

TITLE

Contemporary Egyptian Voices: Studying literature to learn about modern life and culture in Egypt

AUTHOR

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GRADES:

6-12

Note: The general concept of this lesson is appropriate for all middle school & high school grade levels. Options for literature selections are included and the teacher can make choices based on the reading level and sophistication of her students.

SUBJECTS:

World Literature

World Cultures

Grade 7 Social Studies (enrichment)

OVERVIEW OF LESSON PLAN/RATIONALE:

In this activity, students think about how literature can represent a culture and society. They will read several short pieces of literature written by Egyptians in the last 50 years. As they read, they will identify cultural practices of contemporary Egyptian life and also create questions about the lifestyles of contemporary Egyptians. Students will then attempt to find answers to their questions and factual information that supports or negates the assumptions they made about modern life in Egypt.

PENNSYLVANIA Academic Content Standards

ENGLISH

1.1 Reading Independently

Purposes for Reading

Comprehension and Interpretation

1.2 Reading, Analyzing, and Interpreting Text

Inferences

Text Analysis and Evaluation

1.3 Reading, Analyzing, and Interpreting Literature-Fiction and Non-Fiction

Analysis and Evaluation

1.8 Research

Inquiry-Based Process

GEOGRAPHY

7.3 Human Characteristics of Places and Regions

OBJECTIVES:

As a result of this lesson students will be able to:

- Articulate the links between literature and culture
- Define specific cultural or societal practices of contemporary Egypt as presented in selected literary works
- Create questions about daily life and culture that arise from reading literary works
- Locate factual information on websites
- Analyze the authenticity or “truth” about practices as presented in the literary works

KEY QUESTIONS:

What can we learn about a society through its literature?

What is life like in contemporary Egypt?

Is life the same for all Egyptians?

Are there cultural practices and values common to all modern Egyptians?

SUGGESTED TIME ALLOWANCE:

Variable, depending on number of literary selections read

MATERIALS/RESOURCES

Student Handouts:

1. **Stories from *Are You Listening? Voices From the Middle East*** – Online FREE usage
 - “The Whistle,” by Abdul Hakim Kassem
 - “The Night Festival,” by Fawzi Abdel Kade el Milady
 - “In Line,” by Elsa Marston
2. **Additional Literary Texts listed in appendix #1 (optional)**
 - Teachers can add other literature selections.
3. **Chart/Graphic Organizer (appendix #2) :**

- CONTEMPORARY EGYPTIAN LITERATURE: CULTURAL & LIFESTYLE OBSERVATIONS - ASSUMPTIONS & AUTHENTICITY

4. Best Internet Sources on Contemporary Egypt (appendix #3)

Sources:

Ali, Monica. "Do I Know Enough to be British?" *The Atlantic, Fiction* 2009.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200908/border-crossings>

Are You Listening? Voices From the Middle East, The Outreach Center, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University. Available free as a PDF download:

<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/mideast/outreach>

Handal, Nathalie, ed. *The Poetry of Arab Women, A Contemporary Anthology*.

Interlink Books, New York. 2001. ISBN: 1-56656-374-7

Idris, Yusuf. Denys Johnson-Davies, ed. *The Essential Yusuf Idris: Masterpieces of the Egyptian Short Story*. The American University in Cairo Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-977-416-242-8

Marston, Elsa. *Santa Claus in Baghdad & Other Stories about Teens in the Arab World*.

Indiana University Press, Bloomington. 2008. ISBN: 978-0-253-22004-2

Marston, Elsa. *Figs and Fate: Stories About Growing Up in the Arab World Today*.

George Braziller, Inc. New York, 2005. ISBN: 0-8076-1554-4 (Note: This is an earlier version of Santa Claus in Baghdad)

Nye, Naomi Shihab, ed. *The Flag of Childhood: Poems From the Middle East*. Aladdin

Paperbacks. New York. 1998. ISBN: 0-689-85172-3 (Note: this is the paperback version of *The Space Between Our Footsteps* without the art.)

Nye, Naomi Shihab, ed. *The Space Between Our Footsteps: Poems and Paintings From the Middle East*. Simon & Schuster, New York. 1998. ISBN: 0-689-81233-7

ACTIVITIES/PROCEDURES

1.WARM-UP

Quickwrite

What can we learn about a culture from reading poems and stories written by members of the culture? What problems might arise when we make assumptions about a society after reading its literature?

Or

What do you think the writer Monica Ali meant when she wrote, “But it is fiction that reveals the truth; the emotional truths that delineate the state and psyche of the nation...” Think about Ali’s statement in relation to fiction, memoir, and poetry. Do you agree or disagree with her? Why?

PAIR/SHARE Quickwrite answers

SHARE OUT Quickwrite answers and create a classroom chart

2. ACTIVITY:

Note: The teacher can decide how to approach the reading of the selected literature. Small groups or individuals can be assigned separate readings, allowing many pieces to be read and a larger picture of contemporary Egypt to be created.

1. Pass out selected literary works and the graphic organizer.
2. Instruct students to read the literary work and fill in the first three columns of the chart.
3. Arrange for students to use the internet for research. Encourage them to find information that will answer their questions and fill in the remaining two columns on the chart.
4. Co-construct a class chart to share all of the student findings.
5. Provide time for each student or group to share their findings with classmates.
6. Instruct students to answer the following StepBack questions: “What conclusions have you come to about the way that literature can represent a society or culture? Why? What can literature offer that reader that informational text does not?”
7. Use the StepBack writing as an exit slip and collect as students leave the classroom. Share selected student comments with the entire class on the following day.

APPENDIX #1
ADDITIONAL TEXT POSSIBILITIES
CONTEMPORARY EGYPTIAN LITERATURE:
CULTURAL & LIFESTYLE OBSERVATIONS - ASSUMPTIONS & AUTHENTICITY
 * indicates literary works that are most usable & appropriate for this unit

	Title	Author	Genre	Source	Length	Themes	Cultural Practices	Notes
*	“The Whistle”	Abdul Hakim Kassem	Short Story	<i>Are You Listening? Voices from the Middle East</i> , p. 117 http://cmes.hmdc.harvard.edu/outreach/resources/are	1.5 pages	Child labor in the rural delta lands	-Names: Hasan & Hanim -Galabia	Beautiful story about children fertilizing plants under cruel eye of the overseer
*	“The Night of the Festival”	Fawzi Abdel Kade el Milady	Short Story	<i>Are You Listening? Voices from the Middle East</i> , p. 43 http://cmes.hmdc.harvard.edu/outreach/resources/are	2.5 pages	-City (Cairo) vs village -Traditions vs modernity -Migration from rural to urban centers	-Ramadan -Arranged marriage -Qur’an -Prayer & abulution -Ululation -Responsibilities of eldest son	Author born in 1928, but still a relevant & moving story
*	“In Line”	Elsa Marston	Short Story	<i>Santa Claus in Baghdad & Figs and Fate</i>	20 pages	-City life in Cairo vs country life -Class differences & social boundaries	-Food -Hijab -Private tutoring -Competition for university	
	“The Shame”	Yusuf Idris	Short Story	<i>Are You Listening? Voices from the Middle East</i> , p. 59 http://cmes.hmdc.harvard.edu/outreach/resources/are	8 pages	-Adultery -Family honor		Features a sensuous female, not school appropriate

	“The Errand”	Yusuf Idris	Short Story	<i>Are You Listening? Voices from the Middle East</i> , p. 77 http://cmes.hmdc.harvard.edu/outreach/resources/are	5 pages	-Longing for Cairo -Egyptian govt. bureaucracy		Villager volunteers to escort insane woman to Cairo.
	“Miracles for Sale”	Tewfik Al-Hakim b 1898	Short Story	<i>Are You Listening? Voices from the M.E.</i> , p. 97 http://cmes.hmdc.harvard.edu/outreach/resources/are		-Priest victim of a hoax		
	Midaq Alley Chapter 2	Naguib Mahfouz	Novel excerpt	<i>Are You Listening? Voices from the Middle East</i> http://cmes.hmdc.harvard.edu/outreach/resources/are				
	“Me and My Sister”	Alifa Rifaat	Short Story	<i>Are You Listening? Voices from the Middle East</i> http://cmes.hmdc.harvard.edu/outreach/resources/are	2.5 pages	-Multiple wives -Strict rules for dating -Legacy of Colonialism		Sex & marijuana mentioned
*	“Childhood. 1948”	Hamza El Din	Poem	<i>The Space Between our Footsteps & Figs & Fate</i>	1 page	Nubian poem about the damn and flooding of Nubian homeland.		
*	“Home”	Pauline Kaldas	Poem	<i>The Space Between our Footsteps & Figs & Fate</i>	1 page	Chaos of Cairo street life	-Names of foods -galabiyas	
*	“I Have No Address”	Hamza El Din	Poem	<i>The Space Between our Footsteps & Figs & Fate</i>	1 page	Homelessness of good and kind Nubian people		

*	“You Are My Yemen”	Mohja Kahf	Poem	<i>The Space Between our Footsteps & Figs & Fate</i>	1 page	Love poem using Arabic references		
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INFORMATION ABOUT THE TEXTS & WEB RESOURCES

Are You Listening? Voices From the Middle East, The Outreach Center, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University. Available free as a PDF download: <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/mideast/outreach>

Handal, Nathalie, ed. *The Poetry of Arab Women, A Contemporary Anthology*. Interlink Books, New York. 2001. ISBN: 1-56656-374-7

Idris, Yusuf. Denys Johnson-Davies, ed. *The Essential Yusuf Idris: Masterpieces of the Egyptian Short Story*. The American University in Cairo Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-977-416-242-8

Marston, Elsa. *Santa Claus in Baghdad & Other Stories about Teens in the Arab World*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington. 2008. ISBN: 978-0-253-22004-2

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APPENDIX #2
CONTEMPORARY EGYPTIAN LITERATURE:
CULTURAL & LIFESTYLE OBSERVATIONS - ASSUMPTIONS & AUTHENTICITY

Student Name _____

Instructions: As you read a work of literature, look for information about the way Egyptians live. Record what you notice in the first column of this chart. In the second column, formulate questions that you have about the practice. After formulating your question, look for an informational source that can answer it and record your conclusions. One example is provided for you.

Cultural Practices & Lifestyle Observations	Question	Literary Work & Author	Website resource	Conclusion
Child labor exists in contemporary Egypt.	I'm not sure about when this story was written. Does child labor still occur in Egypt?	"The Whistle" by Abdul Hakim Kassem	Dan McDougall, "Working flat out - the child labour behind your Egyptian cotton sheets" The Guardian, June 8, 2008. http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/jun/08/childprotection.humanrights	Even though the Egyptian government has outlawed child labor, it is estimated that 2.7 million children still work, the majority in agriculture. They work long hours in 40C heat. Often there is no school time in between. In a recent Unicef survey, nearly all children asked reported beatings by foremen in the fields. According to most NGOs, eradicating child labour in agriculture in Egypt would be impossible, as it is traditionally an issue between families. The children are more likely to be victims of modern-day gangmasters, who recruit them from impoverished families to work the fields from dawn until dusk.

APPENDIX #3
Best Internet Sources on Contemporary Egypt
CONTEMPORARY EGYPTIAN LITERATURE:
CULTURAL & LIFESTYLE OBSERVATIONS - ASSUMPTIONS &
AUTHENTICITY

Access Islam

Videos segments from PBS that students can watch online

<http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/accessislam/video.html>

Al-Ahram Weekly online newspaper, February, 2006, "A Tale of Two Values"

This article analyzes how the gap between the rich and the poor in Egypt has not only become wide economically, but how the two groups have also become widely segregated from each other in terms of their sets of values and styles of life. It can be a companion piece for the story "In Line."

<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2006/780/sc16.htm>

Harvard University Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Internet Resources for Teaching

A well-researched and annotated collection of resources for students and teachers

<http://cmes.hmdc.harvard.edu/outreach/resources>

Marriage in the Arab World, 2005, Population Reference Bureau, 1875 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 520 Washington, DC

This statistical report outlines trends in marriage in Egypt and other nations. It can be a companion piece for the story, "The Night of the Festival."

http://www.prb.org/pdf05/MarriageInArabWorld_Eng.pdf

McDougall, Dan, "Working Flat Out - the Child Labour Behind your Egyptian Cotton Sheets" The Guardian, June 8, 2008.

This article details child labor trends in contemporary Egypt. It can be a companion piece for the story, "The Whistle."

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/jun/08/childprotection.humanrights>

Young Voices from the Arab World from AmidEast

Click on the links to view Hazam's explanation of being a teen in contemporary Egypt

<http://www.amideast.org/#>