



Lesson/Discussion Plan: The Middle East
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NOTE: Those taking this course will need access to the internet and/or local library.

Subject of this Lesson Plan Series:

In this lesson series, students will become aware of the history of the Middle East, including U.S. policy interests in the region, the history of colonialism and military conflict, and the current issues that impact the political, social, cultural, religious, economic and diplomatic landscapes. Students will be encouraged to discuss their views on these topics, to think outside-of-the-box, and even to formulate their own policy solutions to some of the ongoing conflicts involved.

Particular attention will be paid to:

- Iraq
- Iran
- Israeli-Palestinian Conflict
- Sunni/Shiite Divide,
- Lebanon, Hezbollah and Israel (including the military conflict in 2006)
- The role of Saudi Arabia in the region
- Other key players – including (but not limited to) Syria, Egypt, the Arab League, and OPEC

Any discussion of the Middle East should include the ongoing world interest in the region's natural resources (especially oil/ natural gas), recent diplomatic moves in Washington and at the United Nations that impact the Middle East – especially the ongoing diplomacy with Iran over its nuclear program, Israel and its formation in the wake of the holocaust during World War II and its history through the present day, and the critical role media and public information plays in this region (Note: the "Great Decisions 2006" [DVD](#) from the Foreign Policy Association does a great job of addressing this issue in particular).

There should be some discussion about the role of Islam in the Middle East and around the world, security and terrorism concerns, changes in the world's view since 9/11 and the terror attacks against transportation systems in Madrid and London – and the impact this has had on Muslim populations in the US, Europe, Africa and Asia. Other potential topics include (but are not limited to):

The role of women in the Muslim world and human rights issues – including those raised by the detention of “enemy combatants” in terrorism investigations, and depending on the group this lesson plan is presented to, a more detailed overview of terrorist groups in the region.

This lesson plan includes several potential in-class activities/talking points, and a suggested paper or multi-media presentation as a final project. It is also strongly suggested to give a final exam at the end of these lessons (including a quiz with geographic elements, and some short essay questions related to the various talking points) to re-enforce what is learned in class, and to require students taking the course to closely follow and monitor current events related to the Middle East.

NOTE: this lesson plan is meant to be a STARTING POINT only – teachers are encouraged to come up with additional information and instructional materials depending on the group they are teaching. Cross-cultural sensitivity is strongly suggested. Also be aware that there may be students in the room, whose lives or the lives of their families, have been directly affected by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, including those who have family members serving in the military, or who may have family members whose lives are affected in other ways by these issues.

Instructional Materials/ Useful Websites for Research by Students before Class:

*Students should receive a copy of the “Middle East” section from Great Decisions 2006, from the Foreign Policy Association as a place to start.

*It’s absolutely essential to show a map of the Middle East (and North Africa) to get across the geographic dimensions of the issues discussed in this lesson plan. Also, remember the country with the largest population of Muslims in the world today is NOT in the Middle East – it’s Indonesia.

*Students are encouraged to read AT LEAST one newspaper a day (not just an internet news site) to begin to learn about these issues.

*For this lesson series, it is strongly suggested that students also become somewhat familiar with Arab news sources, including Podcasts of English newscasts from sites like Al Jazeera (which in Arabic means “the island”), especially as preparation for the Media section of this lesson plan.

*Podcasts from the BBC & CNN on topics related to the Middle East are also encouraged.

*A great source for background on many of these issues, is The United Nations Website (<http://www.un.org>) Make sure to look at the UN Security Council’s history of voting and intervention in the Middle East, and the presence of UN Peacekeepers in places like Lebanon at the start of the 2005 war with Israel.

*US Department of State (<http://www.state.gov>) A great place to get the US Policy perspective of these issues.

*CIA Fact Book ([https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/Fact book](https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/Fact%20book)) Great source for background information, and a variety of statistics about the various countries being discussed.

*Websites of UN Missions of Middle East /North African Countries - A great way to get students to think about other world perspectives on the issues discussed in this lesson series.

*A variety of academic sources (Note: Students should be encouraged to check the websites of Colleges and Universities in their home States for Middle East studies program's, and even find local non-profits or community groups that are somehow involved in these issues)

Books/Reference Materials related to Middle East Studies:

*Bernard Lewis, "The Middle East: A Brief History of the Last 2,000 Years" - Probably the best known and most widely read of all college history professors teaching Middle East studies.

*Roger Owen, "State, Power and Politics in the Modern Middle East"- One of my personal favorites but may be too advanced for most high school students.

*The Foreign Policy Association Website (www.fpa.org) - Good source for an overview of some of the key issues.

*The Brookings Institute Website, in particular work published by the Saban Center for Middle East Policy (http://www.brookings.edu/fp/saban/sabancenter_hp.htm) - Absolutely fantastic resource for all of the issues discussed in this lesson plan, and a great source for understanding the current issues under debate in Washington.

*Two Chapters from Donald M. Snow "Cases in International Relations"

1) Chapter 16 "Understanding and Organizing a Post-9/11 World" - An easily understood overview of terrorism and terror-related issues - great for high school students.

2) Chapter 6 "Camp David I & 2" - A good starting point to understanding the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict - great for high school students.

**"The 9/11 Commission Report" and "The Baker-Hamilton Report" - At the very least students should know about these reports, and their significance in U.S. history.

*Flynt Leverett, New York Times Op-ED piece, 1/29/07 - "The Race for Iran" - Great overview of the broader strategic issues faced by the US, China and Russia in the ongoing conflict with Iran over its nuclear program.

**"The Shia Revival: How conflicts within Islam will shape it's future" by Vali Nasr. (For a shorter version of this book try Nasr's article in Foreign Affairs July/August 2006 "When Shiites Rise")

*Hamid Dabashi "Iran: A People Interrupted" - Fantastic analysis of the current state of Iran politics, culture and society. Dabashi is one of the top Iranian historians in the US.

*Robert I. Rotberg. "Building a New Afghanistan" - A look forward at the challenges faced in re-building Afghanistan.

*Paul M. Barrett "American Islam: The Struggle for the Soul of a Religion" - Newly published overview of the state of Muslims in America. Any of these chapters are a great starting point for classroom debate from high school on up. Barrett is a long time journalist from the Wall Street Journal currently with BusinessWeek and has spent years looking at post 9/11 issues related to American Muslims.

*Fawzia Afzal-Khan "Shattering the Stereotypes: Muslim Women Speak out" Olive Branch Press, 2005 (*Note: there are MANY sources address some of the issues surrounding Muslim women.. This is just one of several examples... teachers are encouraged to do their own research on this issue to provide a complete perspective*)

*Bob Woodward's book "State of Denial" about the Iraq war

**"Hubris: The inside story of Spin, Scandal, and the selling of the Iraq War" by Michael Isikoff and David Corn.

*Jimmy Carter's book "Palestine: Peace not Apartheid" - This highly controversial book should at least be mentioned in class, but also make sure to include all sides of the issue in the discussion.

**"Al-Jazeera: The inside story of the Arab news channel that is challenging the West" by Hugh Miles.

Good DVD's on Muslim and Middle East Issues (a partial list)

*The Foreign Policy Association's "Great Decisions 2006" Section on the Middle East - A great overview of some of the current issues surrounding the Media and Public Policy from a U.S. perspective.

*National Geographic Channel, "Inside Mecca" - A non-biased, easy to watch perspective of the Muslim faith, and the reason behind the Hajj" - The Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca.

**"The Crusades - Crescent and the Cross" - A good overview of the beginnings of colonialism in the Middle East.

**"Frontline: Muslims" - A good overview of current issues.

**"Control Room" - An inside look at the Al Jazeera newsroom

Additional Resources (for development and economic issues related to the Middle East):

*World Bank - Data/Statistics (<http://web.worldbank.org>)

*International Monetary Fund (<http://www.imf.org/>)

*Worldwatch Institute - State of the World 2007 (<http://www.worldwatch.org>)

*Research OPEC and Oil related issues, including U.S./European oil companies holdings in the region.

Lesson Outline / Discussion:

The Middle East has become one of the central issues facing our nation and the world – It is not just a key focus of U.S. foreign policy, but has emerged as a major issue in the ongoing internal debate that is transforming the U.S. domestic political landscape.

Before even starting this lesson, be prepared for a variety of reactions and some strong opinions among your students. Be open and flexible. Encourage students to listen to one another, and to be open to learning new historical and cross-cultural perspectives – perspectives needed to understand some of the complicated issues involved.

It is suggested that this material be presented in more than just one lesson, in order to cover the issues involved with some degree of depth and sensitivity. The use of Video/Audio/Multi-Media material – and whenever possible actually bringing experts into the classroom to talk about these issues – is strongly encouraged. Also, getting students to read newspapers (as opposed to just watching TV or surfing the Internet) and to become familiar with academic sources – and US Policy perspectives – is highly encouraged.

Potential Talking Points:

DAY #1

1) *History of the Middle East* - The beginnings of Islam, The crusades, Colonialism under the British and French. (DVD: *The Crescent & The Cross*) (Possible written materials: *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2007 “The New Middle East” by Richard Haass, and Chapters 1 & 2 from Roger Owen’s book “State, Power and Politics in the making of the modern Middle East”)

DAY #2

2) *The U.S. in the Middle East (Including the Wars in Iraq & Afghanistan)* - The Foreign Policy “Great Decisions” printed material does a great job of starting the dialogue about these issues. Encourage students to look at news sources and know current events before coming to class. (Possible written materials: Sections of the Baker-Hamilton report, also an article from *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2007 “Iraq’s Civil War” by James D. Fearon. Possible article for Afghanistan from *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2007 “Saving Afghanistan” by Barnett Rubin)

DAY #3

3) *Terrorism and Security* - The history of religious extremism, events leading up to 9/11, post 9/11 concerns. (DVD: *Frontline: Muslims*) (Possible Written materials – interesting perspective from British PM Tony Blair in *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2007 “Our

Values - and Theirs”, and sections of the 9/11 Commission Report are strongly recommended here)

DAY #4

4) *Israel, and the Palestinian issue, and the recent War with Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Israel's influence on US Policy* - In order to understand the current issues faces the Middle East, it is absolutely essential to tackle the Israel/Palestinian issue first, including the creation of the state of Israel, and the reaction to this in the Arab world. This better frames recent events in the region, including the 2005 war in Lebanon. (Possible written materials: Foreign Affairs November/December 2006 “The Future of Lebanon” by Paul Salem, a very short article on page 38 of The Economist, “Lexington: The American-Jewish Lobby”, March 17th 2007, and a mention of Jimmy Carters book may be appropriate at this juncture) *NOTE: make sure to ALSO include written materials that show an Israeli perspective for this section. Strive as much as possible to be fair and balanced.*

DAY #5

5) *The Sunni/Shiite Divide* - Before addressing the issues related to Iran, or the role of Saudi Arabia in the region, it is important to start with the conflicts *within* Islam first. (Possible written materials: Foreign Affairs July/August 2006 “When Shiites Rise” by Vali Nasr)

6) *The Influence of Saudi Arabia* - Saudi funding of Islamic schools and related issues, Saudi oil resources and interests, influence on US Foreign Policy. (Try the Brookings Institute Website for some good background material here, and article's from business sources like “The Economist”)

7) *The Rise of Iran's influence* - Iran's growing role in the region, changes in the balance of power in the wake of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the history of Iran through the 1979 revolution to the present day, ongoing diplomacy over Iran's nuclear program. (Possible written materials: Foreign Affairs: March/April 2007 “Iran: Detente, not regime change” by Ray Takeyh. Also from Foreign Affairs November/December 2006 “The Truth about Iran” by Gary Sick)

DAY #6

8) *Muslims in the U.S. and Europe* - There are an estimated 6 *million* Muslims in the US, and millions more living in communities throughout Europe. Provide a brief historical overview, and address some of the issues these communities have faced since 9/11, and the terror attacks against transportation systems in Madrid and London. (DVD: National Geographic “Inside Mecca” for this section. Also, various chapters from Barrett's book “American Islam” can be used as a starting point for dialogue/discussion. Another possible article is “France and It's Muslims” by Stephanie Giry in September/October's 2006 Edition of Foreign Affairs)

9) *Muslims in North Africa and Asia* - The country with the largest population of Muslims in the world today is NOT in the Middle East – it's in Indonesia. The influence of Islam in Asia and Africa should be touched upon..

DAY #7

10) *The role of the Media and The Internet* - Start by showing the FPA Video - "Great Decisions 2006" that relates to the Middle East. (Additional DVD Suggestion: "Control Room" - An absolutely fascinating documentary about what it's like to work inside the Al Jazeera newsroom – takes place at the start of the US war in Iraq)

11) *The role of women in Islam: Regional differences and stereotypes*

12) *Human rights concerns* - Including those raised by the detention of "enemy combatants" in terrorism investigations, and human rights abuses in the various countries (especially Saddam Hussein's treatment of the Kurds in Iraq). Some discussion of the influence of non-profit groups and NGO's (non-governmental organizations) in the region can be addressed here. (Possible places to start this research: Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and even the ACLU have been active in many of these issues. Make sure to show a balanced perspective and mention the other side)

13) Topics raised by students themselves, not covered in the lesson plan

Homework:

Getting students to actually read multiple sources to formulate their own opinions and create policy solutions is strongly encouraged. One suggestion: Students should be asked to clip newspaper articles related to Middle East topics, and search academic and public policy websites, and bring some of this material with them to each class as a way to spark dialogue and discussion, and some flexibility should be written into the lesson plans to allow for this. Requiring students to read about certain topics BEFORE those talking points are covered in class is also strongly suggested, with a short in-class exam before the lecture begins as a way to provide some disciplined approach to the learning process. Some type of final exam with geographic features and one or two essay questions related to some of the talking points may also be an option, depending on the group this course is presented to.

For a final project, each student is required to prepare either a 800 word (3+ page) report on a topic related to the Middle East – either a report on a specific country OR one of the suggested talking points. There must be AT LEAST 4 sources used in the creation of this report – two academic (and Wikipedia is not allowed) and at least one government or historic website must be used as a potential resource for this report (either a United Nations source, information from the CIA Factbook, or information from these countries diplomatic websites, preferably all of the above). Finding immigrants from these countries, or policy experts to interview as "primary sources" is strongly suggested (if

possible). The use of multi-media (either photo, video, audio interviews or power-point presentations) is also encouraged. Extra credit will be given for especially well researched reports with accurate footnotes and the use of multiple-sources for information, and especially for those students who suggest policy solutions.