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**“Easier to Understand but More Difficult to Digest”:  
Student Experiences with Israeli Yom HaZikaron  
Cartoons**

## Abstract

*Yom HaZikaron, Israel's Remembrance Day, has received considerable scholarly attention, with research published about how the country's youth understand the day but there has been no comparable data from diaspora Jews. This article presents findings about how a cohort of Canadian Jewish teenagers participating in a gallery walk of Israeli political cartoons provided new ways of thinking about and relating to Yom HaZikaron. The data revealed that students care about Yom HaZikaron but struggle to form a connection to the day. Political cartoons that depicted personal loss led students to form new insights into the day and to new associations and connections with Israelis.*

## Résumé

*Yom HaZikaron, le jour du Souvenir en Israël, a reçu une attention scientifique considérable, avec des recherches publiées sur la façon dont la jeunesse du pays saisit cette commémoration. Cependant, aucune donnée comparable existe concernant les personnes juives de la diaspora. Cet article aborde la manière dont une cohorte d'adolescents juifs canadiens font l'expérience du Yom HaZikaron et, en particulier, comment une promenade dans la galerie de caricatures politiques israéliennes leur a fourni de nouvelles façons de penser et de se rapporter à cet événement. Les données révèlent que la population étudiante s'intéresse à Yom HaZikaron mais a du mal à établir un lien avec cette journée. Des caricatures politiques illustrant des pertes personnelles/deuils personnels ont amené les étudiants à se forger une nouvelle vision de cette journée et à tisser des nouveaux liens avec la population israélienne.*

It is Tuesday, April 25, 2023, and Penny is walking around the room of her grade 12 Israeli society class at Tarbut High, a community Hebrew high school in eastern Canada.<sup>1</sup> She is participating in a gallery walk, looking at political cartoons illustrated by Israelis for Yom HaZikaron, Israel's national day of commemoration for fallen soldiers and victims of terror. This is not the first time Penny has looked at political cartoons this year, as their inclusion in the curriculum has made them a regular feature of learning about contemporary Israeli life. But today is different. The lights are dimmed, somber Hebrew-language songs play through the classroom's speakers, and students have been given the liberty to meander around the room, taking in the seven cartoons at their own pace.

Penny is a confounding student. She is friendly and popular, with classmates often following her lead, but she is apathetic in the classroom, often distracted by her cell phone and laptop and she frequently ventures on walks around the building. She desires high grades but fails to see how distractions impact her success. On this day, however, Penny is rapt with attention, walking around the room with two of her

friends. As they approach one of the cartoons, Kate says: “I don’t get it” and pulls Penny away to look at another cartoon. But Penny doesn’t budge. Instead, she begins to unpack the cartoon, explaining to Kate about the different signs and symbols the artist has used and how the colour and perspective contribute to establishing the mood.

I have chosen to begin with this story about Penny because her behaviour and engagement during the Yom HaZikaron gallery walk differed so greatly from what I observed of her when she was a student in my class over the course of the year. While her interest in the political cartoons demonstrated outlier comportment for her, her comments and contributions were typical of most of her classmates. Even Kate’s desire to move past that first cartoon was not because she was disinterested in the lesson; rather, she wanted to find a cartoon that better spoke to her.

The data collected for this article comes from a year-long study of the use of political cartoons in Israel education. In this specific article, I have chosen to focus on Yom HaZikaron and how students reacted to learning about this solemn day through visual media. While articles have been published about Yom HaZikaron education in Israel, this is the first to document how a group of diaspora Jewish teens navigate a day that feels both intimate and removed from their own lives. What emerged was that the day posed challenges for students; they recognized the importance of the day but often struggled to feel how they thought they should feel because none had ever experienced the loss of friends or family in war. The opportunity to explore cartoons produced by Israelis was disruptive; it introduced a new way of encountering the day and, in turn, provided a meaningful and emotionally affective experience.

## Literature Review

Held yearly on the fourth of the Hebrew month of Iyar, Yom HaZikaron predates Israel’s 1948 founding by decades, with the earliest ceremonies having been held in Palestine during the first years of the twentieth century before being cemented into Israeli law in 1963.<sup>2</sup> The day itself is highly ritualized, with ceremonies held throughout the country and radio stations exclusively playing songs that reflect the day’s sombre tenor.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the state’s thousands of air raid sirens simultaneously sound on Memorial Day’s eve at 8pm and then again in the morning at 11 am. The siren calls Israelis to attention, with the expectation that all citizens—including automobile drivers—stop what they are doing. Ido Gideon locates in the communal ritual an opportunity for self-reflection and a reminder of a “shared common history.”<sup>4</sup> It is, according to Don Handelmann and Elihu Katz, a time where “all is silent, yet all silent space is pervaded by the fullness of the same wail.”<sup>5</sup>

Yom HaZikaron ceremonies are organized by schools, youth movements and military associations, with data suggesting that Israelis participate in commemoration rites at

a rate higher than other Western countries, which result in increased feelings of nationalism.<sup>6</sup> Participation in these rituals begins even amongst the youngest learners, with evidence showing that kindergartners become socialized into the national discourse by participating in lessons designed to teach the day's values, alongside the reality that many Israelis have been personally affected by violence and terror.<sup>7</sup> Both school-based and public ceremonies adhere to one of a number of set approaches to commemorating the day. Traditionally, the ceremonies sought to promote national values like "heroism, self-sacrifice, the victory of the few over the many, the link between life and death, national revival, and the command to remember the fallen" through a more impersonal commemoration of the dead.<sup>8</sup> Ceremonies of this nature resulted in what Gal Hermoni and Udi Lebel see as an intentional attempt to de-politicize the commemoration by reifying shared national values like self-sacrifice and confidence in the military.<sup>9</sup> In more recent years, ceremonies of this nature have become less common, replaced with ceremonies that personify those who have perished and situating their stories at the heart of the commemoration.<sup>10</sup> This transition from commemorating national loss to personal loss has led to the politicization of memory, allowing individuals to form their own associations with the day and ascribe their own meaning to it.<sup>11</sup>

## Political Cartoons in Education

Political cartoons are representations of societal phenomena and are guided by social and ideological intent. They are a platform where cartoonists explore different themes and meanings that represent group interests alongside the cartoonist's own interests. They are produced to "inform the public about contemporary or topical issues and to discuss contentious socio-political issues."<sup>12</sup> They are multimodal, combining visual and verbal modes of communication to aid the reader in decoding the artist's social or political critique.<sup>13</sup> As a corollary of having a limited amount of space in which to operate, cartoonists make use of various devices such as metaphor, humour, and satire to craft societal critique in a single panel. The successful political cartoonist can thus communicate sophisticated visual rhetoric in a limited space. While they might possess some form of a narrative, they do not, on their own, tell a sequential story and instead rely on the reader's imagination and intellect to fill in the gaps of what happens before and after what is depicted in the panel.

Political cartoons' brevity and function as stand-alone texts have made them ripe for inclusion in different classes with varied subject matter and learner age. They can be used as set induction pieces to begin a lesson, be the primary focus of a lesson, or be used as an evaluation tool.<sup>14</sup> For visual learners, they can be particularly empowering because they accommodate their preferred learning style.<sup>15</sup> Political cartoons are effective at engaging students in discussions about contemporary political issues and can also be used to foster peer-to-peer conversation and collaboration.<sup>16</sup> Students

enjoy engaging with them, which in turn motivates them in the classroom and helps foster critical thinking skills.<sup>17</sup> Cartoons can also be used to show different ideological and political approaches to an issue helps students formulate their own responses to contemporary societal challenges.<sup>18</sup>

It is important to acknowledge that simply showing a student a cartoon and expecting them to immediately grasp its intent is unreasonable. This is because the interplay between visual and verbal prompts, use of metaphors, requirement to understand the context, and knowledge of the intertextual references, relevant cultural symbols needs to be paired with an ability to piece together disparate components into a coherent whole, which can make parsing the text difficult for some students. Educators therefore need to help students engage the texts and ensure that the cartoons' level of difficulty does not exceed the learners' capabilities.<sup>19</sup> Walt Werner advises educators to provide specific prompts and questions that can guide the students through the cartoon and help them arrive at an understanding of the illustrator's intent.<sup>20</sup>

## Arts in Israel Education

The last decade has seen a proliferation of publications about Israeli education in formal and experiential settings.<sup>21</sup> However, there have been very few studies authored about the use of creative and visual arts in Israel education. Of those published, there has been more emphasis on students' creative products as opposed to how the arts were integrated into instructional time.<sup>22</sup> A qualitative study I conducted in 2021 examined how a group of high school students navigated strips from Israeli cartoonist Shay Charka's series *Over the Line*. Charka's cartoons are heavily rooted in Israeli political and religious context, with Charka's autobiographical series frequently delving into the salience of both topics. In addition to replicating the above-mentioned educational outcomes like enjoyable learning and meaningful discussions, the study's results showed that Charka's transparent identity as a right-wing Orthodox Jew enabled students to better understand Israelis of his demographic, and that his cartoons humanized his community for the students.<sup>23</sup> Studies of this nature are demonstrative of what Ezra Kopelowitz has identified as a pedagogical model that involves social engagement with Israel. This is a type of Israel education that fosters personal or intimate relationships with Israel.<sup>24</sup>

## Method

Tarbut High is a large community Jewish high school in a major Canadian metropolitan city. The school's mission statement identifies the school as supportive of Israel and seeking to inculcate positive identification between students and Israel. The school hires teachers from Israel to stimulate dialogue about Israel amongst students and to create meaningful Israel programming like the yearly Yom HaZikaron as-

sembly. One of the ways that support for Israel is also manifested is by requiring all grade 11 students to study the history of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict for one semester and to offering a grade 12 elective on contemporary Israeli society.

## Gallery Walk of Political Cartoons

The practitioner research study took place during a lesson on Yom HaZikaron in April 2023 with the twenty-one students enrolled in my grade 12 Israeli society course. None were Israeli citizens, but most had visited Israel at least once. Throughout the year, two made regular mention of their desire to immigrate to Israel after they graduated from high school. In the first part of the lesson, a gallery walk of seven printed Yom HaZikaron cartoons was set up around the room. Students were given twenty-five minutes to look at the cartoons and fill in a printed chart with their observations.

Gallery walks are an instructional method used by teachers in many disciplines and amongst learners of all ages from grade one through to university.<sup>25</sup> They require students to leave their desks and walk around the room to explore content stations and interact with their classmates in active learning.<sup>26</sup> Research has shown that gallery walks have a number of educational and social benefits. This includes providing opportunities for students to participate in meaningful dialogue which can lead to higher response rates of student engagement and student initiative and autonomy.<sup>27</sup> The methodology also allows for critical thinking and evaluation because it is a student-directed learning process and has demonstrated the capacity to enhance young learners' speaking abilities.<sup>28</sup>

The seven cartoons that were selected for inclusion in the Yom HaZikaron gallery walk were all produced by Israeli cartoonists, six of them were illustrated in 2023 and one illustrated in 2021. The cartoons were purposefully curated to include works by cartoonists from across Israel's religious and political spectra and to also include cartoons by both men and women. All the cartoons were accessed through the artists' social media accounts with the exception of two, which were shared in a WhatsApp group where ultra-Orthodox cartoonists post their work. With regards to content, all the cartoons reflect the themes of Yom HaZikaron, with six of them focusing on how individuals have experienced loss. Within these six cartoons, there are differing emphases placed on personal loss and national loss. For example, in Guy Morad's 2021 cartoon, he illustrates a husband and wife watching a video of their deceased son celebrating at a family gathering on a television that sits at the centre of the panel (Figure 1). Surrounding the television are photographs of their son at different stages of his life, with the most recent being of him in military uniform. The cartoon's depiction of the single soldier and the traumatized family reifies personal narratives as opposed to national ones. Conversely, Reut Bortz's 2023 cartoon is an

illustration of nine separate graves, with each containing either symbols or visitors that associate the deceased with a specific Israeli community. While gravesite alludes to the unique story of the deceased soldier, considered as a whole, they testify to how Yom HaZikaron affects all Israelis, irrespective of political and religious affiliation. The lone outlier in the group of seven cartoons is a 2023 cartoon by Or Reichert. In it, is a platoon of faceless soldiers carrying a map of Israel. Reichert's cartoon of a shared national narrative offers a powerful visualization of how the army holds the state aloft, signifying its importance to the country. Excluding Reichert's, the gallery walk cartoons all reflect the trend observed by Edna Lomsky-Feder that memorial commemoration has increasingly focused on the single story in order to highlight the impact of loss on individual Israelis.<sup>29</sup>

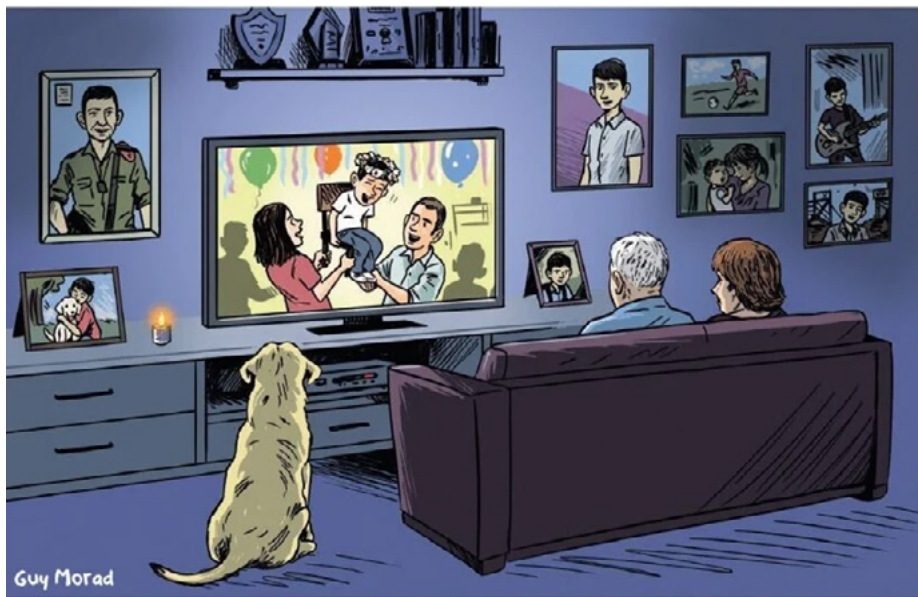


Figure 1. Guy Morad, Yom HaZikaron cartoon, in "A Nation of Grief and Joy," *Ynet*, April 13, 2021, <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/HysHig7800>.

The collection of Yom HaZikaron cartoons differs from most Israeli political cartoons in a few significant ways. First, the cartoons contain no depictions of Israel's political or religious leaders, all of them feature unidentified Israeli men, women, and children. Second, the cartoons do not contain any of the many pop culture intertextual references that routinely populate the Israeli cartoon landscape.<sup>30</sup> Third, the Israeli intertextual references included are all relatively straightforward, with military insignia, dog tags, and uniforms recurring throughout the cartoons. Fourth, the cartoons rely entirely on visual signifiers because they contain no dialogue or text. The lone cartoon to use Hebrew is an additional 2023 cartoon by Or Reichert, and in it, he illustrates posterboards with slogans and logos that were used at protests

held in early 2023 propped up outside of a cemetery where inside, two individuals embrace in front of a gravesite.<sup>31</sup>

The cartoons were not hung around the room in a particular order. While many of them did not require explanation, I did include brief comments or instructions on three of them to help focus students' attention. For example, on the previously mentioned Reichert cartoon with Hebrew-language posterboards, I offered students translations and a brief note explaining that the slogans were used at the recent demonstrations by members of Israel's left- and right-wing communities.

## Data Collection

Following the completion of the gallery walk, all twenty-one students submitted reflections written in class on the day of the lesson, and fourteen participated in a semi-structured follow-up interview within a week of the lesson's completion. Both data collection tools rely on student voices to understand the student experience. This reflects an attitudinal orientation that recognizes teenagers as the authorities of their own lives and can be relied upon as trustworthy interviewees. To that end, the questions asked of students in both tools sought to understand how they experience Yom HaZikaron and their thoughts on the salience of using Yom HaZikaron political cartoons as a way to commemorate the day.

At two points during the lesson students responded to written prompts about the Yom HaZikaron cartoons. At the end of the gallery walk, students returned to their desks and answered the following question: "Of the seven cartoons, which one *most* spoke to you and gave you what to think about for Yom HaZikaron, Israel, Remembrance Day for soldiers? What is it about this cartoon?" Following a discussion about the different cartoons, students had an opportunity to answer: "As an exercise, was this lesson a meaningful way to think and learn about Yom HaZikaron?"

Beginning the day after the Yom HaZikaron lesson and continuing for one-week, individual semi-structured interviews were held with fourteen students from the class. These students were randomly selected at the beginning of the course and had been participating in interviews since November 2022. The purpose of the interviews was to ask more pointed questions that were not covered in class and to provide students with the opportunity to supplement the answers that they shared in their written work. The interview was semi-structured, with a base set of questions that were asked of all students but allowed for supplemental questions based on the answers provided. Each interview began with the question: "What does Yom HaZikaron mean to you?" followed by "What did you think about learning about Yom HaZikaron through cartoons?" Students were next asked, "Which cartoon did you choose as the one that most spoke to you? Why did you choose it? What did it



mean to you?” Given that students had been studying political cartoons in class since the fall, I was interested to know whether students found the ones that focused on a commemoration day easier or more difficult to read than the news-cycle events that we had been reading throughout the year. I therefore asked them “Did you find these cartoons easy or difficult to understand? Why do you think it was easy/difficult? How does this compare to other cartoons we have read this year?”

## Data Analysis

The data was considered using what Robert S. Weiss called issue-focused analysis. This is an approach that emphasizes the importance of the issue at hand as opposed to the individual interviewees. Doing so places the students’ perspectives in dialogue with each other to generate a more comprehensive understanding of the issue—political cartoons and Yom HaZikaron—and not about how specific students experienced the learning. While individual interviewee profiles are not generated, issue-focused analysis still uses individual perspectives to serve as examples that are demonstrative of broader trends in the data collected and analyzed.<sup>32</sup>

Data was coded and analyzed using grounded theory methodology to arrive at new theories that demonstrated how the Canadian students understand Yom HaZikaron and the use of political cartoons in learning about the commemorative day. As a research method, grounded theory is an “approach to qualitative data collection and analysis, ultimately generating a theoretical explanation for the phenomenon being studied.”<sup>33</sup> The interviews were transcribed and then, along with the students’ written submissions, were coded using open coding to identify “distinct units of meaning.”<sup>34</sup> I then used focused coding to generate descriptive categories and higher-order categories that explain how students approached and appreciated studying Yom HaZikaron through political cartoons.<sup>35</sup>

## Findings

### ***Yom HaZikaron is a Day of Importance but Not of Emotional Resonance***

The interviewees expressed a clear and consistent refrain that Yom HaZikaron was a day of importance. That the day was of significance was something that had been instilled from an early age, as Marley said: “it’s always been important since I was really little. Even then, everyone was just always quiet, and that was significant because you never see that silence with a bunch of little kids.” It was a day when many had the opportunity to remember soldiers who died while serving Israel, a country that mattered to them.

The significance of the day existed for the students irrespective of the fact that not even one had a personal connection to a soldier who perished while serving in the Israeli military or to a victim of terror. That they did not have this type of personal connection was observed by a number of respondents. For example, even before explaining her connection to the day, Fiona first revealed that she "[does] not have a personal connection to the day." Even Amit, the son of a former soldier, revealed that the day is not one of personal connection, given that none of his family members died in action.

What emerged most clearly for the students was that the day was an exercise in forming associations with soldiers and families they did not know and who died in active service. It was an opportunity to hear stories and to think about their deaths. It was a day that mattered but, because of the absence of personal experience with soldiers dying, it was also one that was difficult to connect to emotionally. As Will explained: "I guess it's not as meaningful to me as someone who lives in Israel and participates in the things that Israel does to commemorate the soldiers and experience it. But I still think it's a meaningful thing to me." Will's explanation couches his connection to the day in relation to Israelis. This is understandable, given that he is living in Canada, but it also highlights the difficulty for diaspora students who attend assemblies and programs designed to evoke emotions when the connection does not naturally exist.

Two extreme outliers to this identification with the day did exist. First, Hunter ascribed so much significance to the day that he shared: "Yom HaZikaron may be a lot more meaningful to me than a lot of the Jewish holidays, even. There's something about the songs they do on Yom HaZikaron. They always give me goosebumps." Hunter explains his attachment and emotional connection to the day based on his family and his elementary education, where Israel sits at the forefront of conversations. Conversely, Kate, a student with no formal Jewish background until beginning Tarbut in grade 9, revealed that Yom HaZikaron would not be on her radar at all if she was not at Tarbut and that if not for Tarbut commemorating the day, she would not have even known that it was happening. As polar positions within the class, Hunter and Kate sit on the margins of the class, with their peers resting somewhere between. They care about Israel, its soldiers, and Yom HaZikaron, and it is a day of importance but not one of great emotions because loss has not been personally felt.

### ***Gallery Walk of Israeli Political Cartoons Facilitated Emotional Reaction***

Student responses to participating in a gallery walk of Yom HaZikaron cartoons demonstrated that the cartoons facilitated an alternative connection and association with the day. Whereas their impressions of the day itself were highlighted by interest

but distance from it, seeing cartoons that are intentionally designed to evoke emotions from Israeli readers yielded a comparable powerful reaction from the Canadian teens. Amit, whose father served in the Israeli military but did not feel a connection to the day, felt transported to the military cemeteries he saw illustrated in the cartoons and was confronted by the reality that it could have been *his* father who was killed in action. He said:

I think the cartoons resonated with me a lot because I can't imagine a world where my dad would be in one of those graves on Mt. Herzl. Israeli children grow up without that figure in their lives. And I don't know how they do it. If I'm thinking back on my life, and I'm thinking about the impact of my dad or my parents, my dad or my mom had on it, so many things wouldn't have happened. So many things I wouldn't have had. It's just impossible to imagine. It would be a just completely different life on a completely different ... I don't even know.

Amit's emotional response was not prompted by a specific cartoon, nor did the cartoons trigger a new insight into Israeli society. Instead, the cartoons as a corpus elicited an emotional transformation wherein he was forced to confront the realities of war. Seeing children mourning their parents in cartoons resulted in Amit thinking about an alternative version of himself—one whose father died in action—and how his life would have been so very different as a result if this was his reality.

One feature that students identified as helping facilitate their comprehension was the absence of both Israeli political figures and contemporary events. Unlike the cartoons that were studied at other points during the school year, none of the seven cartoons included in the gallery walk included Israeli politicians. Students expressed that having to recognize someone specific did, at times, occlude meaning because they could not decipher the individual's identity. For example, Jessica explained: "I don't always recognize a specific person they're talking about. And then I can't always remember what their role is and if the people like or hate them, or how they're seen. And also obviously artists have very different styles so that they could draw one person the same, and it could look like two different people."

Instead, the cartoons emphasized the *day* of Yom HaZikaron and this was accomplished through depictions of average Israelis experiencing it and this allowed students to better understand the cartoon. For Jessica, the difference was significant because the absence of identity made it easier for her to "automatically understand and be able to pick apart the cartoon." The significance of not having figures to identify also allowed some students to experience greater agency in their ability to interpret the cartoons. No longer having to rely on the teacher or even their peers to explain who someone is or what the news event is, Fiona felt the "independence to say 'oh! I understand this!'" For Blair, a student who sometimes struggled remem-

bering all of Israel's different political figures, the gallery walk cartoons were not a struggle. Instead, she "knew the topic [she] was talking about and could focus on the specifics of the cartoon."

Despite finding the Yom HaZikaron cartoons easier to work with, students did not find them simple. In fact, as Amit put it, "they were easier to understand, but more difficult to digest." By this Amit means that his ability to access the text unlocked its meaning, but with this ability, he was confronted by texts that were humbling, challenging, and personal. For many of the students, the cartoons introduced alternative models of Yom HaZikaron commemoration by showing new sides to Israeli society and how regular Israelis remember their loved ones.

### ***Opportunity to see Israeli Perspectives on the Day***

#### *Unity Amongst Israelis*

Having spent the year studying Israeli society's complexities and the disagreements that suffuse its political discourse, the non-confrontational nature of the political cartoons changed students' perspective on the meaning of Yom HaZikaron. Throughout the course, historical instances of disagreement were taught alongside contemporary ones. For example, students learned about how Israel's religious and judicial courts used different criteria for defining who is considered a Jew throughout the 1960s, alongside the practical implications for who is eligible for citizenship and full inclusion in society today. These disagreements were reflected in the types of cartoons students frequently saw, with right and left and religious and secular disagreements prominently featured in the cartoons.

During the Yom HaZikaron lesson, however, the cartoons primarily documented an apolitical stance towards the day by presenting the reactions of Israeli children and families. For Marlee, seeing cartoons like this led her to observe how "everything else sort of fades away and Israelis are unified in mourning. This is important to see because a lot of these cartoonists when we looked at them in the past, their cartoons have been very polar opposites." Marlee's view was echoed by Blair, who shared that "it was powerful to see that no matter where you come from or what your background is or your political beliefs, on that day, Israelis put everything aside. Everyone has someone they miss, something to mourn, something to remember." For both Marlee and Blair, when politics are put aside, people are able to see each other as people who have suffered much like they have.

Students like Marlee and Blair are certainly aware of the politicization of Israeli society, and their comments acknowledge the politics depicted in the cartoons. As noted above, both Reut Bortz and Or Reichert illustrated cartoons that recognize the political and religious divisions that are so prominent in Israeli society. What emerged

in student responses was not only an acknowledgment of the presence of politics in these two cartoons but also a recognition that Bortz and Reichert were subverting the political divide to highlight how Yom HaZikaron affects all segments of Israeli society. Both Hunter and Zane shared that despite all the politicking in Israeli society, Yom HaZikaron is a day where the politics are put on hold. For Hunter, this is because “everyone’s going to that same cemetery” because everyone has someone to mourn. Zane offered an alternative way of thinking about the relationship between Yom HaZikaron and Israel’s religious and political tensions. Zane sees in Reichert’s illustration of political posterboards being discarded and of a couple embracing inside of the military cemetery a model for how reconciliation and healing can be used to shape Israeli society (Figure 2). He said:

At the entrance, there were the far-left parties and the far-right parties, and it seemed separated, just as Israel sort of is separated through politics. But when you go through the gate in the middle of the cartoon, you break that barrier, you get through into a field of unity with all the soldiers laying together, and there’s no barriers between them and they’re all united. And I think the cartoon is supposed to symbolize that today and every day should be in unity, and we shouldn’t be selfish with our opinions and political beliefs, and we shouldn’t let it separate us. Because at the end of the day, we’re all going to be fighting for the same country, and we’re all going to be trying to achieve the same goals so that everyone should be united.

Considered together, the responses offered by the students suggest that the cartoons led to new understandings of how Israelis approach a day like Yom HaZikaron. The students knew that the day was important, and they also knew that Israeli society was deeply divided. What they had not considered was how those divisions might play out and impact the Yom HaZikaron commemoration. The cartoons’ juxtaposition of these two facets of Israeli society resulted in new lines of inquiry for students, yielding surprising understandings of how the day’s commemoration by way of reconciliation can serve as a model for reconciliation in other spheres of Israeli life.



Figure 2. Or Reichert, "Cartoon for the weekly edition of Shvii," Facebook, April 20, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10160670502768794&set=pb.720233793.-2207520000.&type=3>

### *Israeli Personal Stories Personalized Yom HaZikaron*

In addition to seeing how Israeli unity on Yom HaZikaron led to new understandings of the day, the interviewees spoke candidly and at length about how seeing suffering facilitated an emotional connection with the day. Hunter distinguished other Yom HaZikaron sessions he has attended during his Jewish day school years from the gallery walk. Whereas these other sessions, often involved diaspora Jews offering what he called an "outsider perspective," the Israeli cartoons offered an unmediated exposure to "the inside perspectives and seeing how Israelis see it, not just diaspora Jews." The value of this for him was that "It's easy for us to say stuff when we're not in the army or our kids don't go to the army. When you're creating a cartoon and your son or daughter is in the army right now or you know that they're going soon, or you're thinking about having kids or whatever, you went there, I think it's just a different perspective."

The singular story depicted in many of the cartoons also served as an impetus for connecting to the day. Dylan shared that she struggles with Canadian and Israeli re-

membrance days and also with learning about the Holocaust because the vast number of victims renders the day inaccessible. Learning about Yom HaZikaron through cartoons “personalized it a lot more and it showed how much this family’s life was affected by just why death, and there’s tens and thousands of those. Seeing the cartoons reminds me that all these people are really people.”

Of the seven cartoons that were displayed for the gallery walk, Morad’s illustration of the bereaved family generated by far the greatest interest. Students were drawn to Morad’s ability to capture so much emotion in a single panel, and evoked pathos in them. Jessica explained her reaction this way: “It was seeing how empty a family really is without a soldier or their son and seeing what they do every single year. Obviously, time has gone on since their son’s death, but seeing what they do every year to remember their child was very heartbreaking to see, so real.” Despite identifying different merits to the cartoons, all three, Hunter, Dylan, and Jessica, were able to understand and connect with Yom HaZikaron in new ways. The common factor in all of their responses was seeing personal loss visualized by those directly affected by it.

### ***Active Learning Engaged Students in the Process***

The content of the cartoons fostered a new, deeper understanding of Yom HaZikaron in the students, and they shared that the active learning provided by the gallery walk helped them engage with the subject matter more deeply than before.

For some learners, this new understanding emerged from getting out of their seats, walking around the room, and *doing* something. Much like previous research has shown, the students benefited from the autonomy to direct their own learning.<sup>36</sup> Blair appreciated that she was not provided with a set path around the room or a set amount of time she could spend with each cartoon. Being able to meander at her leisure and linger at the cartoons she appreciated resulted in a meaningful way of learning about Yom HaZikaron. Penny put it more pithily when she explained that the gallery walk did not just require her to “sit there partially listening, zoning out” and instead allowed her to “actually get involved and write something about the cartoons and the day.”

Other learners spoke about the visual aspect of the cartoons and how *seeing* visual texts produced by Israelis played a part in why they arrived at a new emotional place with Yom HaZikaron. Benji, whose favourite cartoon was Morad’s illustration of the parents still mourning their deceased son, explained: “It’s more impactful when you can see it, visualize it, like almost touch it, imagine yourself at that moment and imagine what it would be like for you to be in that position, what it could be like for you to be any of the characters.” In a similar vein and about the same cartoon, Will explained that “seeing how the soldier had a life before, and they did activities same

that we did, I think that was really meaningful to actually see." Much like their peers who had remarked on the value of encountering texts by Israelis about Israeli Memorial Day, Benji and Will recognize the value of being able to see suffering by those affected and not just hear it described in writing.

## Discussion

Memorial commemoration in Israel has been marked by a rise in the personal narrative to emphasize the impact of loss on the individual.<sup>37</sup> This approach to remembrance is reflected in the stories told in the political cartoons themselves and in the individual ways that students found meaning in them. While many of the students were drawn to Morad's illustration of the family mourning their deceased son, students' observations about the cartoon and the meaning they derived from it was not all the same. In this regard, the gallery walk facilitated multiple encounters with Yom HaZikaron, because each student was able to form their own association with the day when given the autonomy to do so.

The data paints a compelling portrait of the value of using political cartoons to help students better understand and relate to events they have not personally experienced. As many of the students themselves acknowledged in their initial responses about Yom HaZikaron, as a day that is designed to be emotional, it is a day that is difficult to fully relate to because they do not have a personal connection to Israeli loss. Mirroring the experiences of Israelis who were able to form their own associations with the day through the telling of single stories, the students at Tarbut were also able to form new associations with the day and find meaning in a day that many otherwise struggled to relate to because of the personal nature of the cartoons.<sup>38</sup>

The students' reflections on the day, and on the cartoons they were introduced to, reify the value of arts-based education. Much like Amit who was confronted with a vision of life without his father, Maxine Greene has observed that the arts are transformational in education because they allow students "to enter a created world, an invented world ... to find new perspectives opening on our lived worlds."<sup>39</sup> The value of doing so—and this was certainly evident in the students' new ways of thinking about Yom HaZikaron—is that it allows learners to "challenge the taken-for-granted ... to break with confinement, to look from increasing number of vantage points—realizing that the world is always incomplete."<sup>40</sup> The thread that runs through the students' responses is not merely that Israelis come together on this day and that they suffered losses. Rather, this loss, beautifully captured in ink on paper, opened new modes of understanding these losses and their impacts on Israelis. What resulted was a cohort of Canadian learners who gained new insight, appreciation, and identification with Yom HaZikaron and Israelis.



As a pedagogical model, the gallery walk proved to be of great significance in helping facilitate the learning experience. Over the course of the year, students had opportunities to study cartoons in a variety of contexts, but this was the first gallery walk. The learners recognized its merits because it helped set the tone for an exploratory and student-driven experience. The gallery walk was thus not ancillary to the lesson's success but central to it, allowing students to choose their own adventure around the room, discussing cartoons with whomever they pleased and at their own pace. Slowing the learning down in this way mirrored the reflective nature of Yom HaZikaron itself, emphasizing the importance of deep learning and contemplation to arrive at a new outcome.

## Conclusion

The study clearly demonstrates that as an instructional tool, the cartoons yielded the desired learning outcomes of thinking about Yom HaZikaron in a new way that provided students with a meaningful learning experience that they enjoyed. This is no small feat, and educators should take advantage of strategies that increase teacher and student satisfaction. Unfortunately, most of the students shared in earlier interviews from the wider study that the Israeli society course was the only one that they can remember from throughout high school that regularly made use of visual media as part of the structured learning, and this is a finding that is consistent with research conducted about other Jewish schools.<sup>41</sup> Not surprisingly, given their responses to the Yom HaZikaron cartoons, they were disappointed that they did not have more opportunities to explore cartoons and other visual media in their history, literature, and social sciences classes or their Bible, Hebrew, or Jewish history classes. Heeding student voices on this can result in a classroom environment infused with curiosity and interest.

Integrating arts-based pedagogy into the classroom is eminently doable but also not simple. Like any other subject, teaching in and through the arts requires an understanding of the medium and the pedagogical content knowledge of how to do it effectively.<sup>42</sup> Research in arts-based learning has demonstrated that it is most effective when it is a regular part of the classroom routine, therefore it should not just be a one-off experience.<sup>43</sup> While this study focused on a single lesson, cartoons were used approximately every three to four weeks and were therefore part of the class culture. Equally, I also entered the space with subject matter expertise in both Israeli society and Israeli visual culture and the pedagogical content knowledge of how to teach Israel. This enabled me to select appropriate texts and be able to support student learning as they navigated the cartoons. Educators interested in making use of the arts must, therefore, be mindful of how it is being done and ensure that it is being done in a way that maximizes opportunities for success. Serious educators who want to make the arts a feature of their classrooms should enroll in profes-

sional development programs to gain the necessary skills to teach effectively in and through the arts.

Lastly, the results here demonstrate the value of finding ways to make teaching Israel relevant to students. For me—and this certainly ties in with my own interest in cartoons and cartooning—visual media has proven to be highly effective, but it is also not the only way to do so nor is it the only instructional strategy that I employ in my teaching of Israel. Instead, it is crucial for educators to find ways to engage students in meaningful Israel education in a variety of different ways. If Israel is a subject that educators want their learners to care about, to see as something that is important to study, and to truly be a part of their lives, it is on educators to experiment, tinker, and find new and novel ways to teach it.

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