

# Barack Obama: *A Promised Land* of an unlikely president

by Bernd Klewitz



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© White House; found at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-33718311> [last access: 12/04/2022]

In Band 1 seiner Autobiografie „*A Promised Land*“ berichtet Barack Obama von seiner ersten Amtszeit als US-Präsident bis zum Erhalt des Friedensnobelpreises und der Tötung Osama bin Laden. Seine Erinnerungen bieten einzigartige und komplexe Eindrücke. Anhand von Zitierten aus der Autobiografie, Informationstexten, Zeitungsartikeln sowie Videos erschließen und lernen die Schülerinnen und Schüler bedeutende Ereignisse der jüngeren Vergangenheit und historische Hintergründe und setzen sich mit Barack Obamas Sicht auf diese Geschehnisse auseinander.

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## Competences and skills:

In this unit, students especially develop their **reading and analysing skills** by dealing with a number of extracts from Obama's book as well as with several additional texts. Another focus lies on enhancing students' **speaking skills** as they participate in discussions in class. Students also practise their **viewing comprehension skills** by working with different videos.

## Overview:

List of abbreviations:

**A** Analysis

**D** Discussion/debate

**P** Working with a picture/cartoon

**R** Research

**T** Working with the text

**W** Writing

**C** Comment

**G** Group work

**PR** Presentation

**RC** Reading comprehension

**VI** Working with a video

Topic	Material	Focus/Skills
1: The environment and climate change	M1–M5	C, D, G, T, W
2: Immigration – The DREAM Act	M6–M8	A, D, R, RC, T, VI
3: The Civil Rights Movement	M9–M11	A, PR, R, T
4: The Middle East conflict – Obama's Cairo speech	M12–M15	A, R, T, VI
5: Obama and history – Buchenwald	M16–M17	P, R, RC, T
6: Personal reflections	M18–M19	A, R, RC, T
7: Worst hours – Operation Neptune's Spear	M20–M21	C, D, RC, T, VI

## Worksheet – Obama’s Cairo speech

M15

On June 4, 2009, President Obama gave a speech in Cairo, Egypt, as a part of a worldwide attempt to repair the image of America around the world, a promise he made during his campaign for president. During his speech to more than one thousand Cairo University students in attendance, Obama referenced the Bible, the Torah, the Qur'an and other Muslim texts. The President also announced that the U.S. government would host a summit on entrepreneurship to identify how ties between business leaders, foundations, and entrepreneurs in the USA and Muslim communities around the world could be deepened.

### Working with a video

1. Watch the beginning of Obama’s Cairo speech (00:00 – 15:40) and identify some outstanding passages that were accompanied by applause (e. g.: 5:50; 7:20; 8:10; 10:05; 13:35): <https://raabe.de/en-Obama-Cairo> [last access: 07/04/2022].
2. Share your findings with a partner and negotiate a list of five key elements to be presented in plenary.



### Research

3. Research some of the important historical events and actors in the Middle East crisis (e. g. Balfour Declaration, Arab Spring, Hamas, Hezbollah). Work in groups and prepare crib sheets for plenary presentations.



### Working with the texts

4. Evaluate the text *A two-state solution?* (M12) as an attempt to offer solutions in this crisis and to bridge conflicting interests.
5. Was the hope raised justified? Comment on Obama’s own perception of the impact of his Cairo speech (M13) and discuss his expectations.
6. Analyse the later development under the Trump administration (and beyond, M14) and assess Trump’s claim to the “deal of the century”, using the think-pair-share format.



## Topic 5: Obama and history – Buchenwald

M16

### Excerpt from *A Promised Land* – Buchenwald

5 June 2009 – During his trip through Germany, President Obama visits Buchenwald, a former Nazi concentration camp used during World War II, with former German Chancellor Angela Merkel and survivor and activist Elie Wiesel. Obama then arrives in Paris, visits the Eiffel Tower with his family, and meets French President Sarkozy.



Before returning home, I retraced a more recent history. President Sarkozy had organized a commemoration of the sixty-fifth anniversary of the Allied landing at Normandy and had asked me to speak. Rather than heading directly to France, we stopped first in Dresden, Germany, where Allied bombing toward the end of World War II resulted in a firestorm that engulfed the city, killing an estimated twenty-five thousand people. My visit was a respectful gesture of respect for a now stalwart ally. Angela Merkel and I toured a famous eighteenth-century church that had been destroyed by the air raids, only to be rebuilt fifty years later with a golden cross and orb crafted by a British silversmith whose father had been one of the bomber pilots. The silversmith's work served as a reminder that even those on the right side of war must not turn away from their enemy's suffering, or foreclose the possibility of reconciliation.

Merkel and I were later joined by the writer and Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel for a visit to the former Buchenwald concentration camp. This, too, had practical political significance: We'd originally considered a trip to Tel Aviv to follow my speech in Cairo, but in deference to the Israeli government's wishes that I not make the Palestinian question the primary focus of my speech – nor feed the perception that the Arab-Israeli conflict was the root cause of the Middle East turmoil – we had settled instead on a tour of one of the epicentres of the Holocaust to signal my commitment to the security of Israel and the Jewish people.

I had a more personal reason as well for wanting to make this pilgrimage. As a young man in college, I'd had a chance to hear Wiesel speak and had been deeply moved by how he chronicled his experiences as a Buchenwald survivor. Reading his books, I'd found an impregnable moral core that both fortified me and challenged me to be better. It had been one of the great pleasures of my life. At the Senate that Elie and I became friends. When I told him that one of

## M21 Worksheet – Operation Neptune’s Spear



### Working with a video

1. Watch the video of President Obama praising those Americans who carried out the operation to kill Osama bin Laden: <https://raabe.de/learn-Obama-BinLaden> [last access: 04/04/2022]. Discuss why Obama's address to the American nation justified bin Laden's capture and killing and, at the same time, urged the Islam community to welcome bin Laden's demise.



### Reading comprehension

2. Read the extract from *A Promised Land* (M20). Describe the reasons for Obama's decision to bring bin Laden to justice.



### Working with the text

3. Comment on the rationale behind the US government's decision to choose this kind of execution for bin Laden.



### Debate

4. Discuss: "Was it justified to kill Osama bin Laden in a secret mission by intervening in a foreign country?" During the discussion, you can take into account these aspects:
  - Obama's reasons for bringing bin Laden "to justice" and the steps leading to his capture
  - the rationale behind the US government to choose this kind of execution
  - bin Laden's background
  - the way the president addressed the public after the operation

### Info box – Agents of Rebuttal

Method used in American debating. Additional to a traditional pro/con debate, agents of rebuttal are given space for refuting or disproving an argument used during the discussion. Each of the contesting sides is allowed two rebuttals (*Gegenbeweis*, *Widerlegung*) to live up the argument. Agents of rebuttal must be well informed and punchy. Moderator introduces the issue and summarises the outcome of the discussion.

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