



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA  
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

## Center for Middle Eastern Studies

### The Dubai Mall, Sharia Law, and Social Norms: No Short-Shorts, No PDA

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(An online text suited for middle or high school classroom use, complete with guided reading questions and suggested activities): How and why do social norms and laws in Muslim majority countries differ from those in countries like the United States? Would students still want to visit greatest mall in the world if it meant following a different set of rules than they're used to?

**Grade Levels:** This lesson is appropriate for grades 6-12 and is primarily at social studies classrooms.

**Instruction Time:** Approximately 50 minutes of classtime to complete the written questions (or one evening of homework); another 50 minutes of in classtime to discuss, process, and debate.

**Differentiation:** The accompanying questions are designed to lead students through an informed, natural line of critical thought. That said, an instructor can easily assign or discard selected questions to better fit the assignment length or conversation that they wish to foster in their classroom.

#### NCSS Standards:

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- I.a. explore and describe similarities and differences in the ways groups, societies, and cultures address similar human needs and concerns
  - I.e. give examples and describe the importance of cultural unity and diversity within and across groups.
  - V.b. give examples of and explain group and institutional influences such as religious beliefs, laws, and peer pressure, on people, events, and elements of culture
  - IX.a. explore ways that language, art, music, belief systems, and other cultural elements may facilitate global understanding or lead to misunderstanding
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This lesson, along with accompanying photos, media, and other resources and lessons on Islam and the Middle East are currently hosted at:

<https://openendedsocialstudies.org/2017/07/04/the-dubai-mall-sharia-law-and-social-norms-no-short-short-no-pda-just-be-good/>

# **The Dubai Mall, Sharia Law, and Social Norms: No Short-Shorts, No PDA**

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The Dubai Mall is the largest mall in the world. As of 2016 it was the most visited building on the planet, attracting 92 million visitors – with 1,200 shops, a 250-room luxury hotel, 22 cinema screens, plus 120 restaurants and cafes. It sits at the base of the Burj Khalifa, the tallest building in the world. The mall has over 14,000 parking spaces across 3 car parks, with valet services and a car locator ticketing system. It also houses a full aquarium, several theme parks, a 24-meter long, 7.6-meter high diplodocus fossil, and shop selling corn-on-the-cob.



Check it out:



At its entrance and on cards available at information desks throughout, the management of Dubai Mall prominently posts these rules:







## The Bottom Line

1. How is this sign similar to ones found in stores in your town? How is it different?
2. Using an online dictionary and then again in your own words – define the concept of a “social norm.”
3. Who are these rules aimed at? How do you know?
4. Compare and contrast these rules to the rules of your school. To the norms that govern your behavior in a public place like a mall in your country.
5. Who decides what the rules are? Does “being good” mean different things to different people? Is it different in different places?
6. Would you still want to visit another country if it meant following these rules? Would you consider living there?
7. Many Muslims believe that the collected traditions of the life of Muhammad, or hadith, require both men and women to dress and behave modestly in public. These collected norms make up Sharia, which forms the basis of both religious and civil law in many Muslim majority countries. However, this requirement has

been interpreted in many different ways by Islamic scholars (ulema) and Muslim communities. **Aside from the sign above, one of the most visible ways that this modesty is carried out is in women’s clothing. Look up and compare these forms of traditional dress, sometimes controversial in the west:**

1. abaya
  2. hijab
  3. niqab
8. Does your society place pressure on girls and women to dress and behave in certain ways? What is this pressure telling them to do, and where does it come from – the media? Your parents? Your school? Your religion?
  9. By American and European standards, the norms and rules that govern life in the Arabian Peninsula, including in Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, can seem very strict – and to outsiders, even random. As you have seen, in Dubai are different standards for dress and Americans have been deported from the UAE for acts of public affection. Alcohol is typically not as openly consumed, either, if it is available at all. Homosexuality is generally illegal. Some Americans are uncomfortable with these laws because of their basis in Islam. **Research laws in your state on alcohol sales, abortion, the teaching of evolution, on prayer in school or in your state legislature. Some of these laws are likely influenced, at least in part, by the rules and norms of the Christian religion. In what ways is this similar or different to the influence of Muslim norms on laws in places like Dubai?**