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# Teaching about the Middle East

## *A Teacher's Resource Guide*

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This new kit of materials contains many of the features of these earlier works with several added dimensions. This new work is firstly a resource guide for teachers and not a classroom text for students. Here you will find a synthesis of scholarship on Middle Eastern topics and introductory overviews that provide discussion for teachers who may have no formal academic training in Middle Eastern history and politics. Secondly, unit plans, lessons and student handouts provide jump starts for teachers who want to get started including Middle East topics in their regular curriculum. Thirdly, the visual presentations that are a part of this kit are offered as ancillary means of providing input to students. Finally, the kit contains an expanded menu of topics that connect closely to curricula in World History, International Relations, Current Events, Economics and Geography.

Many individuals have contributed to the fruition of this project, including Dr. Aaron Willis at Social Studies School Service who supported my concept and Mr. Bill Williams who edited the manuscript. My thanks go to Dr. Kenneth Stein of Emory University and Edie Weitzman who read significant portions of the manuscript and encouraged my efforts. Thanks also to Loretta Cohen who worked with me to develop visuals for the PowerPoint presentations. This project required the focus and concerted attention that a sabbatical from daily teaching duties affords. The Walworth Barbour American International School in Israel has my thanks for facilitating this wonderful opportunity.

Finally, my deepest thanks to my husband Dan who believed in me from the moment I began to teach Middle East History and never doubted the success of my curriculum or my efforts to share it with the teaching community.

Abigail Chill  
Kiryat Ono, Israel  
December, 2012

## Chapter 1

### An Introduction to Teaching About the Middle East

Since September 11, 2001, the perception of the Middle East as a world region with tremendous potential for affecting us has become deeply etched into our consciousness. However, the enduring centrality and importance of the Middle East to our cultural, geopolitical, historical and economic lives has long been a “given” that mandates educating and informing young people about this region of the world—no small task. Dramatic events capture the headlines daily and news travels fast. Sound bites bombard us with images and brief commentary; our opinions are shaped without our even being aware of how and by whom. Certainly, the rapidity of change in the region is one challenge to grappling with this subject; coping with the myriad of opinions, analyses, and information made available by the media and assorted interest groups is another. As teachers, we need to distinguish historical inquiry from current events. While there is no question that knowledge of history in its complexities ideally should inform our critical analysis of current events, they are not one and the same. This book is designed to assist teachers in their endeavors to make the Middle East more comprehensible to youth.

#### **In this chapter you will find:**

- ❖ A rationale for teaching Middle Eastern history
- ❖ A description of how to use this book
- ❖ Suggestions for how to integrate the study of the Middle East into your existing curriculum
- ❖ Diagnostic assessment activities to use in your classroom as triggers for beginning study of Middle Eastern history

In each chapter you will find a discussion for the adult reader that provides an overview of an important theme in Middle Eastern history. A unit plan modeling a sequence of lessons, step-by-step lesson plans, and student readings to facilitate implementation in your classroom are also included. Feel free to adapt or adopt these materials for your individual classroom, selecting the topics and activities that meet your needs.

The rapid unfolding of political, economic, and social events in the Middle East calls for teacher readiness to flex as history happens. Thus, a goal of this guide is to empower teachers with models for translating academic materials and current events headlines into student activities that are well-grounded in history. The materials presented here reflect more than twenty years of teaching experience and collegial exchange,<sup>1</sup> are classroom-tested, and are predicated on the conviction that learners actively engaged in the learning process acquire and retain more knowledge than passive ones. The Middle Eastern “souk,” or market bazaar, is traditionally the locus for finding what you need at a reasonable, negotiated price. It is my hope that this resource guide will equip you with a shopping basket of strategies and information that will enhance your students’ learning and make your role as educator more rewarding.

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<sup>1</sup> Materials presented here are original, unless cited as originating from published or collegial sources.

### Middle East Studies and Your Curriculum

Whether you are planning a lesson, unit, or course, stop and consider what you want your students to understand and know as a result of the learning opportunities you develop for them. In a tenth grade global history class, standards mandate that students become familiar with a variety of belief systems, comparing their theologies, rituals, and values. In an international relations elective, the origins and methods of managing conflict are studied. Both of these topics create opportunities for applying a case study method for introducing material on the Middle East. Familiar history and social science topics such as supply and demand, nationalism, imperialism, revolution, tradition and modernization, diplomacy and foreign policy, social structures, and institutions each have their illustrative counterpart in Middle Eastern studies. The chart below gives examples of connecting links between familiar high school social studies courses and Middle Eastern topics. Each general topic area is paired with a Middle East standard or outcome that I have worked with, and in column three there is a list of suggested content that links to the standard.

Social Studies Courses	Unit of Study/Middle East Standard	Suggested Content or Case Studies
<b>World/Global History</b>	<b>Islam.</b> Students will understand the origins, development, and impact of Islam on the Middle East.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comparing and contrasting Arabian society before and after Mohammed.</li> <li>• The expansion and development of the Islamic Empire.</li> <li>• Comparing Islam to other faiths.</li> <li>• Islam as a political ideology in the past and present.</li> </ul>
<b>World/Global/European History</b>	<b>Nationalism.</b> Students will understand the seminal role that nationalism has played in shaping Middle Eastern history.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluating national claims (Palestinian, Jewish, Kurdish).</li> <li>• Origins and expressions of Arab nationalism.</li> <li>• Origins, methods and outcomes of Zionism.</li> <li>• Why did the Jews succeed and the Palestinians fail to achieve independence?</li> </ul>

<b>World/European History</b>	<b>Imperialism.</b> Students will understand the nature of European imperialism in the Middle East.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ottoman Empire and European contacts.</li> <li>• The case of Egypt and the Suez Canal.</li> <li>• Administration of the Palestine Mandate.</li> <li>• Is Zionism a form of colonialism?</li> </ul>
<b>European History</b>	<b>World War One.</b> Students will understand how the political boundaries and institutions of the modern Middle East were a result of World War One.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wartime diplomacy; evaluating Britain's policies and strategies as a potential and later governing mandatory power.</li> </ul>
<b>European History</b>	<b>Holocaust.</b> Students will understand the origins and expression of European anti-Semitism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethnic v. civic identity; evaluating the status of the Jewish minority in 19th-century Europe.</li> <li>• The impact of the rise of Nazism on the relationship between Arabs and Jews in Mandatory Palestine.</li> <li>• The psychological impact of the Holocaust today.</li> </ul>
<b>Twentieth-Century History (IB)</b>	<b>Cold War.</b> Students will understand how the Middle East is a case study in Cold War politics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The case of the Aswan Dam and the Suez War.</li> <li>• How did the end of the Cold War affect the politics of the Middle East and the quest for peace?</li> </ul>
<b>Twentieth-Century History/Sociology</b>	<b>Developing Nations.</b> Students will distinguish between traditional and modern world views and understand that the process of modernization has played a central role in the Middle East.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comparative study of the process of modernization in Palestine, Egypt, and the Gulf states.</li> </ul>

<p><b>International Relations</b></p>	<p><b>Conflict.</b> Students will understand that conflict in the Middle East stems from mutually frustrating interests and contrasting values of individuals, groups, and nations.</p> <p>Students will understand the factors and strategies that may contribute to a fruitful or aborted peace process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Causes of the Arab-Israeli conflict.</li> <li>• Evaluating models of managing the Arab-Israeli conflict.</li> <li>• Evaluating the role of the UN in the Middle East.</li> <li>• Comparing military confrontations in the Middle East: How have military confrontations resolved or created problems?</li> <li>• Negotiating and proposing solutions to conflicts—for example, over Jerusalem or water.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Geography</b></p>	<p><b>Human Geography.</b> Students will understand how geography has shaped the economic, political, and social development of the Middle East.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The conflict over water.</li> <li>• The impact of the discovery and ascent of oil in the Middle East and worldwide.</li> </ul>
<p><b>U.S. History</b></p>	<p><b>Foreign Policy.</b> Students will understand the pattern of American foreign policy in the Middle East.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• U.S. policy during the vote on partition of Palestine, the Suez War, and the 1973 War.</li> <li>• Examine and evaluate U.S. foreign aid to Middle Eastern nations.</li> <li>• The role of the U.S. in the peace process.</li> </ul>

*The National Standards for History* developed by the National Center for History in the Schools at UCLA includes multiple references to the rise and importance of Islamic civilization and the Ottoman Empire in World History standards addressing the years 300–1770 CE and 1770–1914.<sup>2</sup> This same document highlights the transformation of the Middle East in Standards One, Two, and Three during the

<sup>2</sup> Gary B. Nash and Charlotte Crabtree, *National Standards for History* (Los Angeles: National Center for History in the Schools UCLA, 1996), pp. 157, 163, 167, 180, 190, 194.

period 1900–1945.<sup>3</sup> Standard Two, “The search for community, stability, and peace in an interdependent world,”<sup>4</sup> specifically addresses the Arab-Israeli conflict. Finally, the “Ten Strands” standards produced by the National Council of Social Studies charge educators to give students an understanding of cultural diversity, governance, economics, continuity and change over time, environment, global connections, civic practice, technology, identity, and interaction among individuals, groups, and institutions.<sup>5</sup> Regardless of the standards and indicators underpinning your curriculum, the history, culture, and people of the Middle East provide excellent illustrative examples of principles, patterns, and processes that are at the core of social studies curricula.

Before you begin the process of identifying content objectives for your students, however, take a moment to consider your own attitudes and beliefs and how they might affect your teaching. If you are a “tabula rasa” when it comes to the Middle East, your class may experience a more objective presentation, although a less well informed and impassioned one. But if this possibility was unlikely before September 11, 2001, it most probably is unrealistic now. All of us have views and opinions on what America’s policy towards Iraq should be, the appropriateness of a global war on terror, the presence or absence of justification for Palestinian and Israeli policies and tactics, and the efficacy and power of Islam in today’s world. Perhaps when the Twin Towers crashed to Ground Zero, your views may have shifted or become stronger.

It seems that each year since I began teaching Middle Eastern history in 1977, there has been a watershed event that has challenged me to reexamine my understanding of the region I am teaching about. Anwar Sadat’s historic visit to Jerusalem in November 1977 that paved the way for the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt was such an event. The commencement of the Palestinian uprising in 1987, the Gulf War in 1991, the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin, and the violent hostilities in progress since 2000 between Israel and the Palestine Authority are others.

Teaching a multicultural population with varying levels of investment in the volatile region being studied creates difficulties for the teacher. I will never forget the challenge pitched to me in the mid 1980s by a boy from Chile when he asked whether I wanted students to agree with my personal viewpoint. Surprised by his question, since I believed that I had been careful to withhold my personal viewpoint on the issue under discussion, I looked him straight in the eye without blinking and said as convincingly as possible: “I don’t care about that at all. I want to empower you to think intelligently about the issues and arrive at your own conclusions.” I meant it then and I still believe it today. What my student didn’t know was that inwardly I was thankful to him for asking his question. He had provided me with a reminder to be ever vigilant and careful in how I present material and to be respectful of the power of point of view and mindful of its appropriate place in the classroom.

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<sup>3</sup> Gary B. Nash and Charlotte Crabtree, *National Standards for History* (Los Angeles: National Center for History in the Schools UCLA, 1996), pp. 201–02.

<sup>4</sup> Gary B. Nash and Charlotte Crabtree, *National Standards for History* (Los Angeles: National Center for History in the Schools, 1996) UCLA, p. 212.

<sup>5</sup> National Council for the Social Studies, <http://www.ncss.org/standards/2.0.html>.

### **Getting Started With Diagnostic Assessments**

Upon preparing to leave Israel for a school in Oman, the editor of our student newspaper wrote an editorial comparing reactions of friends to her plans with those she received from stateside companions three years earlier when she announced her family's intention to relocate to Tel Aviv. For her, it was a case of *deja vu*. Our international population held a stereotypical view of Omani life just as American teenagers had of Israel. In both cases, the tendency was to visualize a technologically inferior society stagnating in an unmitigated desert environment and peopled by quaint, exotic, nomadic people riding camels. Our student editor concluded pessimistically that the prevalence of stereotypical understandings augurs ill for bridging the differences that divide people and lead to conflict.<sup>6</sup> This is exactly where Middle Eastern studies in particular and global studies in general can make an important contribution.

Teachers have long recognized the importance of beginning inquiry about any topic from the student's starting point. This idea is built into the popular "What I know; what I want to find out" paradigm and the ubiquitous pre-test or informational survey frequently administered at the beginning of a unit of study. Diagnostic assessments such as these can become learning opportunities that enable students to reflect on their formative knowledge base, their attitudes, and those of their classmates. This information will be helpful to you and the class as you introduce topics, moderate class discussions, and develop strategies to optimize student participation. The activities presented here are generic ones appropriate as openers to a learning segment on any aspect of the Middle East and adaptable for use with other topics as well. They are designed to reveal:

- The level and accuracy of the students' knowledge base
- The degree to which the student has a personal connection to the content
- The students' affective attitudes

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<sup>6</sup> Ellen Clark, "Why I Lack Faith in the Middle East Peace Process," *The Word* (June 14, 2002), p. 12.