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## Background Information for Educators

### Stats and Facts!

The Gaza Strip is a narrow piece of land along the Mediterranean coast between Israel and Egypt. Its area is 365km sq. or approximately **half the size of Wexford**. More than **1.5 million** Palestinians live there. **56%** of the Gaza population are under 18 years of age.

### A long history...

After the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, Egypt occupied Gaza. Palestinian refugees fled to Gaza from areas that became the country of Israel. Israel occupied Gaza in **1967**. Since then Gaza has been **disconnected** from the other Palestinian areas of the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

In **2005** Israel removed its illegal settlements from Gaza but no Palestinian was allowed to enter or leave Gaza. Israel controlled Gaza's borders.

In 2006 the militant group **Hamas** won elections in Gaza. The international community and Israel imposed **sanctions** on the people of Gaza.

This led to a **siege** on Gaza. Israel allowed only basic items like food, groceries and medicines into Gaza. In 2008, aid agencies described Gaza as in a **humanitarian crisis**.

After a six month ceasefire in 2008, during which people in Gaza remained under siege, **violence began to escalate**. Both sides, the Hamas and the State of Israel, blame each other for the increased violence.

### What's happening recently?...

At the end of 2008, Israel attacked Gaza with shelling and missile attacks, killing hundreds of Gazans, including civilians, and injuring thousands. Palestinian militants fired rockets into Southern Israel.

Aid workers in Gaza report that **70 per cent of homes** no longer have running water. People risk their lives to queue for up to ten hours for bread. With **no fuel** entering Gaza many life-saving machines in the hospitals are unable to run. The violence has resulted in a huge number of **civilian deaths** especially among **children**.

### Next steps...

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