

Arab Cultural Exploration & Celebration
A Curricular Unit Created in Association with
The 2002 NEH Summer Institute on the Arab World & the West

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Subject Area: Social Studies, Eastern Hemisphere; Art, Drama, Music

Grade: 6

Duration: 4-6 week (multidisciplinary) unit from October – November, culminating in 3 assemblies and an evening cultural festival corresponding with the holidays Ramadan, Hanukkah and Christmas

Overview: This unit was created to provide an elementary introduction to what is known as the Arab World, its communities, history, religions, arts and current events (with general inclusion of the non-Arab Muslim countries and Israel). It will be taught primarily through social studies, with correlating units in art, drama and music. The students will study, go on field trips, meet guest speakers from the cultures and show their comprehension of the unit through designing 3 assemblies based on the Muslim, Jewish and Christian holidays of Ramadan, Hanukkah and Christmas (all of which are an intrinsic part of the Arab World's history and culture). A general holiday festival night will also be planned in December, featuring students' artwork, poetry, artistic guests and foods from the Middle Eastern region.

Please note: This unit is flexible, depending on the amount of time available to teach it. My school was in the process of incorporating a 6th grade, as well as tentative block subject scheduling – so I had no idea how much or little of this curriculum would be able to be used. So it is meant to have as many options/choices for instruction as possible.

Objectives: The student will:

- Learn about the geographic location and features of the countries of the Middle East and Maghrib regions (including Muslim non-Arab countries)
- Learn about the communities comprising these regions, including their past and present traditions
- Learn about the general history of the origins of the Arab world, its relationship with Western Europe, lightly touching on the origins of Islam and the current history of the Middle East
- Learn about the visual, musical and literature arts of the Arab/Islamic cultures
- Create 3 assemblies, one for each holiday of Ramadan, Hanukkah and Christmas, exploring the significance of those holidays and their traditions found within different Arab (and non-Arab) countries (i.e.: Israel, Ethiopia, Sudan, Turkey, Iran).
- Use elements of the assemblies to create 1 evening cultural arts festival for the parents and surrounding community

Materials: These will be included in the "References and Resources" section, as the materials will vary depending on the units covered.

Background for Teacher: This is an outline for a 1-week unit on Arab communities, followed by a 6-week general outline of the course structure. One of the texts used for instruction was compiled by the Saudi Embassy and is no longer in print. Informational units can be constructed as classroom centers and students can work through these in groups. Establishing small student groups will also be useful in specific country studies, and doubly useful for creating the assembly program. The outline is written specifically for the social studies class, and all extending activities (i.e.: art units, literature units, guest speakers/artists, field trip (NYC) suggestions) are written in at the end of each day/week's outline. There is enough suggested material within the outline that instructional information can be selected, rearranged and re-planned as desired.

All units should begin with KWL type of chart work, charting student knowledge and preconceptions of each topic. Locate visual resource materials from your local libraries, universities and museums such as slides, films and maps. Students should keep a journal through all of the units, for recording their work, research and thoughts.

Students will be assessed through their group work – completion of centers and group contribution towards the class' assembly – as well as through testing and response essays on materials, guests and fieldtrips.



PART I: Initial Social Studies Unit

Week 1: Families, Communities & Cities in the Arab World

Lesson 1: Preconceptions and Expectations of other peoples and cultures

- 1) **Lesson & Vocabulary: Memory, Myth, Narrative, Received Knowledge**¹
 - a. *What is Memory?* History? What is the difference?
 - i. Opinion vs. facts
 - b. *What is Myth?* (Helps to construct meaning of life.) What are some myths that we know? I.e.: ancient old tales – also means stories told that are not necessarily true; Can we think of current myths?
 - c. *Narratives:* descriptions of memories/events that we carry in our heads
 - i. What are some of the narratives that we carry about events in our own lives at home? About events in the world around us?
 - ii. Compare/contrast Narrative with Myth: how do our narratives affect how we see the world?
 - d. *Received Knowledge:* Knowledge that we have received from surrounding world – “Everyone knows it’s true, so there is no reason to check the facts.”
 - i. From what sources do we receive our knowledge?
 - ii. Is this related to myth or narrative & how?
 - e. Have Students fill out “Generalizations” worksheet (M.E.H., pg. 36)
 - i. 1word associations for Arabs
- 2) **KWL chart:** Arabs and the Middle East
 - a. What do we know? List what we know about Arabs and the Middle East based on Memory, Myth, Narrative & Received Knowledge
- 3) **Video:** “Young Voices from the Arab World: Lives and Times of Five Teenagers” (20 min.)

Lesson 2: People and Families in the Arab World, Day 1

- 1) **Discussion - video:** Compare/contrast video teens’ realities with our preconceptions:
 - a. What did we observe about their lives:
 - i. What countries were represented? Where did they live? How did they dress?
 - ii. What elements were similar to our own lifestyle? Different?
 1. Venn Diagram “American teens”/ “Arab teens”
 - b. How did the video compare with our preconceptions and expectations?
 - i. What matched our expectations?
 - ii. Have any of our concepts been changed? How?
 - c. Do we know any Arab people living in New York? America? How do/don’t they resemble the people in the video?
- 2) **KWL chart:** Based on the video & discussion, what would we like to learn about Arab and Arab Americans, and the countries they live in? (Fill in “W” section)
- 3) **Vocabulary for Family:** Arab (Bedouin/*bedu*, Berber), extended family, Middle East, Arab World, Religion (Islam, Christianity, Judaism), lunar calendar (Ramadan)
 - a. **Foods from film:** atayef, couscous, fattoush, ful, mulukhiya

Lesson 3: People and Families in the Arab World, Day 2

***Lessons taken from Arab Mosaic & Middle East workbooks; students will work in “centers”**

- 1) “I Have a Name” (A.M., pg. 2-3) – each student picks an Arab name for unit; Make up index card with their Arab name (do not decorate yet)
- 2) Kinship & Family Values (A.M., pg. 26) – Arabic names for members of family
 - a. (A.M., pg. 33) – Cultural note on Extended Family
 - b. Values (M.E., pg. 24-5)
- 3) Clothing and Hats (M.E., pg. 15; A.M. pg 15, 17 – 19)
- 4) Language: Common Expressions and Greetings, Numbers (A.M., pg. 21-2)
- 5) Stories on Families (A.M., pg. 42 – 43) – write story about themselves and their family – a memory/event – in their journal
- 6) Homework: Read “Yusuf’s Interview” – go home and interview one of your family members, using the type of questions that Yusuf asked his mother.

Lesson 4: Homes, Neighborhoods & Cities (based on A.M. & M.E. books), Day 1

- 1) Homes – Group work – each group has a different house(s) from a different city(s); each group will make a compare and contrast chart
 - a. Use pictures of home (A.M., pg 24-5) with “Arwa & Hamsa’s Favorite Rooms” (A.M., pg. 48-51, 53); Worksheet from M.E. handout book (M.E.H., pg. 42-3) on different homes; (visuals on different types of houses in Middle East.)
 - b. What do you find in their rooms/houses?
 - c. Compare and contrast with your own room /house? (Shape, size, color, etc.)
- 2) Activity: Map of neighborhoods (A.M., pg. 56-7, 58-9): Have each student make a map of their neighborhood, labeling buildings and stores.

Lesson 4: Homes, Neighborhoods & Cities, cont’d, Day 2

- 1) Three Ways of Life in the Middle East: City, Village and Nomad (M.E., 54-71)
- 2) Jobs & Occupations in Communities – markets, suqs (A.M., pg. 73) – compare and contrast with our own neighborhood community
- 3) Activity: Create a Classroom Market Place (A.M., pg. 71-2).

(Variation: choose one L.4 activity to explore in depth over 2 days time)

Lesson 5: Arab American Communities in the United States

****Note:** This lesson can also be done as separate centers, with a short class introduction to immigration. Another topic for exploration can be Ellis Island and the Anglicizing of immigrants’ surnames

- 1) New York City, Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles [Immigration]
 - a. Population demographics: what countries are the immigrants from, and when did they migrate? What events happened in mother country to inspire their migration?
 - i. Create class graph (past, present, compare with immigration patterns of other countries)
- 2) What is a refugee?
 - a. How many Arabs have come to the U.S. as political refugees?
- 3) Compare/contrast with students’ own personal immigrant stories/experiences
- 4) Integration into American Society
 - a. New vs. old traditions, games, sports, literature
- 5) Material culture: where can we find evidence of Arabic influence in everyday things we use: i.e., cumin, cinnamon, tea, coffee
 - a. Bring in samples of different objects
- 6) Video: “Tales from Arab Detroit” (about Egyptian storyteller)
- 7) KWL: The “L” section of the chart may be filled in gradually at completion of each unit.

PART II: General Outline (A 4 – 6 week unit, including suggestions for extension activities and fieldtrips)

Week 1: Families, Communities in the Contemporary Arab World

- 1) Countries and Communities within the Arab World
- 2) Arab-American Communities
- 3) Video: "Tales from Arab Detroit"
- 4) Fieldtrips: i.e.: City Museum of NY (NYC Arab-Americans); UN Consulates/Missions
- 5) Activities: henna drawings, weaving, foods, centers
- 6) Literature: Habibi, and Flag of Childhood by Naomi Shahib Nye

Week 2: History of Arab Countries

- 1) Pre-Islamic Middle Eastern, Central Asia and North Africa
- 2) Mohammed, the dawn of Islam & the Arabic Ages
- 3) Over-view of caliphates and dynasties vs. kings and empires; compare and contrast
- 4) Famous cities within the Arab Empire; The House of Wisdom
- 5) Video: "The Crusades"
- 6) Art Activity: Calligraphy, book making, tessellation drawings, architecture of mosques and palaces
- 7) Field Trips: Metropolitan Museum of Art (Permanent collections: Islamic Art, Ancient Near Eastern Art; Egyptian Art), the Jewish Museum
- 8) Guests: Calligrapher

Week 3: Religion in Ancient and Contemporary Arab World

(Can replace this with a country study including religions and explaining them through context of each country's culture; festival pieces can created based on country studies.)

- 1) What were the religions practiced in the Middle East/? Where did they come from?
- 2) The coexistence of 3 religions within the Arab cultures and Mahgrib
- 3) What is important to know and understand about each people and their faith today?
 - a. Demographic chart of locations of 3 religions around the world
 - b. Chart with different faces of people in each religion: Faces Of Judaism, Christianity, Islam
- 4) Extending activities:
 - a. Calligraphy unit for: Hebrew; Arabic; Latin? (Something related to Christianity)
 - b. Tessellations & Islamic tile art, rug art/weaving
 - c. Research other art forms
- 5) Architecture field trips: Mosque, Synagogue, Cathedral
- 6) Guests: Local New York City community speakers

Week 4: Current Events of Arab World Today

(Can be expanded to include a unit on women in Islamic and Arabic countries as well.)

- 1) Review student knowledge of each society; talk about how things change from past to present
- 2) Palestinian/Israeli conflict; Afghanistan; the influence of media on our beliefs
- 3) Popular Perceptions and Misconceptions; gender issues, religious issues, wars
- 4) News, Media, Movies: How do we decipher them? Understanding propaganda and advertising.
- 5) Model UN type of project:
 - a. Divide class into groups, each representing a different country:
 - b. Set up a UN roundtable to discuss a current world issue and its solution.
- 6) Literature: Search for Peace; The Story of the UN; If You Could Be My Friend; Gavriel and Jemal; The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai; Israel
- 7) Guests/Fieldtrips: Speakers from UN consulate or visit to the U.N.

Weeks 5 & 6: Presentation projects and rehearsals to be worked on in groups.

Class Assembly Presentations and Festival evening: Presentations will be done November through December, acknowledging the holidays of Ramadan, Hanukkah and Christmas. An evening festival including performers such as storytellers, dancers, musicians, Middle Eastern food, henna painting and other activities will also be planned.



Bibliography: (This is just a basic sampling of books I've looked at, half of these have been resourced through my local public library.)

- Ashabranner, Brent Gavriel and Jemal, Two Boys of Jerusalem. c. 1984, Dodd, Mead & Company, NY
- Bloch, Chana & The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai c. 1986/1996, Harper & Row (HarperCollins), NY
- Boudalika, Litsa If You Could Be My Friend: Letters of Mervet Akram Sha'ban and Galit Fink. c. 1992/1998, Orchard Books, NY
- Hintz, Martin & Israel: The Enchantment of the World. c. 1999, Children's Press, NY
- Jacobs, William Jay Search for Peace: The Story of the United Nations. c. 1994, Charles Scribner's Sons (Macmillan Publishing), NY
- Leacroft, Helen & Richard The Buildings of Early Islam. c. 1976, Hodder & Stoughton/ Addison-Wesley Publishing
- Rodseth, Lars
Howell, Sally &
Shryock, Andrew Arab World Mosaic: A Curriculum Supplement for Elementary Teachers, 2nd Edition. c. 2000, The Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services, MI
- Shahib-Nye, Naomi a) Habibi. c.1999, Simon & Schuster Children's
b) The Flag of Childhood: Poems from the Middle East. c. 2002, Aladdin Paperbacks
- Soghikian-Swedenburg, Juanita Will a) Lands, Peoples and Communities of the Middle East: An Introductory Work-Study Text for Students in Intermediate Grades. c. 1980, Middle East Gateway Series, MA
b) Enrichment Activities Duplicating Masters to Accompany Lands, Peoples and Communities of the Middle East. c. 1981/1991/1994, Middle East Gateway Series, MA

Web Resources:

American-Arab Anti Discrimination Committee
<http://www.adc.org/>

AMIDEAST
<http://www.amideast.org/>

Arab American Institute
<http://www.aaiusa.org>

Council on Islamic Education
<http://www.cie.org/>

Encarta Map Center at MSN.com
<http://encarta.msn.com/encnet/features/MapCenter/map.aspx>

Scholastic: Meet Kids from Egypt (can also search for other countries)
<http://teacher.scholastic.com/glokid/egypt/>

University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies
<http://www.umich.edu/~iinet/cmenas/events/sep11.htm>

University of Texas at Austin, Center for Middle Eastern Studies
<http://menic.utexas.edu/menic/hemispheres/online.html>