Interpreting the Media Response to the Flotilla Incident
by Wilhelmina Roepke

Materials - one copy per student of:
- Worksheet “Determining Media Bias in the Flotilla Incident”
- Article “Facebook Meets the Flotilla”
- BBC, Ha’aretz, HonestReporting and CAMERA articles linked on the Babaganewz website (http://www.babaganewz.com/teachers/blog-june-1/)

Objectives:
- Students will be able to read an article critically and ascertain its biases
- Students will be able to brainstorm appropriate responses to anti-Israel sentiments

Ask students to relate what they have heard about the flotilla incident. If necessary, expand question to include Gaza’s recent history, the settlement pullouts and Israel’s blockade of the territory. Record, for later use, any particularly incendiary or biased language they use. (5 minutes)

Explain that many of the facts they have related, or the information they have learned from other people over the years, is biased in some way. A bias is a perspective on a situation, which will influence the way someone understands what is happening around them.

Explain to your students that a bias doesn’t necessarily make information right or wrong, but it is important to identify another’s bias.

- Example for students: If your friend said that his father’s hummus was the best in the world, you might take a smaller bite if you knew that your friend likes unbelievably spicy, fire-in-your-mouth food. But if that same friend told you not to eat the salsa because it’s too bland, then knowing his bias for spicy food would help you decide to ask someone else for a recommendation or try the salsa yourself. Our own biases influence the choices we make—our favorite colors, the clothes we wear, even the friends we hang out with. We all have personal biases.

Ask students to brainstorm some of the biases that influence the decisions they make.

Write “Media Bias” on the board. Ask students if they have heard the phrase before, and if they know what it means. Explain that most, if not all, media sources (papers, magazines, television news channels) have some sort of bias. Some are more conservative, others liberal. Some sources are more likely than others to support military actions. The students (or their parents)
most likely already have certain news sources that they do or don’t trust, based on the biases they present. (5 minutes)

Write the following three article titles (from the BBC, HonestReporting, and Ha'aretz, respectively) on the board. Ask students to consider what biases they might expect from each article, and why.

“Death as Israeli forces storm Gaza aid ship”
“Special Alert: Flotilla Attack Unleashes Anti-Israel Wave”
“Israel Navy commandos: Gaza flotilla activists tried to lynch us”

At this time, you may also mention some of the words you recorded earlier during the students’ recap of the flotilla incident. Ask them what sort of biases they see in their own words. (Gaza should be a part of Israel; Israel is treating Gaza unfairly; Israel needs to defend itself from Gaza) (5 minutes)

Divide the class into four groups, to correspond with the four articles linked on the BabagaNewz site. Distribute copies of these articles for each student by group, as well as one copy per student of the worksheet, “Determining Media Bias in the Flotilla Incident.” Ask the students to use the worksheet to work through the article’s possible biases. (15 minutes)

After everyone has finished, ask each group to share their answer to the final question (“Did you think your article was on somebody’s side? Whose? Why do you think that?”). (5 minutes)

Distribute copies of the article “Facebook Meets the Flotilla.” After students have read it silently, ask them to write a paragraph detailing their own feelings about the incident. These paragraphs are to help them lay out their own ideas and will not be shared with the class. (10 minutes)

Use the following questions to guide a discussion about the flotilla incident. (10 minutes)

Has anyone ever expressed anti-Israel sentiments to you? How did you respond?
Did you disagree with any of these articles? Which ones? Why?
What would you imagine saying to someone whose opinion of the flotilla incident was drastically different from yours?

At the end of class, remind students that it is their responsibility to identify media biases and to know who is responsible for the news they hear and read.