



The Olive Branch Award

Information Pack for
teachers and schools



Contents



- 03 What is The Olive Branch Award?
- 04 Charter of Values
- 05 FAQs
- 09 Leaves
- 10 The Olive Branch Award Tree
- 11 Life Skills
- 15 Community Information

What is the Olive Branch Award?



The Olive Branch Award supports schools to become safe and empowered spaces to talk and learn about tough issues through focusing on four key skills; **active listening, empathy, critical thinking, and social and emotional learning**. Schools can join and collect leaves for their Olive Branch by participating in SNS sessions and exclusive new programmes for teachers and students. It is a holistic approach for the school to embed a culture of learning, listening, and reflection on Israel - Palestine over a three year period, achieving full SNS accreditation at the end.

Why should I sign my school up?

The Olive Branch Award is a unique way to include key life skills within school curriculum and school culture. In addition, it supports teachers and the SLT in having challenging conversations, increasing quality teaching and learning across the board, and creating safe and informed spaces. Israel - Palestine is the vehicle through which these skills are taught and through which school culture is strengthened.



Fig 1: Students speaking to a Palestinian speaker during a Solutions Not Sides workshop



Charter of Values



1. To promote Social and Emotional Learning within the school
2. To promote active listening and critical thinking
3. To tackle antisemitism and Islamophobia
4. To support non-violent forms of activism
5. To take a whole-school approach to Israel-Palestine education
6. To empower students to have a voice
7. A rejection of conspiracy theories and a blame culture
8. A commitment to seek win-win outcomes for conflict
9. A commitment to practise empathy and respectful disagreement
10. A commitment to equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging

We ask all schools joining Olive Branch to sign up to a charter of values. This charter is a pledge of intentions for the school to become a school that is a safe and compassionate place on Israel - Palestine. Schools may choose to hang the charter up somewhere, display it on their website and/or social media, and use it as a discussion point with students.



Frequently Asked Questions



1. Why does this initiative exist?

The model and impact of the Solutions Not Sides Youth Education Programme has evolved significantly in the last twelve years. SNS is no longer a single intervention programme, but today provides multiple interventions to the target audience of British youth, and has also started working more closely with the teachers themselves. Following an upsurge in violence in Israel and Palestine in May 2021 and the subsequent fallout in schools here in the UK, we have responded to a request of additional support for schools & teachers. Taking on feedback from hundreds of schools, we now also understand that the unit of change is not just the individual student, but the wider school community and school culture. In response to this feedback from schools and our deepened understanding, SNS has designed and implemented additional components including resources and teacher training. The Olive Branch Schools Award formalises these components for schools, providing schools with a systematic method of strengthening the school's culture against racism related to Israel and Palestine.



Fig 2: Students listening to a speaker's personal story during a Solutions Not Sides workshop



Frequently Asked Questions



2. *Why do schools sign up for three years?*

We ask participating schools to commit to the Award for three years because we have observed from focus groups and focus schools that real cultural and organisational shifts, which have an impact within an institutional setting, require at least three years of active work. The implementation of new policies, training, and skills amongst the teaching staff, and changes to PHSE curriculums take time to settle. In addition, SNS is offering multiple programmes that are best implemented step by step over consecutive years.

3. *Which schools can participate?*

The Award is open to any secondary school or sixth form college, or higher education college. You may be interested in the initiative because of the focus on life skills and the way in which it enriches geography, history, religious studies, and politics curriculums, or it may be because you want to take a more proactive approach to antisemitism and islamophobia within the school, or it may be because your students, the teachers, and the general school community see Israel - Palestine as a vital international issue. If your students are interested in or passionate about Palestine - Israel, this will give them multiple opportunities to learn, listen, and express themselves. It also provides teachers with additional training, peer-to-peer learning, and a community of teachers across the country. Olive Branch is neither simply for teachers or simply for students, but a wrap around Award for the school itself.



Frequently Asked Questions



4. How much is it?

Schools make a contribution for each programme of the Award that they choose to participate in with an annual cap that differs based on need. There are discounts on the programmes for Olive Branch Award schools.

5. How much work is it?

The initiative is designed to be as low or high commitment as schools see fit within their needs and within their timetables. Several of the programmes can take place within normal school lessons and are programmes that schools are already doing, and others are self-run student projects, or once a year events.



Fig 3: Students listening as a speaker's answers questions during Q&A in a Solutions Not Sides workshop



Frequently Asked Questions



6. How does it work?

Once a school has applied to the Award, you will receive a welcome pack with all the information you need to get started. You'll sign up for certain programmes throughout the academic year, and send in evidence of completing programmes in order to receive the next leaf on your branch. SNS will send you new graphics and certificates for each branch. You'll receive a framework to self-monitor progress, and the Founder and Director of SNS will support you with an evaluation process. There are over 15 different programmes to choose from and full accreditation is reached once you have done 10 of these programmes over three years and you can choose whichever ones you like.

7. How many teachers should be involved?

Schools should nominate one teacher to be the lead teacher on the Award, but multiple teachers are welcome to run the programmes and attend events.



Fig 4: Teachers during a teacher training event with Solutions Not Sides



Olive Branch Award Leaves



You'll sign up for certain programmes throughout the academic year, and send in evidence of completing programmes in order to receive the next leaf on your branch. SNS will send you new graphics and certificates for each branch. There are over 15 different programmes to choose from and full accreditation is reached once you have done 10 of these programmes over three years and you can choose whichever ones you like:

- 3 SNS sessions per year
- Staff training on Antisemitism & Islamophobia
- Networking meeting - once per term - virtual
- Student-led research projects
- Cambridge networking and training event for teachers
- Priority places for students at our annual Student Leadership Programme
- A charter of values
- Letters From Israel and Letters from Palestine
- + more to be announced very soon!



Letters from Palestine & Israel



Priority Places at Annual
MUN Programme



A Charter of Values



Mural/Display



Priority Places at Annual
Student Leadership
Programme



Cambridge Networking
& Training Event

Student-led Research
Projects



3 SNS Sessions Per Year



Staff Training



Networking Meeting



Life Skills for Students



These are the life skills that the Olive Branch Award focuses on. These are designed for students, but teachers and parents alike can also benefit from better understanding and engaging in training of these skills. Whilst there are many other practical skills that the Olive Branch Award programmes provide such as public speaking, debating, researching, and knowledge on Israel - Palestine, these are the ‘soft’ skills that are important for life.

Social and Emotional Learning

The Education Policy Institute defines [Social and Emotional Learning](#) as being “concerned with fostering children’s social and emotional skills within educational settings, alongside their academic skills. This can include developing young people’s relationships, communication, decision-making, self-esteem and behaviour”. It focuses on Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. [The Education Endowment Fund](#) carried out research and interviews with teachers across the UK who noted that they would like to integrate SEL into the curriculum and schools, but there were specific barriers in the way:

Table 8: C8. What do you think are the main barriers to promoting pupils’ social and emotional development in your school?

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Lack of time available to prepare for teaching lessons | 172 | 47% |
| Lack of time in class available to teach lessons on SEL | 259 | 71% |
| Lack of confidence amongst staff in teaching SEL | 131 | 30% |
| Lack of specialist knowledge amongst staff in teaching SEL | 170 | 38% |
| Lack of finances available to purchase SEL curriculum | 145 | 33% |
| We are not aware of a curriculum that addresses our needs | 35 | 8% |
| General scepticism regarding need for teaching of SEL | 40 | 9% |
| Lack of senior belief or support for SEL | 11 | 3% |
| Negative experiences with teaching SEL in the past | 6 | 2% |
| The pressure to focus on other priorities unrelated to SEL | 249 | 68% |
| Difficulties in staff recruitment and turnover | 52 | 14% |
| Other | 37 | 10% |
| Total | 365 | |



Life Skills for Students



The Olive Branch Award seeks to address these issues by integrating SEL within the programmes which can be done throughout the school year and which also address other curriculum needs. These curriculum needs are particularly relevant within Geography, History, RS, PHSE, and Politics.

Active Listening

- Active Listening is the skill of concentrating and working to understand what is being said by those who are speaking or communicating. It is about:
 - listening to the words being said
 - Being aware of your body language
 - Giving the speaker your full and undivided attention
 - Listening without judgement
 - trying to decipher the meanings, intentions, and perspectives behind the words
 - Understanding the body language of others
 - Pausing before responding

It connects to social and emotional learning in better understanding the emotions of others. It can help with developing empathy and helps to respect and celebrate diversity and difference with comfort. The National Literacy Trust lists Active Listening as a vital skill in their Oracy and Talk For Learning [guide](#). Being able to fully listen to what is being said and understand the nuances of communication is a vital skill for all sorts of [work and careers](#) that students may go on to do later in life.



Life Skills for Students



Many things distract us in modern life, and active listening is a skill that many adults do not yet practice [including educators](#). After reading this, why not try to engage in active listening in the next conversation you have and see what difference it makes to that interaction?

The Olive Branch Award includes the fostering of this skill for teachers and for students through the various programmes on offer including the Part 3 session, the Student Leadership Programme, the teacher community, and the annual teacher conference.

Critical Thinking

Being able to take the time to pause and think critically about what is being said is vital to learning and to life. Understanding that not everything that is said is necessarily true, and to understand the bias behind certain sources, medias, social media, and those communicating messages. Whilst we all have access to diverse narratives, different media sources, and opposing viewpoints to the ones we hold ourselves, we rarely actually look to engage with multiple perspectives and we rarely go outside of our own comfort zone. We all have 'confirmation bias' - seeking out information that confirms our already firmly held beliefs or perspectives. The skill of critical thinking gives us the chance to take a step back and look at what we are understanding and what we are thinking. It gives us the skills to assess the sources of our information and analyse the interests and bias behind them, as well as pushing us towards looking at different perspectives. Critical thinking also gives space to a number of other skills in [other areas](#) including maths and science, and ties into the other life skills here. The Olive Branch Award has several programmes that promote critical thinking including the student led learning resources and the part 3 of our three part programme.

Life Skills for Students



Empathy

The ability to have and use empathy is another life skill to be developed. Empathy involves stepping into the shoes of someone else, and understanding their perspectives and emotions. It does not require you to become that person or take on their feelings as your own, but simply to understand and accept those feelings and perspectives. A good way to look at empathy is to think about stepping into someone else's shoes whilst keeping your own socks on. SNS was founded on the value of empathy and being able to understand how those who are different from you, or even those who have very different viewpoints to you feel and approach situations. The premise of empathy is that every human is good and to understand their needs and emotions better helps us to understand where they are coming from. All of SNS' programmes include approaching and teaching empathy. [Radical Empathy](#) goes one step further, to look at our own internalised biases and discriminations and how the dismantling of them can lead to a fairer society.



The Olive Branch Community



Schools joining the Olive Branch Award will also join the Olive Branch Award Community of other schools and teachers in the community. We advise that schools nominate one teacher to lead on the Olive Branch but we welcome multiple teachers to our events including:

- Half-termly community get-togethers on Zoom which consist of guest speakers, training, sharing best practice, and scenario discussions
- Our annual Olive Branch Award conference in Cambridge, in July, with teachers also joining from partner organisations in Israel and Palestine
- The half-termly Olive Branch newsletters will provide you with useful information about opportunities, events, and hopefully inspire you to take up more leaves for your olive branch!



Fig 5: Teachers during a teacher training event with Solutions Not Sides

Thank You!



Solutions Not Sides is a registered charity in England and Wales (1183651)

www.solutionsnotsides.co.uk