

PASSPORT TO ISRAEL

SDEROT

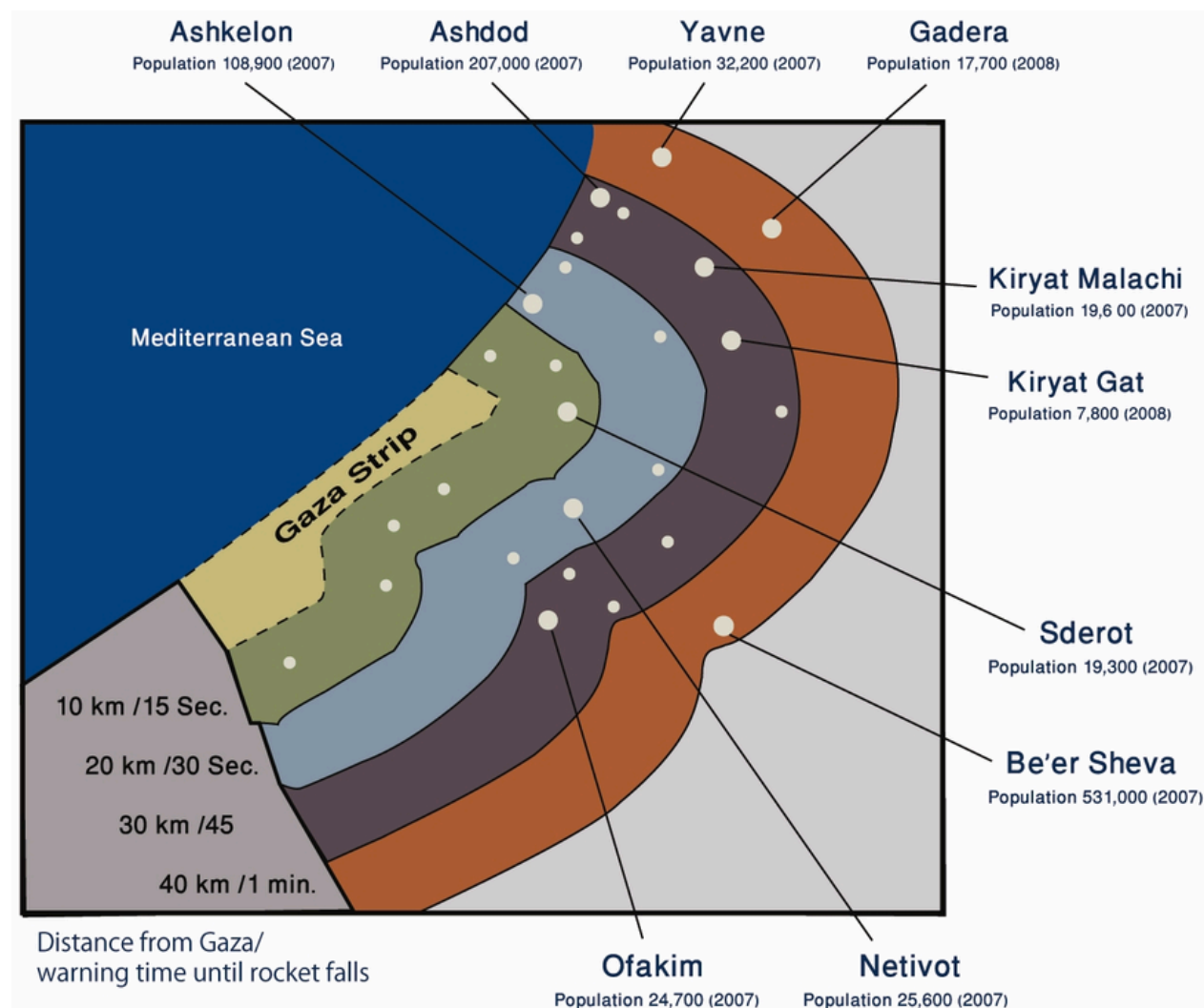
Sderot is a city in the western Negev Desert, less than one mile from the Gaza Strip. It was founded in 1951 as a transit camp for many new immigrants coming to Israel. Many of these immigrants were Jewish families who had been forced to leave countries in the Arab world, such as Morocco and Kurdistan. Jewish immigrants from Romania, Iran, Ethiopia, and the Soviet Union also made Sderot their home.

The name Sderot means “boulevards” in Hebrew. David Ben-Gurion chose this name because eucalyptus trees lined the city’s main street. The Bible verse Isaiah 35:1 says, “The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.” We see this verse reflected in Sderot, Israel, today. Jewish pioneers worked hard to turn the Negev Desert into a place where people could live and grow crops, and Sderot represents that biblical vision.

Because Sderot is so close to Gaza, it has often been targeted by rockets fired by Hamas. The city is called the “Bomb Shelter Capital of the World.” One example is a children’s playground that looks normal at first, but in the center is a concrete bomb shelter painted like a caterpillar. When sirens sound, warning of incoming rockets, families have only 15 seconds to reach safety. Because of these constant threats, many people in southern Israel suffer from anxiety and post-traumatic stress (PTSD).

On October 7, 2023, Sderot was attacked by an elite group of Hamas terrorists. Fifty-three residents were killed, including thirteen elderly people who were on a bus heading to relax at the Dead Sea. Many residents are observant Jews and were not using their phones that morning, so they did not receive warnings about the attack. A memorial has been built over the Sderot police station, where heavy fighting took place.

Even after years of attacks, Sderot continues to grow and move forward. New homes, parks, and factories are being built, and the city now has more than 38,000 residents. The people of Sderot are known for their strength and resilience, choosing to keep building and living despite the challenges they face.



FOR THE TEACHER

Description:

In this activity, students explore what daily life can be like for kids and families living in Sderot, a city in southern Israel. Through short, realistic scenarios, students think about how people make everyday choices while showing courage, preparation, and resilience. The goal is not to focus on fear, but on how communities continue living, growing, and caring for one another even in difficult situations.

Resources Needed:

- Scenario cards
- Paper or student notebooks
- Pencils or pens

Instructions:

Students will reflect on daily life in Sderot by thinking through real-life situations that kids and families experience in the “Bomb Shelter Capital of the World.” The goal is to think, discuss, and reflect.

- Form small groups of two or three students.
- Give each group paper or a student notebook, a pencil or pen, and a scenario card.
- Students will imagine they are middle schoolers living in Sderot and consider the scenario on the card they are given.
 - **Scenario 1:** You are at a playground when a warning siren sounds. What choices would need to be made quickly or in advance? Who do you help? You have 15 seconds.
 - **Scenario 2:** You are walking home from school and hear a warning siren. How do you stay calm and safe? You have 15 seconds.
 - **Scenario 3:** Your family is planning a birthday party. If a warning siren sounds during the party, everyone will have 15 seconds to find shelter. What plans would your family need to make in advance to keep everyone safe?
 - **Scenario 4:** You are at home doing homework when a warning siren goes off. What could each family member do to help everyone reach shelter safely? You have 15 seconds.
- Remind students they have 15 seconds in their scenario to find shelter.
 - Set a timer for 15 seconds to help students understand how quickly they would need to respond.
 - Students should remain seated and discuss what they would do rather than physically rushing to find shelter.
- Using the guiding questions below, each group will work together to write a response of at least one paragraph.
 - **Question 1:** What choices do you need to make quickly?
 - **Question 2:** How do people help one another?
 - **Question 3:** What shows courage or preparation in this situation?
- After 10 minutes of small-group discussion and writing, ask each group to share one decision it made and explain why.
- After the class discussion, have each student write a short individual reflection using one of the prompts below.
 - **Prompt 1:** One way people in Sderot show strength and resilience is...
 - **Prompt 2:** If I lived in Sderot, I think I would learn how to...