



# BROTHER'S KEEPER

## Educator's Guide

by

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### HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The goal of this teaching guide is to provide options and opportunities to connect Brother's Keeper to larger curricula on the History of Israel, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or current events, or as a stand-alone class focused only on the comic. Included are questions for interpretation and analysis, mini-lesson ideas, options for continued reading/viewing, and more. My hope is that this story can be a springboard for both students and teachers, kids and adults, to reconsider some of their preconceived notions, reach out for narratives outside of their echo chambers, and grapple with this, at times, endlessly complex history with courage and conviction.

If that seems hyperbolic, I promise you it's not. Now, more than ever, we need the next generation to be able to understand, identify, and overcome rhetoric, confirmation bias, and overt hatred masquerading as justice. May this beautiful story be a starting point on that journey.

## INTRODUCTION

Since it began in 1948, the story of the State of Israel (which is distinct from the land of Israel and the people of Israel) has been mired in triumph and tragedy, normalcy and controversy, peace and war. It seems at no moment in its 75-year history has there just been ONE story of Israel, one stance one can take, one narrative on which everyone can agree.

But that's how history has always worked.

To assume that one definitive telling of a nation's history will ever exist is pure insanity. History is as vibrant, multitudinous, conflicting, affirming, alarming, beautiful, ugly, significant and mundane as the lives of the people who lived it. There is no historical narrative, but rather trillions of them. And in the spaces between stories, in those disjointed moments that don't seem like they should fit together but somehow do, are where we find history in its purest form.

Brother's Keeper depicts one of those moments. And it is a powerful one.

Yaacov Shorr's experience during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, the sheer determination, bravery, and circumstances that at least appear to simulate a miracle, is in many ways emblematic of many Israelis at the time; a slice of life that describes the whole pie. It is a lens through which the establishment of the State of Israel can be viewed.

It is a lens through which Israel in the modern day can be viewed as well. The rhetoric surrounding Israel, from its founding to the modern day, from its supporters and its enemies, is dense and murky. Some of it sounds very convincing, even if it's entirely disconnected from fact. Some of it is hard to believe, even if it is 100% true. The obfuscation of Israel's story in the media and public squares, both physical and digital, has made it incredibly hard for educators to approach this subject in a meaningful way, lest they stumble into a faux pas or worse.

The result is that many Jewish Day Schools, Synagogue religious schools, and other educational institutions, avoid exploring Israel's history as part of their curricula, for fear of the complexity of the subject. This story, told in just 20 brightly colored and action packed pages, will not be a magical panacea that makes teaching this subject instantly easier, but it might put a crack in that particular armor.

Because one story can lead to another, which can lead to another, and stories can weave together to create understanding. From understanding can come change for the better. When history squares up against rhetoric, history wins.





### VOCABULARY/TERMINOLOGY/CONTEXT:

**Kibbutz:** literally meaning “gathering” or “clustering,” Kibbutzim (plural of Kibbutz in Hebrew) were the geographic moniker given to the earliest Jewish settlements in Palestine, later Israel. Kibbutzim were typically based around agriculture, and those who lived in them often ascribed to socialist ideals of shared reward for equal labor.

**Kibbutz Ramat Rachel:** Established in 1926 on the outskirts of Jerusalem, Ramat Rachel was established as a workers’ colony focused on manual labor such as stonecutting, housing construction and haulage. While it never housed a strategically significant population, its proximity to Jerusalem made it a valuable target for invading armies in several regional conflicts from 1948 to 1967.

**Holocaust Survivors:** Between 1945 and 1950, tens of thousands of Holocaust survivors, when it became clear that they would not be safe returning to their homes, immigrated to Palestine, later Israel, in an attempt to establish a country where Jews could be safe under their own sovereignty. This created a unique challenge for the new State of Israel in 1948. The Jews of Israel had to defend their new land from invasion and also integrate this new population of immigrants, many of whom came from urban areas and had little knowledge of agriculture and self defense, two skills necessary to thrive in the land.

**The Arab Legion:** A Jordanian paramilitary unit which participated in the 1948 attack on the State of Israel along with forces from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia.





### DISCUSSION/JOURNAL QUESTIONS

- The story uses stamps as both a narrative framing mechanism and an overall metaphor for the “slice of life” nature of the story. Why are stamps a useful tool to represent this story?
- The creators of this story describe it as “a story from a war” and not “a story about a war.” Why is that choice significant? What is the difference between those two things?
- What is significant about the fact that the soldiers Yaacov is meant to train are Holocaust survivors?
- Why is the fact that Yaacov was born in Jerusalem important to this story?
- Halfway through the story, it changes focus from Yaacov the soldier to Shmuel the doctor. Why is it important for “a story about a war” to showcase both of these perspectives?
- Yaacov, the book’s narrator, dismisses his tale as “just a story from a war.” Do you agree or disagree with him? Is there more importance to this story than Yaacov suggests?
- By story’s end, we learn that not only are Yaacov and Shmuel “brothers in arms” fighting for the same cause, but actual brothers, with one fighting to save their home and one fighting to save the leg of the other. What does this uncanny coincidence say about the interconnectedness of Jews and the importance of fighting for their sovereignty?
- There exists a seemingly overwhelming amount of misinformation related to Israel’s founding as a sovereign state, specifically in relation to Jewish ties to the land and the way in which they arrived and built lives there. How, and in what way, can this story serve to subvert some of that misinformation?

### RECOMMENDED READING/ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following are four fantastic resources for teaching about Israel of the past, Israel of the present, and Israel of the future.

- **Side by Side: Parallel Histories of Israel-Palestine** - edited by Sami Adwan, Dan Bar-On, Eyal Naveh, and the Peace Research Institute in the Middle East
- **Unpacked for Educators** - <https://unpacked.education>
- **Israel: A History** by Anita Shapira
- **The Shalom Hartman Institute** - <https://www.hartman.org.il/>



## SAMPLE LESSON PLAN

**Lesson: One War, Many Names      Grade Level: 8, 9, 10**

### **General Goal:**

**To highlight and explore the different names used for the 1948 war and how each name tells a fundamentally different story.**

### **Objectives:**

SWBAT name at least three names for the 1948 war and who typically uses those names.

SWBAT explain the differences between each name and infer the significance behind each use.

SWBAT describe the challenges of finding consensus when the same event is viewed so fundamentally differently by different people.

### **MA Common Core Standards Alignment:**

WHII.T5.7 Explain the background for the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948, and subsequent military and political conflicts.

- c. the United Nations (UN) vote in 1947 to partition the western part of the Palestine Mandate into two independent countries
- e. the rejection of surrounding Arab countries of the UN decision and the invasion of Israel by Arab countries

### **Connection to Brother's Keeper:**

Provide larger context for the conflict which forms the narrative backbone of the story by examining both the conflict overall and a smattering of perspectives on the war, of which Brother's Keeper is one.

**Essential Question:** *How do the names chosen for conflicts after the fact determine how those conflicts are remembered and their stories conveyed to future generations?*

**Introduction:** This lesson will introduce/explore the concept of different names for the same things in history. It begins fairly banal, with different names for soda within the United States, continuing into a connection to American History and then finally introducing the monikers for the 1948 War and the different perspectives each moniker conveys. Finally, students will be asked to generate their own moniker for the conflict based on their understanding of it through both this lesson's materials, and the content contained in *Brother's Keeper* (which students should read BEFORE this lesson).

**Teaching Procedure:**

**BELL RINGER** (3-5 minutes): Write the words "Pop," "Soda," "Coke," and "Cola" on the board and ask students to explain in their own words what each of them are. Depending on the group you have, they may tease out the point you are trying to make before you reveal it: that all four are interchangeable depending on where you are in this country, and that sometimes even the most common things can have wildly different names depending on who you ask.

**OPTIONAL ADDITIONAL SHORT ACTIVITY** (2-3 minutes): Ask students to come up with other things in their daily life that have many different names (example: grinder/hero/hoagy/sub/etc...)

**MINI-LESSON** (20-30 minutes): Begin by explaining that this lesson will expand on the story they have already read in *Brother's Keeper* by delving deeper into the conflict during which that story takes place. Explain that the names given to conflicts ultimately convey the perspectives of the people using those names and that this "multiplicity of monikers" has been common for hundreds of years.

A very common example that they will (hopefully) have heard of is the American Civil War, which has been referred to not only by that name for the last 150+ years, but also "The War of Northern Aggression" and "The War Between the States." If you feel students need more help understanding this idea, you can ask them to identify the differences between those monikers and ask them to reflect on what the perspectives on the war of those who use them might be.

Introduce the following video from Unpacked for Educators, which explains the 1948 Arab-Israeli War from multiple perspectives and introduces four major names used for the conflict: War of Independence, War of Sovereignty, War of Liberation, and The Nakba (Catastrophe). Screen the video in its entirety (10 minutes): <https://unpacked.education/video/israels-war-of-independence/>

**DEBRIEF OPTIONS:** Write/project the four names the video uses on the board and complete one of the following:

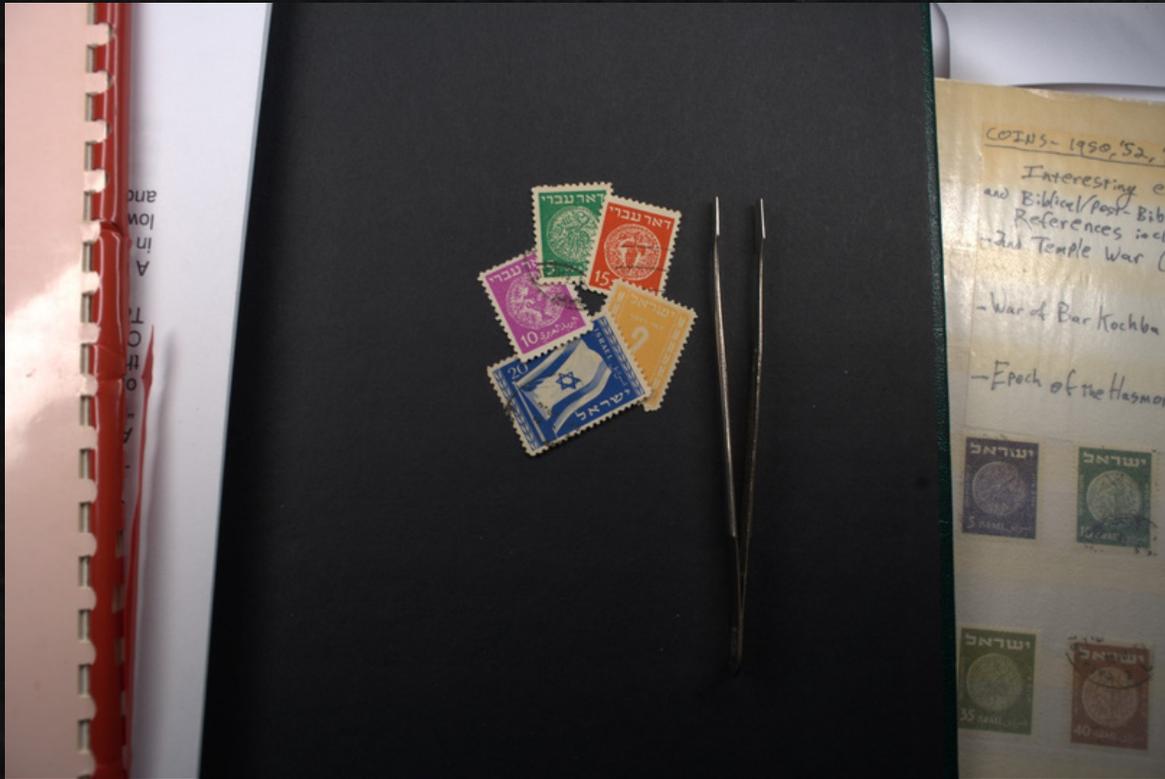
- Guide a group conversation asking students first to compare and contrast each name with the other names and, second, to identify who might want to use each name and why.
- Turn the above discussion prompt into a writing prompt, give students 7-8 minutes to write down their response, and have them turn and talk with a partner to share their perspectives.

**ACTIVITY ASSESSMENT** (10-15 minutes): Separate students into groups of two or three and ask them, using what they learned in the video and from reading *Brother's Keeper*, to think of a new name for the 1948 war and to be prepared to explain their answer. Allow them time to discuss together before having each group present their name and why they chose it.

**WRAP-UP:**

Have students complete the following exit ticket/reflection prompt:

**Given what you now know about the different names for the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, which do you think you will use moving forward? Is that moniker different from the one you used when you came into class today?**



**BONUS EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVITY**  
**“Creating a New Stamp for Israel”**  
**Grade Level: 4, 5, 6**

**Procedure:**

- Have students find and discuss the postage stamps that are featured in Brother’s Keeper. Pose questions about these stamps:
  - Where are they from?
  - What are the elements/imagery found on those stamps?
  - Why was that imagery used?
- Show some examples of the real stamps that inspired those used in Brothers Keeper (see next page). These are stamps from the author’s stamp collection, some of which he received from his grandfather, Yaacov Shorr.
- Have students list ideas for imagery that might appear on a new postage stamp for the State of Israel.
- Have students illustrate their new State of Israel postage stamp using the template provided below, or on a plain sheet of paper.

## Postage Stamps from Arnon Z. Shorr's Collection

These are some of the postage stamps from Arnon Z. Shorr's collection that were incorporated into the illustration and design of Brother's Keeper.

Some of these stamps had been part of the collection that Arnon received from his grandfather, Yaacov Shorr.



This stamp was part of a series that was printed by the British during the era of the British Mandate, before Israel declared independence.

It says "Palestine" in English, Arabic and Hebrew. The Hebrew also has an acronym, "א"ר"ץ which stands for "Eretz Yisrael" - the Land of Israel



These are part of the first series of stamps that the State of Israel printed in 1948.

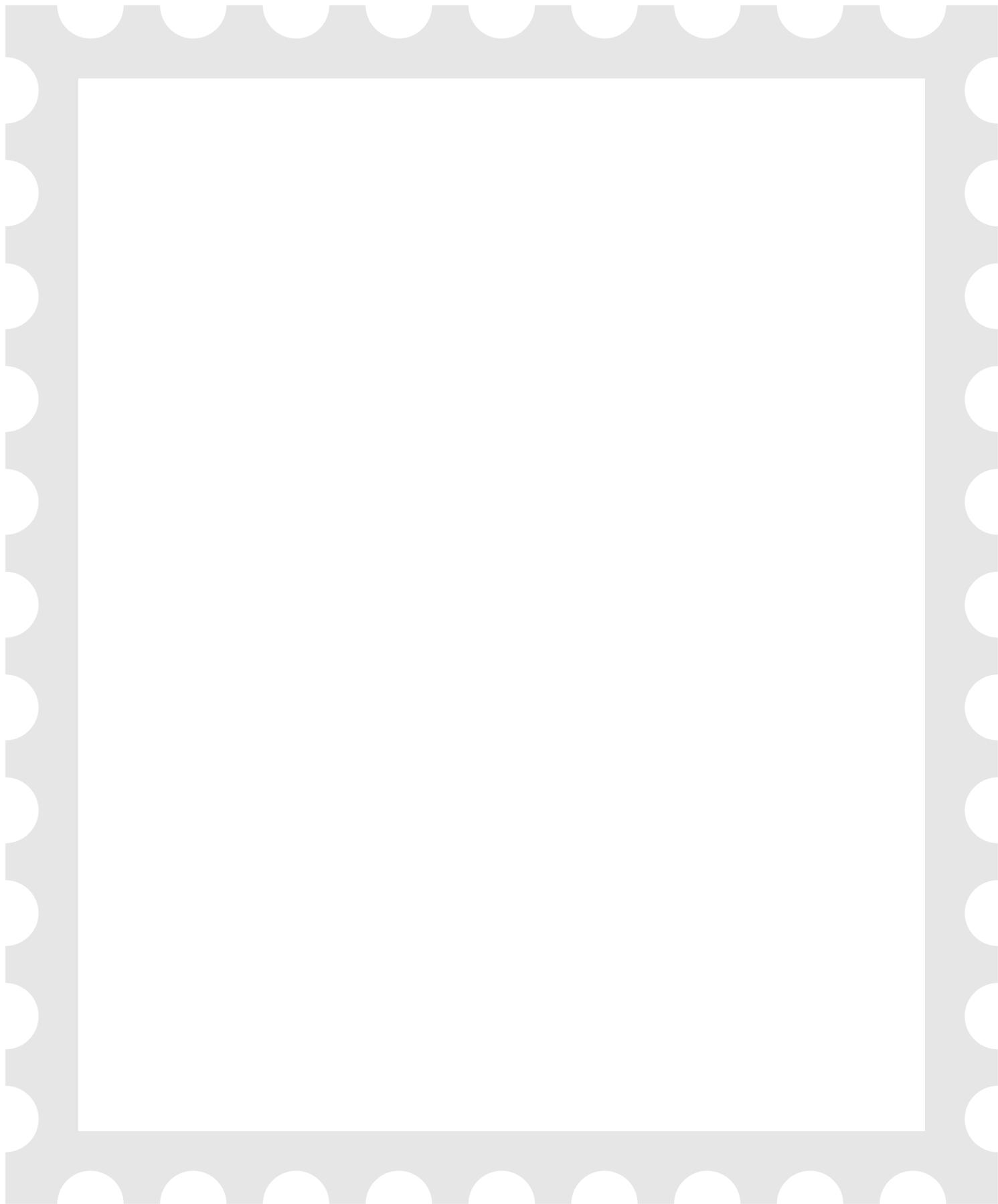
The Hebrew at the top says "Doar Ivri" - Hebrew Post.

The stamps depict ancient coins with paleo-Hebrew writing on them.

This stamp, from 1949, one year after Israel declared independence, features the Israeli flag, and the word "Israel" in Hebrew, English and Arabic.



*Design Your Own Stamp!*





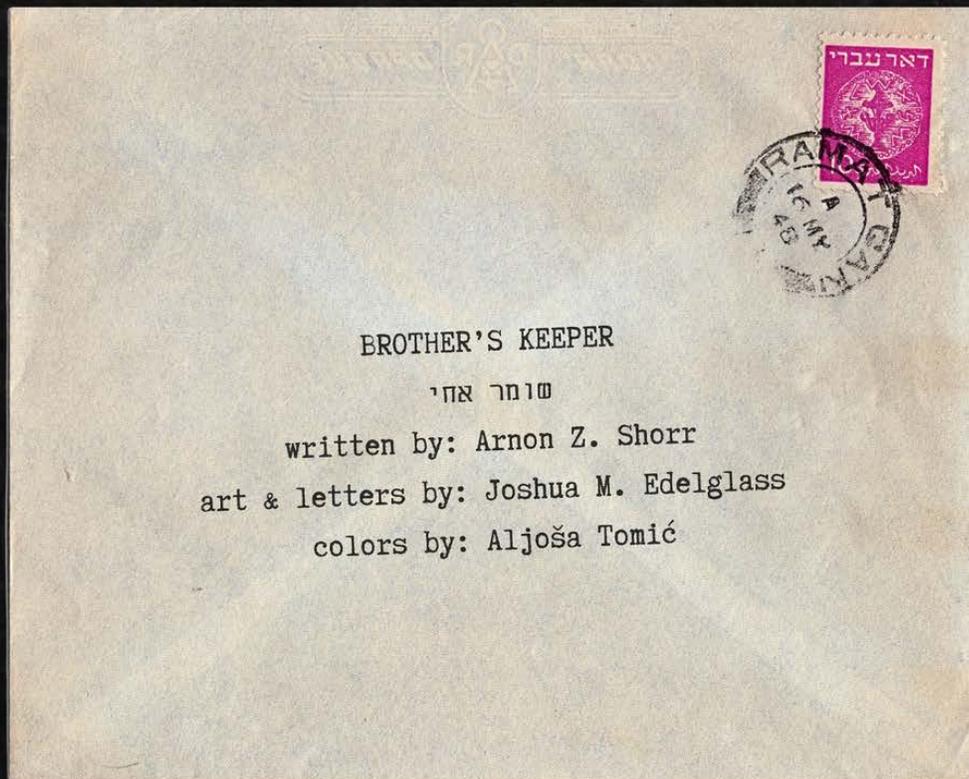
**BROTHER'S KEEPER** is a self-published single-issue comic book, available as an e-book on Amazon.com, or as a physical book. Volume discounts are available.

The author and the illustrator are also available to visit schools (in-person or virtually). If interested, contact them at the addresses below.

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To purchase "Brother's Keeper" for your classroom or school library, visit <http://tinyurl.com/brotherskeepercomic>



### **About the Educator's Guide author:**

Josh Mocle loves teaching and comics, so creating this guide was kind of a no-brainer.

For the last six years, he has served on the Social Studies faculty and Middle School advisory team at the Jewish Community Day School of Greater Boston. As part of his work for JCDS, he has developed and expanded upon curricula to teach American History, Government and Economics, the Holocaust, the History of the State of Israel and much, much more. Previously, he served as the designer and lead teacher of the 7th grade Bechirot (Choices) Curriculum at Temple Beth Elohim in Wellesley, MA, the Assistant Director of Pre-College Programs at Brandeis University, and as a staff writer for Multiversity Comics. He received his Master of Arts in Teaching at Simmons University in 2017.

He can often be found listening to (loud) music exclusively on vinyl, expounding upon the intellectual significance of the X-Men, openly wondering why the Montreal Canadiens can't seem to stay healthy, and getting his cardio in chasing around his two highly energetic kiddos, Oliver and Nora. He lives in the burbs outside of Boston.

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