

Amos Oz's "Nomad and Viper"

A GREAT JEWISH BOOKS TEACHER WORKSHOP RESOURCE KIT

Teachers' Guide

This guide accompanies resources that can be found at: <http://www.teachgreatjewishbooks.org/resource-kits/amos-ozs-nomad-and-viper>.

Introduction

From his earliest stories to his last novel, Amos Oz (1939-2018) creatively and critically examined the problems of zealotry and hypocrisy in Israel. Strongly identified with Israel's now fading Labor movement and a fierce defender of the two-state solution, Oz (who served in the IDF during 1957–60, 1967, and 1973) was one of the first Israelis to warn against the morally-corrupting perils of occupying another people and was a founder of the Peace Now movement.

Amos Oz first published "Nomad and Viper" ("*Navadim va-tsefa*") in his 1965 debut short story collection, which he revised and republished in 1976. While this story—which centers around a conflict between members of a kibbutz and a group of Bedouin nomads—appears quite critical of kibbutzniks, it should be noted that Oz lived on a kibbutz for decades, and was a steadfast supporter of the kibbutz system.

This resource kit includes materials that will help students engage with and understand the cultural and moral complexities in this story, which draws on biblical motifs and explores Arab-Jewish relations in the decades after the state of Israel was created.

Cover image: Jewish workers eating lunch in the fields of Migdal, Palestine, in 1912. Photograph by Ya'acov Ben-Dov.

Subjects

Fiction, Hebrew, Israel-Palestine, Social Commentary

Reading and Background

- The full story "Nomad and Viper" is available in English translation in Amos Oz's *Where the Jackals Howl*, translated by Nicholas de Lange and Philip Simpson.
- This [short literary biography and bibliography from the Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature \(ITHL\)](#) provides a good introduction to the extraordinary range and international impact of Oz's work. *Amos Oz: The Conscience of Israel* (2005), an excellent BBC profile of Oz, covers crucial aspects of his life.
- Oz's lifelong ethical, political, and cultural concerns are memorably underscored in his final collection of essays, *Dear Zealots: Letters from A Divided Land*. His memoir *A Tale of Love and Darkness* is widely considered to be one of the most important portraits of Israel, and is the biggest-selling literary work in Israeli history.
- For a useful introduction to the history of kibbutzim, see Anita Shapira, "The Kibbutz and the State" in *Jewish Review of Books* (Summer 2010). Director Ran Tal's acclaimed 2007 documentary film *Yaldey Hashemesh (Children of the Sun)* additionally offers a worthwhile introduction, and is available in Hebrew with English subtitles from [Israel-Catalog.com](#) and from Amazon. Consider as well Michael Fein's short video introduction, *The Kibbutz*.
- To hear Amos Oz speak on issues of peace and conflict, listen to this [2011 speech](#) at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia, or to [this 2002 interview](#) with Elizabeth Farnsworth on *PBS Newshour*.
- For an excellent introduction to the festering relations between Bedouin people and the Jewish state, consider Matt Rees's "[The Lost Tribes of Israel: The Jewish State Seeks to Bring the Bedouin in from the Desert.](#)"

Resources



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