

## Lesson Plan

### “Middle East Debates”

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#### Overview

This high school lesson outlines an in-depth 9-week Middle East unit that culminates in a 3-day, 6 hour public performance of skills and knowledge where students debate from the perspective of 20+ different Middle East leaders. The lesson plan below is accompanied by two dozen files (handouts, forms, etc.) – indicated with asterisks below - that I have developed in teaching this unit for the last 25 years. In addition, the instructional material I created for this course that trains students to critically analyze Middle East history from different perspectives, is published in the kit *Media Construction of the Middle East*, available free of charge at: [www.projetlooksharp.org](http://www.projetlooksharp.org). While this is a very intensive and time-consuming unit (2-periods – Global Studies and English for 9 weeks) the Middle East debates have become a right-of-passage for 10<sup>th</sup> grade students at our school. They often cite the experience as the most important and transformative learning experience of their high school career. Watch a 5 minute clip from the 2009 debates at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GThVnsI8xCY>

**COURSE OUTLINE/CONTENT:** \*see calendar for specific dates.

Wks 1&2: Introduction to the Middle East and stereotyping, geography test, research work: begin paper #1, getting resources, bibliography format, and trips to libraries and computer lab. Social Networking training and Del.icio.us account.

Wk 3&4: Arab/Israeli conflict, 2 perspectives on history, Research work, outlining and citing.

Wk. 5&6 : begin 2nd paper, advanced research work including current periodical sources from Middle East, history of Lebanon, Iraq and 2 US Wars, and role of oil in the region.

Wk.7&8: Iran. Afghanistan, 9/11 and rise of militant Muslim groups, Students begin to take on role of country/group in class discussions and activities. History test, speakers on the conflict

Wk.9: the debates, debriefing and evaluations.

### **Learning Objectives**

Students will:

- Develop an in-depth understanding of current events, conflicting identities, and the complexity of historical, multicultural and international disputes and perspectives
- Learn core content about current and historical issues and leaders in the Middle East and about U.S. policy related to the Middle East
- Develop and practice skills in researching information using traditional and new media forms (including social bookmarking, online newspapers, YouTube, etc.)
- Develop and practice skills in organizing, writing and synthesizing ideas
- Develop and practice oral presentation skills including giving speeches and debating
- Learn how to demonstrate knowledge and understanding through role-playing, staying “in character” while responding to unscripted statements and debate
- Develop an appreciation for global literature (*through optional activities*)

Prior to the start of this project, teachers should access and review the *Media Construction of the Middle East* curriculum kit on the Project Look Sharp website as well as the accompanying *Lesson Plans* that lay out the day-to-day details of the process and *Student Handouts*.

### **Time Needed**

Approximately 40 hour of instructional time for teaching history, research and debate preparation; plus one week for the debate and speeches, and follow-up discussion and reflection.

### **Materials & Equipment**

- *Lesson Plans* for teachers describing each of the steps and activities involved in the project (including optional global literature components)
- A copy of the *Student Handouts* for each student
- A copy of the relevant lessons from *Media Construction of the Middle East* curriculum kit, including PowerPoint slides and video clips, as well as the technology to show them in class
- Students will need Internet access outside of class time to access international news sources and to research their characters
- Costumes for students to wear during the debates, representing their characters (students are responsible for this themselves as part of the assessment)
- Nameplates for each character during the debates
- **(optional)**: Videocameras and microphones to videotape (and possibly broadcast) the debates

### **General Step-by-Step Procedures**

**NOTE:** See accompanying files including the Day-by-day lesson plans, downloadable student handouts, and other support materials. They are indicated by an asterisk\* below

***Days 1-2:* Introduce the project to the students and their families with letters home\* and a video of prior debates\*. Introduce the possible roles\* for the Middle East characters and assign a role to each student. Share a project timeline\* with due dates for each of the task\*s that students are responsible to complete.**

***Weeks 1-3:* The initial stage of the project focuses on research, with particular emphasis on teaching students how to find, evaluate, and cite library and online resources\*. Students apply**

these skills as they learn them, taking initial steps to prepare their first research paper\*, which is about their character's perspective on the background history of his nation. They create an annotated bibliography\* identifying the utility, credibility and bias of each source. Expectations for the paper are clarified by distributing an example outline\* and sample papers\* from previous years. Students create a tentative bibliography, outline and rough draft which the teacher collects, edits and returns.

**Ongoing:** Throughout the project, have students follow the international news in multiple sources (domestic and foreign press, magazines, podcasts, and newspapers, etc.), discuss current events in the Middle East, and pay special attention to noticing and evaluating how different news sources cover events. Consider hosting an online news portal\* and giving students a weekly news quiz\*.

**Ongoing:** Students learn about the Middle East using media literacy lessons from Project Look Sharp's *Media Construction of the Middle East* kit. The lessons address background knowledge and issues of stereotyping (Unit 1), the Arab/Israeli conflict (Unit 2), the Wars in Iraq (Unit 3) and the rise of militant Muslim movements including the Iranian Revolution, Afghanistan and 9/11 (Unit 4). Specific lessons explore the students' prior knowledge, pre-conceptions and stereotypes about the Middle East and its peoples, including one lesson that involves a decoding of the opening scenes from Disney's *Aladdin*. Other lessons involve analyzing representations of Arab and Muslim people in U.S. television and feature films, and comparing regional maps and songs created from Israeli or Palestine perspectives, and comparing and contrasting encyclopedia entries about "Islam" from *Islam.com* and from *Encarta*.

**Weeks 3-4:** Each student *briefly* introduces themselves to the class in character\*. The short time slots force students to organize and prioritize information and the class presentation provides practice in speaking skills. Classmates, as well as the teacher provide feedback on delivery and content, keeping those who are not presenting at the moment actively engaged and providing them with practice in listening and communication skills.

**(OPTIONAL):** Have students read literature that reinforces the history and perspectives they are learning\* (see *Beirut to Jerusalem* assignments).

**Weeks 4-7:** Students begin to work on their second research paper\*, which is about current issues, written from the perspective of their character. They continue learning how to conduct online research, including the use of databases, periodicals, foreign newspapers, and YouTube (for voice/speeches). Students also learn how to productively use online social networking resources, using a *Social Bookmarking site* that the teacher has created on which they enter, annotate, and tag key resources for their role\*. Students may also share resources and strategies in class and/or through social networking (e.g., Facebook), including exchanging ideas and information with students from previous years. Connecting with other students who have played their role is encouraged. Cheating is not an issue because the project is based on ever-changing current events, And because the final performance requires an internalized understanding of content.

**Weeks 7-8:** Students prepare for the debates by responding in character (in writing and orally) to prompts, including media prompts (news clips, events, quotes, etc)\*. Students study and practice writing and speaking skills and begin to take on their roles, such as explaining who they would and would not sit next to in a meeting. The teacher introduces the ground rules for the debate\* and arranges to coach (or have a teaching assistant coach) students in small groups of related characters (30 minutes for each group), asking the types of questions that are likely to come up in the culminating debate\*. Also discuss costumes (students should be able to determine appropriate dress from their research). At this point choose and prepare a facilitator for the debates\*, and choose someone to collect and transcribe proposals presented during the debates.

**Ongoing:** Since it would be unlikely that the characters themselves would raise issues of human rights (unless to attack an opponent), there needs to be a specific structure to ensure the inclusion in the debates of issues pertinent to the development of critical literacy, such as women's rights, economic development, corruption, democratic freedoms, and other non-foreign policy issues. This may be handled through the assigning some of the students to represent human rights representatives. Alternatively we have brought in graduates of the class who research specific countries to play take on this role for a specific "Human Rights Hour" so that all the core class students experience taking on a specific Middle East (or US) leader.

**THE DEBATES:** Set up for the debates with students seated next to allies and preferably opposite opposing characters (e.g., Palestinians facing Israelis, the U.S. facing Iran). Secure in place nameplates that will be visible to the debaters and audience. Students will need 10 minutes before each of the debates (more on the first day) to change into their costumes. They will also

need a safe place to store the costumes. Follow the debate protocol\*: 90 minutes of speeches, 3 hours of debating with proposals, 45 minutes voting, and 40 minutes closing statements.

Collect at least one proposal from each student during the debates. Re-write the proposals into a ballot\* that will help you to assess student knowledge through voting. The voting is the one place where the teacher should play a role. After the facilitator asks for votes of YES, NO, or ABSTENTION for each proposal, the teacher then calls on individual characters to explain and defend their votes. This is an opportunity to both assess student knowledge and to teach the rest of the class about critical issues. The teacher may want to arrange for photos (e.g. for the Yearbook) before students disrobe for the last time.

**Debriefing:** You will want at least 2 class periods to debrief. Do not cut short or skip this piece. It is critical that each student reflects on their feelings and thoughts about their character (and differentiates from their own) and for the other class members to hear those thoughts so that they do not conflate the views of their peers with those of the characters they played. This is a great opportunity for students to reflect on how we individually and collectively develop our views of the world, the role of culture, history, and media in shaping opinions, and the possibilities for change. Students should begin the debriefing by writing self-reflections. Each student should then briefly explain to the class their thoughts and feelings on the character they played. Then discuss three or four of the central issues students wrote about (e.g. the solution to the Arab/Israeli conflict, the appropriate role for the U.S. in the Middle East) through fishbowl discussions where a small group of students discuss the issue with the rest of the class listening on. This will help students to begin to differentiate their views from those of their characters.

The teacher should consider following-up with films and/or speakers that present alternatives to the standard political process (they are now well schooled in) of dealing with cross cultural conflict. These could include models of non-violent cross-cultural people-to-people movements.

### **Assessments**

The teacher may choose to use any of the following for formal assessment:

- ***Student research papers\**** and research process including their ***annotated bibliography\**** (where they identify utility, credibility and bias for each source), and their entries into the project's social bookmarking site\*).
- Multiple choice ***tests on Middle East history and vocabulary*** (see the assessments in Project Look Sharp's kit *Media Construction of the Middle East*).
- ***Participation in the debates***, including ability to accurately and appropriately articulate the cultural, historic, religious, national, and/or political perspective and voice of their character.
- Student ***Self Reflections\**** on their learning and learning process and ***Self-Evaluation\**** of their strengths and weaknesses (see Voices from the Field Box 8A in Chapter 8).

### **Extensions and Adaptations**

- It can be very useful to have “teaching assistants” (college students or upper level high school students who have previously taken part in this project) who can edit written work (outlines, rough drafts, etc.), pull out and coach individual students during class time, and lead small groups for discussion.
- Facilitate online connections between students and Middle East scholars and experts.



- Orchestrate a video conference with adults or students in Middle Eastern countries about these issues.
- Invite other classes, parents, educators and the press to attend the debates\*, and/or invite the community to watch by videotaping - ideally using multiple cameras and microphones - and broadcast the debates (perhaps on a local cable access channel).
- ***The Human Rights Hour*** - Have a few graduates of the class (who are longing to get back in) research human rights issues for 3 or 4 nations each and return to the debates as human rights representatives. Have a designated time (the “Human Rights Hour” where the returning students debate current characters on human rights issues. It is helpful for the (older and more experienced) graduates to give a short overview of the issues they will raise to the current students 2 weeks prior to the debates\*.