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University of Arizona Lesson plan contest
August 2011

Islam Fact and Fiction:
Overcoming Stereotypes

Philosophical Belief:

Since the September 11 attacks, the lack of understanding and our society's general misconceptions of Islam have become overwhelmingly apparent and dangerous. Shortly after the attacks, an Indian was murdered in Arizona. Apparently he was the victim of a group of racists who thought he was Muslim since he was wearing a turban. Sadly, this was not a fluke incident. Human Rights Watch, an independent human rights protection organization has documented over a dozen murder and assaults against Arabs and Muslims (and those perceived as such) immediately after the September 11 attacks. Such acts can only be the result of ignorance. Although a Washington Post survey (http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/polls/postpoll_09072010.html?sid=ST2010090806236) shows small improvements in America's general attitude toward Muslims, there is still a great need to educate the public about Islam and Muslims. How can there be so much misinformation in this age of internet and globalization?

Lesson Plan Objectives:

In this lesson, students will examine a variety of media and recognize biases and misconceptions about Islam and Muslims.

Essential Questions:

The focus of this lesson is to help students answer these basic questions:

1. How do we know what we know about Islam?
2. What is the overall public understanding of Islam?
3. What are the major forces that influence the latter?
4. Why?

Content:

Facts: Although we now live in the age of internet and globalization, the general public has many misconceptions about Islam and Muslims.

Concepts: Islam, Muslim, Arab, bias, racism, popular media, stereotype

Generalizations: The popular media (TV/movie industry) has created a powerful and misguided image of the Middle East region and its people.

Massachusetts State Standards:

1.7. H, C, G, E.

Show connections, casual and otherwise, between particular historical events and ideas and larger social, economic, and political trends and developments.

Teaching material/resources:

1. Boston Globe article about the racially motivated murder of Balbir Singh in Arizona.
2. Human Rights Watch website:
http://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/usahate/usa1102-04.htm#P349_57452
3. Take a Stand question handouts, 4 Index cards marked somewhat agree, strongly agree, somewhat disagree, and strongly disagree.
4. Movie: The Mummy(1999) with Brendan Fraser and Rachel Weisz
5. Various verses from the scriptures, this activity is modeled after Dr. Ali Assani's presentation, Harvard University.
6. movie: (at least the trailer from youtube.com) Beyond Belief .
http://www.youtube.com/movie?v=ii1itDC1Zj4&ob=av1n&feature=mv_sr

Note ~ This lesson needs to be conducted in the media room or the language lab.

Assessment Plan:

- Students will be informally assessed while working in groups and discussing events during various activities.
- Students will be formally assessed during their oral presentation to the class and their contribution to the Socratic seminar.

Teaching Strategy:

This lesson will be conducted in two days. Day one lesson uses either the media section of the school library or the computer lab. Each student will sit by a computer. I will start the lesson by distributing a printed of an article from the Boston Globe about the murder of Balbir Singh in Arizona. I will then ask students if they know of any other hate crimes/discriminations against Muslims?

Activity #1: It can't be true!

At this point, I will put students in groups of 2-3 and send them the following link from the Human Rights Watch Organization:

http://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/usahate/usa1102-04.htm#P349_57452

- I will assign each group to an incident. After 5-7 minutes, I will ask each group to present the case to the class.

Activity #2: the US Media

* I will explain to my students that we will do a brainstorming activity. I will put the word “Muslim” on the board and ask them to tell me any word they can associate with it. I will write the answers in 2 different colors: facts (i.e. Islam, mosque, etc.) will be in blue and stereotypes (belly dancing, camel, dessert, etc) will be in green.

* I will ask students if any of them has ever traveled to a Muslim country. The answer is most likely negative.

* I will ask students to tell me how they know what they know about Muslims? A few may know a Muslim or someone from the region. My guess is that for most of my students, their first understanding of Islam, Muslims, or any Arab country comes from what they see on TV.

* I will ask them to name TV shows or movies that gave them information on this topic. Some may mention the National Geographic/ Discovery Channel or PBS. I am positive they will all remember Disney’s “Aladdin” and the “Mummy” .

* I will ask students if they ever noticed how Disney has portrayed the Arabs in “Aladdin”. With a little direction, I’m sure my students will see the biases from the movie and how they entered a child’s psyche at an early age (Princess Jasmine wears a belly dancing outfit, Aladdin like most other characters is a liar, The sultan is a bad ruler, etc. For more on this topic, please

see <http://www.calstatela.edu/faculty/sfischo/Arabs.html>

To better illustrate my point, we will watch selected scenes from the movie: The Mommy (1999, Brandon Frasier, Rachel Weisz). I ask students to try to find the stereotypes in the footage I will show in class. I will put our findings on the board. Using a different color pen, students will add to their notes anything they had missed. I will collect the papers. This assignment will be marked with V or V+ depending on the student’s effort. I hope we can find the following:

Synopsis: The archeologists split into 2 groups: One group of American treasure hunters include an Egyptian scholars and many local guides and workers. The other group is made of a young American and a British woman and her brother. To note:

Biases students should note: The Arab guide is considered “stinky”, smelly, but has good taste. He is also the first victim due to his excessive greed.

The Egyptian archeologist is greedy and incompetent

Other locals are “superstitious bastards”

Even the Bedouins who are there as “good guys” are violent and terrorize the visitors at night

The Arab women portrayed in the movie are dressed in a genie suit regardless of their age or body type.

Activity #3: take a stand

I will bring the class attention to the 4 index cards I have posted on the 4 different corners of the room. I will then explain to students that I will distribute a handout with 3 questions. Students will read one question at a time. They will be a short pause to help everyone think (about one minute). When I say “Take a stand”, each student will have to go near the index card which is closer to his/her opinion and be ready to discuss the reason why?

Questions:

1. Since 9/11 many people have a stereotypical view about Muslims as violent people and cannot be trusted.
2. People tend to stereotype when they don't know much about another group of people.
3. The media is very responsible for our misconceptions about Arabs.

Homework Assignment: Investigation

To highlight the general biases in the society today, students will be given various verses from the Bible and the Qur'an. They will ask parents and other adults if they can guess which religious book each verse comes from. In class, we will compile the answers to make a graph. This activity shows the individual misconceptions on different religions. Please see next page.

Name: _____
Date: _____

Overcoming Cultural Biases
Homework Assignment

This Assignment is modeled after Dr. Ali Assani's presentation at the Harvard CMES Outreach Center workshop, Fall 2008.

Read the following verses to a few adults you know. Ask them to guess which holy book they believe each verse comes from: the Qur'an, the Old Testament, or the New Testament.

Verse:	Old Testament	New Testament	Qur'an
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1. All wickedness is but little to the wickedness of a woman

2. Husbands, love your wives

3. I am the light of the earth

4. Let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice

5. And (know that the true servants of God are) those who do not bear witness to falsehood

6. I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! ... Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and

daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law

7. God is the Light of the heavens and the earth.

Answer key:

1. Ecclesiastic Ch. 25 vs. 19: **“All wickedness is but little to the wickedness of a woman”.**
2. Ephesians Ch. 5 vs. 22-25: **Husbands, love your wives.**
3. "I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD" (JOHN 8:12)
4. Let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. (Qur'an 5:8)
5. Qur'an 25:72: And (know that the true servants of God are) those who do not bear witness to falsehood.
6. Luke 12:49-53:

49"I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! ...
51Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. 52From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. 53They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

7.

Qur'an 24:35: God is the Light of the heavens and the earth.

Day Two Plan~

- 1) Student groups who did not have a chance to present their findings from the Human Rights website will present today.
- 2) We will arrange all desks in a circle. I explain to students that they all have to participate in the discussion to receive a grade. I chose a monitor and pose the following questions, allowing enough time for students to express their ideas.

Question 1: Why do you think there was an increase of violation against Muslims immediately after 9/11?

Question 2: What was the basis for these acts?

Question 3: Do you think anti Muslim sentiments are as strong today?

Question 4: What may have worked? What needs to be done?

- 3) Depending on the time remaining, we will finish the class by watching either at least the trailer of the movie “Beyond Belief”, where two American women who have lost their husbands during the 9/11 attacks reach out to Afghani widows who have also lost their husbands due to the Al Qaeda regime in their country.
- 4) Large group discussion:

I will now ask students to tell me what they think of the movie? Did they like it or not and why.