



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

Center for Middle Eastern Studies

Title: “If I Weren’t...”

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Purpose/Connection to the Curriculum: The purpose of this lesson is to help students see how using humor can help an audience understand how a person’s negative experiences – relating mostly to ethnicity, religion, race, creed, or gender - can impact/influence society in a subtle, yet effective, manner, and to help them analyze whether this is more effective than using another medium to deliver the same message. At the beginning of the school year, we prepare the students for our world literature curriculum by looking at the world from a global perspective, and this lesson is a springboard to show students that everyone suffers when they don’t take the time to get to hear other people’s stories, so it’s important when we study literature to hear other people’s stories to understand that person’s or truth as well as for students to share their own stories so that people can understand them.

Overview: This lesson examines Damir Niksic’s, “If I Wasn’t Muslim” parody of “If I Were a Rich Man,” to see: 1. How Niksic uses humor to impart his lesson about the treatment of Muslims in Bosnia due to their religion, and 2. To determine if this is the most effective way to impart this information. Students then can apply what they learn about this topic by either choosing to write an essay on this topic or to share part of their own stories by writing about their own experiences in a similar style.

Grade Level: 10th

Time Required: 1 class period with the assignment done as homework.

Targeted Skills - Based on Arizona State Standards: RL9-10.6: Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States.

Suggested Procedures: This lesson starts with a timed bell work question – What would you do if you were rich? After sharing out with the class, we view the video clip, “If I Were a Rich Man” from *Fiddler on the Roof* and discuss Tevye’s responses. I present some background information about Jews in Russia, and then talk about how they were not the only people who were suppressed due to their religion which leads us to the Muslims in Bosnia and a clip of “If I Wasn’t Muslim” which the students take notes on. We discuss why the author chose to do a parody instead of a speech or the use of a different medium, and whether his choice is effective. Does it make light of a serious situation, or are people more likely to pay attention to it because this serious situation is handled with a light touch? Students are then given the choice of either writing an essay response to this question or creating their own, “If I Wasn’t...” poem.

Extending the Lesson: Students could be assigned the war in Bosnia to research, specifically focusing on the claims stated in the video, or they could be assigned different marginalized groups and do research on them. Students could also choose to share their poems/essays with a wider audience by submitting them to the school paper.