope.

BACKGROUND

It is not necessary to be an expert on the Middle East to facilitate a discussion of **PROMISES**. The film itself reviews the central issues and history. However, knowing more about the conflict can help you anticipate things that may come up during discussion.

To compare perspectives from each side, especially on current events, you may want to visit a few Web sites.

For official accounts, try:

www.pna.net

The official Web site of the Palestinian National Authority

www.Israel.org

The official Web site of the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs

For an American point of view, try:

www.AIPAC.org

The Web site of the largest pro-Israel lobby in the U.S., the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

www.aaiusa.org

The Web site of the Arab American Institute summarizes U.S. Arab perspectives on issues related to the Middle East as well as issues for Arabs living in the U.S.

In addition, familiarity with key events, places, and terms can improve your ability to clarify points and keep the dialogue on track. The following sites can help:

www.centerpeace.org

The Web site for the Center for Middle East Peace and Economic Cooperation is an excellent place to get background information, including descriptions of current political parties and governing structures, as well as maps and essential documents (e.g., UN resolutions, peace agreements, the Palestinian Charter, etc.). If you're looking for help with vocabulary or definitions (e.g., the difference between Hamas and Hezboullah), this is the site to check.

www.btselem.org

The Web site of the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories provides valuable statistics related to the conflict.

www.adc.org

The Web site of the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee will be especially useful for groups dealing with the treatment of Arabs in America and for those looking for an explanation of the distinction between Islam and fundamentalism.

www.adl.org

The Web site of the Anti-Defamation League provides information on anti-semitism, as well as strategies for discussing hate and violence with children.

www.peacenow.org

The Web site of American's for Peace Now, allies of Israel's peace movement (shalom Achshav), features a great list of links to related organizations, both Israeli and Palestinian.

www.seedsofpeace.org

The Web site of an American summer camp that brings Israeli and Palestinian youth together provides evidence that dialogue is possible.

www.nswas.com

The Web site of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, a joint settlement of Israelis and Arabs, includes descriptions of the community's peace school.

Companion lesson plans can be downloaded at **www.pbs.org/pov/promises** after December 1, 2001. K-12 educators may video-record **PROMISES** and use the program in their classrooms for up to one year following the broadcast, or you may choose to purchase it.

LANGUAGE

The Challenge

Because each side uses different terminology for everything from current and historical events to place names and political titles, it is nearly impossible to speak about conflict in the Middle East without identifying oneself with a particular point of view.

The Strategy

A facilitator is most effective when seen as neutral, so it is important to be conscious of your language choices. You may want to use dual terminology (e.g. “Israel/Palestine”), explain your language choices before you start (e.g., “Our news division follows the language policy used by our local newspaper, so that’s what I’ll do.”), strive to use neutral language where possible (e.g., “suicide bomber” rather than “terrorist” or “freedom fighter”), or work with a co-facilitator with a different point of view. In cross-community dialogue, acknowledge that people use different language and that dialogue is possible without agreement on uniform terminology. Encourage participants to think about why they use the terms they do and how their language choices influence how others interpret what they say.

THE ISSUES

The Challenge

PROMISES touches on a variety of sensitive issues; which issues take center stage will vary from community to community. There is disagreement about the interpretation of nearly every treaty and UN resolution, about responsibility for various acts of violence and retribution, about whether specific acts of violence are provocations, responses, or defensive, and, of course, about what constitutes valid claims to the land. As Moishe so succinctly summarizes, “They think it’s their land and we think it’s ours.”

In addition, there are internal conflicts within groups, including: tensions between secular and religious Jews and between “hawks” and “doves”; claims about whether, in 1948, Palestinians fled their homes or were forced out and about how Palestinians who lived under Jordanian rule until 1967 were treated; tensions between Israeli Arabs and Palestinians living in refugee camps and between Muslim and Christian Palestinians; tensions between members of different Palestinian factions (e.g., Hamas, PFLP, Hezboullah), which often represent allegiances to different political leaders, Arab nations, and/or sects of Islam; debates over appropriate tactics (e.g., Negotiate or fight? Fence off communities or try to live side-by-side? Commit violence against civilians or only military and political targets? Trade land for peace or settle occupied territory making it difficult to trade? etc.).

The Strategy

Acknowledge that participants, even participants from the same religious or national group, come with a variety of perspectives. Make sure that everyone understands that the purpose of the event is to explore the issues and increase understanding, not to settle the conflicts or come to agreement. Use the questions in the “Listening” section to avoid getting bogged down in a narrow debate over whose interpretation of a particular event or treaty is correct. Encourage participants to focus on possibilities for the future rather than on coming to consensus about the past.

The Challenge

The conflict in the Middle East can evoke deeply held beliefs, fears, and passions. It is natural to want others to affirm those beliefs and emotions. In the process, we can become so engrossed in making sure that we are heard and understood, that we forget to listen to others.

The Strategies

1. To avoid getting sidetracked by disputes over who did what to whom, you may wish to begin by generating a list of statements to which all agree. Then take those issues off the table for discussion. A list might include items such as:

- Both sides believe they have religious and historical claims to the land. They dispute one another's legal and political rights to the land based on those ties.
- People on all sides of the dispute have been killed and have killed others. There are Palestinians, Israelis, Jews, and Muslims, who have not participated in or condoned the killings.
- Both Israelis and Palestinians have national aspirations based, in part, on their desire to ensure the survival of their own cultures and to be free from discrimination.

2. Remind the group of the difference between "debate" and "dialogue." In a debate participants try to convince others that their position is right. In a dialogue, participants try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening. Remind participants that your event is about dialogue.

3. Ask the group to think of the event as being about listening, as well as discussing. You may wish to practice "active listening," where participants listen without interrupting the speaker, then re-phrase to see if they have heard correctly. Even without such formal practices, **PROMISES** can provide an excellent opportunity to expand people's thinking through listening. Because a variety of opinions are expressed in the film, viewers will almost certainly encounter things that confirm their beliefs, as well as things with which they disagree. Ask people to listen for things that challenge their ideas or cause them to reconsider their assumptions, in addition to listening for comments that reinforce their beliefs.

4. Remind the group that dialogue may be difficult, but it is possible. The children do it in the film and there are organizations, both in the Middle East and in the U.S. that run successful programs to improve understanding between Israelis and Palestinians and between Arabs and Jews (see Web sites listed in the "Preparing for Discussion" section).

5. Let the group consider why listening to children is different than listening to adults. Perhaps because of children's candor or their innocence, sometimes hearing things from young people can reveal new insights. Invite participants to be open to those insights.

Because the events of September 11, 2001 have heightened emotions around the issues raised in **PROMISES**, you may wish to allow people to gather their thoughts by pausing for a few moments of silence following the film. You can then open the discussion by asking for general reactions to the film or by using one of the questions below.

The title of this section is “Listening Questions” rather than “Discussion Questions.” **PROMISES** provides an unusual opportunity for people to listen to perspectives that they otherwise might avoid or resist. That opportunity is what will make a **PROMISES** event extraordinary. It is also what can make it challenging. The questions below can help you meet that challenge.

Each item contains an introductory level question (in bold) and a “going deeper” question. Choose the level of question that matches your group’s interests and comfort level. You may want to pose one or two of the questions prior to the screening, giving participants a focus for viewing, or you may want to simply use them to open discussion following the film. The idea is not to cover every question, but rather, to find the questions that will best engage and facilitate dialogue for your particular group.

Questions highlighted in gold have been added to help viewers use a discussion of **PROMISES** to reflect on the events of September 11, 2001.

A ● indicates a question that is especially recommended for discussions with youth.

*****Recent events have magnified the need for Americans to learn about the Middle East, but be careful about implying a causal link between the September 11 attacks and the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. In as much as all issues in the Middle East are intertwined, there is certainly a connection, but the Israeli/Palestinian dispute is one among many conflicts in the Middle East. Resolving it alone will not end fundamentalism, nor Islamic fundamentalist opposition to the U.S.**

Because **PROMISES includes expressions of anger, sadness, frustration, and religious dogmatism, as well as descriptions of discrimination and violence, viewers are likely to encounter things they find uncomfortable. As you watch, think about which things are hard to hear and why?**

Which things might be hard for someone who disagrees with you to hear and why? If you and your opponent each listed the things that were hard to hear, which things might be on both lists?

Were there moments that felt “universal” or points which seemed to typify childhood? (The group may identify examples like Sanabel missing her father, Mahmoud hiding his coffee drinking from his mother, the twins or Faraj crying over losses in athletic competitions, or Shlomo’s burping contest.)

How can we use common experiences to build bridges?

● Did you ever have to contemplate things like: Will someone blow up the bus I’m about to get on? What will it be like when I have to go into the army? Will they ever let my father out of prison? Has my friend’s father ever shot at me or someone I love? Will I ever be permitted to leave this place or return to my family’s home?

What happens to people when “normal” means being surrounded by war? What impact does living with daily conflict have on people’s ability to find peaceful solutions?

How have the events of September 11 influenced your ability to be a peace-maker?

There are moments in **PROMISES** when the barriers between the children seem to weaken. What specific things are happening at these moments or have happened to make these moments possible?

Are there ways to facilitate the dissolving of barriers in your own community? What happens to hate when the target of that hate is humanized?

Since the events of September 11, who has been humanized and who has been demonized by the media or the government? How do these portrayals influence your opinions about appropriate responses?

● **Where do our attachments to land come from? Land deeds? Religious texts? Historical events? Military victories? Family ties? Why do we value some kinds of claims more than others?**

What would you risk to keep the land you live on? What factors influence the amount of risk you are willing to take? Would you risk more to save your church, synagogue, or mosque than to save the local mall? Would you risk more to save your home than to save a sports stadium? Why or why not?

How have the events of September 11 influenced your opinion of risk or your ideas about what you would be willing to fight for? How does it feel to acknowledge the possibility that others can choose to put you at risk whether or not you agree (e.g., a hijacker commandeering your plane or a government compelling you to serve in the armed forces)?

● **All the children in the film live within twenty minutes of one another but they are growing up in separate worlds. What's different about where the Israelis live and where the Palestinians live? What's the same? How do the differences produce different perspectives (e.g., is a checkpoint a reasonable security measure or is it a form of harassment and discrimination; is the parade through Jerusalem an appropriate celebration of a landmark event or an intentional provocation)?**

What role does fear play in our ability to have compassion for others?

Over the course of the film, how do the children change? At the end of the film, what are each child's concerns and why do they differ?

Yarko says he really wants peace, but he doesn't think about it day-to-day. Is he justified in wanting to pursue a normal life despite the suffering of others around him? How does this kind of thinking affect prospects for peace? Do you think Faraj could avoid thinking about the conflict the way that Yarko does? Why or why not? What kinds of issues do you think about on a daily basis and what do you choose not to see or not to deal with?

● **The three religious traditions associated with this region (Judaism, Islam, and Christianity) all have sacred texts that value peace. What does your religious tradition teach about peace? Is that tradition reflected in this conflict? Is it reflected in your own community? If so, how? If not, how might you make your tradition's pursuit of peace more visible?**

How is religion used in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict? To further hate? As a refuge? To inspire action? To provide models of justice? How does the use of religion influence your opinion about religion in general or about a specific religious tradition? Is there a distinction between "fundamentalism" and "religion"? Can you give examples of fundamentalist beliefs? What kinds of circumstances contribute to the acceptance of fundamentalist interpretations?

What might you do to change those circumstances?

● Consider how the following quotes from the film make you feel:

The Jews kicked us off our land and put us in this camp.—Sanabel

God promised us the land of Israel. The Arabs came and took it!—Moishe

I think this is our country and it's also theirs.—Yarko

I don't like talking to Jews. I know them. They're mean. And deceitful.—Mahmoud

When I see a Jew I want to grab a stone and throw it at him.—Faraj

If I could make my own future, all the Arabs would fly away.—Moishe

We have our army to protect us. We have our firing range. And if the soldiers aim poorly, it's okay 'cause they might shoot an Arab!—Moishe

I support Hamas and Hezboullah. They kill women and children but they do it for their country. The more Jews we kill, the fewer there will be. Until they're almost gone.—Mahmoud

So we both think of the same thing. We each think of our relatives who have been killed by the other side. So we each want to kill each other!—Faraj

In war both sides suffer. Maybe there's a 'winner' but what's a winner? People on BOTH sides die. Both sides lose.—Daniel

The life we live doesn't allow us to accomplish our dreams.—Faraj

If you could say one thing to the speaker, what would it be?

Some of the quotes reflect hatred for the enemy. Where does this kind of hatred come from?

Why do some of the children seem to be willing to put aside their differences while others are not even interested in participating in a conversation? What kinds of things happen in your own community that teach or reinforce hate?

Mahmoud suggests that “Peace between you and me is impossible unless we get to know each other...” What might you do in your own community to facilitate people “getting to know each other”?

The twins' parents have to decide whether or not to let their sons visit a refugee camp and Faraj's family must decide whether or not to welcome Israeli visitors. The visit represents a danger to both families. Would you let your children participate in such a visit? Would you participate? What kinds of things can we do to prevent our fear from blocking our ability to build bridges?

To buy, rent, or purchase
PROMISES for educational use,
please e-mail promises@pobox.com
or go to www.promisesproject.org.

The national PBS broadcast of
PROMISES on Thursday,
December 13, 2001 on P.O.V. is a
co-presentation of the Independent
Television Service and its
Community Connections Project.
PROMISES is also a
Television Race Initiative selection.



P.O.V. ("point of view") is television's longest-running showcase for non-fiction film. This award-winning PBS series is a catalyst for public culture; developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, on-line and in community settings. Celebrating 15 years in 2002, P.O.V. has pioneered creative, effective multi-media strategies for bringing point-of-view documentary films to millions who would otherwise not have access to them. Each P.O.V. film invites viewers to experience the power of moving, real-life stories that deepen our understanding of the world we live in.



Television Race Initiative (TRI) is a media model that fosters sustainable collaborations among public television stations, community organizations, civil rights leaders, interfaith networks, independent film and series producers, and foundations. Since 1998, TRI has helped these partners use powerful PBS broadcasts on issues of race as catalysts for dialogue and problem-solving.



ITVS's Community Connections Project
For over ten years, ITVS has fulfilled its mission of bringing powerful new voices to public television through its independent productions and national outreach efforts. In 1996, ITVS launched the Community Connections Project (CCP) to maximize the use of media as a tool for civic engagement and community development. The CCP collaborates with local field organizers, national and community-based organizations and public television stations to foster dialogue, develop lasting partnerships and implement positive action.