

## Iran, Iraq: What's the Difference?

### 1. Introductory activity.

A. Tell them there are two songs: one from Iran, one from Iraq. Their goal is to figure out which is which. There will be a number of clues in the language and musical style of the song, the physical appearance of the place, and the way people are dressed. Don't blurt out the answer if you know it; wait until the end and discuss it with the person sitting next to you.

B. Play song #1 (by Ilhan Al-Madfai) and simultaneously show "Song 1 slides." Then play song #2 & show "Song 2 slides."

C. Have people guess which was Iran, which was Iraq and give reasons why or what differences they noticed. Tell them that the first presentation was Iraq, the second was Iran.

### 2. Start main presentation. Geography – **slide 2** – map of Iran and Iraq:

A. location: Middle East, west Asia, along the Persian Gulf and not the Mediterranean. Next to each other. Iran has a large share of Persian Gulf coast; Iraq a much smaller outlet. Iraq's trade has traditionally been based around the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

B. Size: Iran – 1,648,000 square kilometers. Iraq – 437,000 square kilometers. Thus, Iran is not quite 4 times bigger than Iraq.

#### C. Similarities – **slide 3**.

1. Several hundred years of common history.
2. Regional identity and shared cultural traditions.
3. Both have a Shi'a Muslim majority (unlike other Muslim states which are mostly Sunni Muslim) and share pilgrimage sites.
4. Both write their languages in the same alphabet and share some common words.

#### D. Differences – **slide 4**.

1. Several thousand years of separate history. (In modern times, for example, Iran was not part of the Ottoman Empire; Iraq was.)
2. Different enemies/conquerors (Arabs dominated by Ottomans, while Persians independent; in 20<sup>th</sup> century, Iraq controlled by British until the 1930s, while Iran controlled by Russians and British, later by Americans).
3. Iranian traditions shaped by Zoroastrian religion; Iraq influenced by Sunni Muslims.
4. Different languages. (Iran's main language is Persian; Iraq's is Arabic.)

### 3. History.

A. Both Iran and Iraq have ancient histories.

1. Civilization started in Mesopotamia – Sumer, Babylon, etc. are all in Iraq. **Slide 6**.
2. Iran, or Persia, had ancient trade routes. (Possibly a trading place between Sumer and Indus River civilizations.) Persians released Jews from Babylonian captivity. **Slide 6**.

B. For several hundred years after Muslim conquest, Iran and Iraq under common Arab rule from 650 AD. Abbasid caliphate. But Iran maintained its separate language and traditions, and soon became independent again.

C. **Slide 7.** From early modern times: Iraq in Ottoman Empire; Iran separate.

D. 19<sup>th</sup> century: Iran menaced by Britain and Russia; Iraq under less direct British control until the 20<sup>th</sup> century

E. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Iraq came under a British mandate from the end of World War I until it got full independence in 1932. Iran, meanwhile, had to deal with British and then American interference. After the end of World War II, the U.S. indirectly controlled Iran politically (by controlling the shah) and economically (through control of the oil fields) until 1979.

#### 4. Regional identity

A. climate and topography.

1. Iraq: **Slides 8 – 12.**

2. Iran: **Slides 13 – 18.**

B. Historical geography: Iran, in modern history, has been more concerned with Russians to the North and British to the South (Persian Gulf). **Slide 19.** Iraq was dominated by Ottoman Empire, and then had British influence.

#### 5. Cultures: languages/religions

A. Languages

1. Iran: Persian (Indo-European, “Aryan”) – **slide 20.**

2. Iraq: Arabic (Semitic) – **slide 21.**

B. Both are multi-ethnic states.

1. Iran

a. 65.4 million people

b. **Slide 22** - 51% Persians; 24% Azeris (a Turkic people); 8% Gilaki and Mazandarani; 7% Kurdish; 3% Arab.

2. Iraq

a. 27.5 million people.

b. **Slide 23** - almost 75% Arab; almost 21% Kurdish; the rest Assyrian, Turkomen, etc. (**Slide 24** - Kurds in Iraq.)

C. Religious traditions.

1. Both have a Shi'a majority. (Even though it's the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest sect in Islam, only 10-20% of Muslims worldwide are Shi'a. Almost all of the rest are Sunnis.)

2. Iran: 98% Muslim 98% (Shi'a 89%, Sunni 9%), 2% other (Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, and Baha'i) - **Slide 25.**

3. Iraq: 97% Muslim (Shi'a 60%-65%, Sunni 32%-37%), 3% Christian or other – **Slide 26.**

#### 6. Population movements

A. Shi'a pilgrims frequently travel between Iran and Iraq visiting religious sites (such as Qom, Iran, and Karbala, Iraq).

B. Refugees.

1. Iran has hosted millions of Afghan refugees from the 1980s. **Slide 27.** Over 1.6 million have returned to Afghanistan following the overthrow of the Taliban, but nearly 1 million still remain. Iran has also taken in tens of thousands of Iraqi refugees since 2003. 2<sup>nd</sup> largest number of refugees in the world (after Pakistan).
2. Some Iranians have left as refugees (eg. Bahais).
3. 1.8 million Iraqis are refugees.

7. Conclusion: Iran and Iraq have a lot in common, but more separates them than just one letter in their names. They have separate ethnic compositions, languages, historical traditions, cultures. **Slides 28 and 29** (children).