

Overview

This curriculum provides teachers, college faculty and other educators with the materials needed to engage students in a dynamic, interactive, and constructivist process of interpreting history and current events. It is designed to support the teaching of global studies, U.S. history, government, current events and media studies classes at the upper middle school, high school and college levels. Through use of slide, print, audio and video materials, students will develop critical thinking skills while learning core information about the Arab/Israeli conflict, the war in Iraq, and the resurgence of Islam.

Objectives

- To teach core information and vocabulary about the Arab/Israeli conflict, the war in Iraq, and the resurgence of Islam, and to challenge stereotypical, simplistic and uninformed thinking about the Middle East.
- To teach students to recognize, understand and evaluate multiple and conflicting historical, religious, ethnic and national perspectives on controversial issues and events.
- To facilitate students' exploration of political and ethical issues involving the role of media in constructing knowledge, evaluating historical truths, and objectivity and subjectivity in journalism.
- To train students to understand and evaluate authorship, credibility and bias in different media sources and forms including Web pages, textbooks, encyclopedias, timelines, newspapers, news magazines, editorial cartoons, photographs, maps, songs, feature and documentary films, and television programming including news, news analysis, entertainment, music videos and comedy.
- To engage all students, but particularly those disengaged from traditional school work, in complex critical thinking and the development of reading, listening and visual decoding skills and attitudes that support life-long democratic citizenship.

Learning Standards

The material and activities found in this curriculum address many specific standards laid out by the National Council for the Social Studies (www.ncss.org) in Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies, including those laid out on the chart below.

National Council for the Social Studies Curriculum Standards addressed by *Media Construction of the Middle East*

Providing learning experiences so that the learner can...	Strand
...explain why individuals and groups respond differently to their physical and social environments and/or changes to them on the basis of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs.	Culture
...predict how information and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.	Culture
...demonstrate that historical knowledge and the concept of time are socially influenced constructions that lead historians to be selective in the questions they seek to answer and the evidence they use.	Time, Continuity, & Change
...systematically employ processes of critical historical inquiry to reconstruct and reinterpret the past, such as using a variety of sources and checking their credibility, validating an weighing evidence for claims, and searching for causality.	Time, Continuity, & Change
...create, interpret, use and synthesize information from various representations of the east, such as maps, globes, and photographs.	People, Places, & Environments
...compare and evaluate the impact of stereotyping, conformity, acts of altruism, and other behaviors on individuals and groups.	Individual Development & Identity
...examine the interactions of ethnic, national, or cultural influences in specific situations or events.	Individual Development & Identity
...identify and analyze examples of tensions between expressions of individuality and efforts used to promote social conformity by groups and institutions.	Individuals, Groups, & Institutions
...compare different political systems with that of the United States, and identify representative political leaders from selected historical and contemporary settings.	Power, Authority, & Governance
...analyze and evaluate conditions, actions, and motivations that contribute to conflict, cooperation, and interdependence within and among groups, societies and nations.	Power, Authority, & Governance; Global Connections
...analyze the relationships and tensions between national sovereignty and global interests, in such matters as territory, economic development, nuclear and other weapons, use of natural resources, and human rights concerns.	Global Connections
...locate, access, analyze, organize, synthesize, evaluate and apply information about selected public issues – identifying, describing, and evaluating multiple points of view.	Civic Ideals & Practices

Media Literacy and Democratic Citizenship

The founders of the United States articulated the need for a literate citizenship as core to the development of a deep and enduring democracy. We live in an age when the most influential messages about pressing social issues and events are delivered through mass media, such as television, magazines and the Internet. Most students use the Internet as their primary source of information, yet few have any formal training in assessing the credibility of information in Web sites. It is essential to the success of our democracy that young people consciously and consistently analyze and evaluate media messages. They need to be taught to seek out current, accurate, and credible sources of information; they need to understand the influence of media messages on their understanding of the world; and they need training in identifying and using various techniques for communicating messages in different media forms. Without these critical skills, we risk losing the diversity and freedom of thought that underpins a culture of true democracy.

Collective Reading of Media Messages

This curriculum is based on the classroom practice of collective reading, in which the teacher leads the class through the process of decoding images, sounds and text as a way of developing a range of critical thinking skills while teaching core knowledge. This constructivist approach encourages the development of moral reasoning as students clarify their own interpretations, listen to the analysis of their peers, and discuss ethical issues. Decoding of the documents in this curriculum will help train students to distinguish fact from opinion, analyze point of view and identify bias, interpret historical documents, and use evidence to back up a thesis. The classroom decoding process is particularly effective in involving students who rarely share their opinions about print-based material, including students with reading disabilities, visual learners, and students for whom English is a second language. The teacher should consider calling on students or going around the room to ensure participation by all students in the collective reading process.

Encouraging Multiple Readings

Although the Teacher Answer Sheets for each lesson suggest answers to the probe questions, the teacher should encourage multiple readings and a diversity of responses for most of the questions posed in the teacher guide. It is important that students give evidence in the document to explain their conclusions. Occasionally a question has only one right answer (e.g., “who created this video?”), and students should learn to distinguish between objective and subjective questions. The suggested answers given in the scripts are intended to reflect typical responses that address key historical and media literacy concepts and information. However, it is important that students recognize that all people do not interpret media messages the same way. Depending upon each reader’s background, including life experience, age, gender, race, culture, or political views, he or she may have very different interpretations of a particular text. The collective reading experience provides the opportunity to explore these differences and discuss the important concept that readers interpret messages through their own lenses.

Reading Bias

A major theme of these materials is the recognition that all media messages come from a particular point of view and have a bias that reflects the intent and perspective of the producer and sponsor. With these materials, teachers can train students to recognize bias and point of view. The teacher should encourage students to ask critical questions about any media messages encountered inside or outside the classroom using the Six Questions and Five Principles of Media Literacy found at projectlooksharp.org.

Bias in this Curriculum and in the Classroom

This series of lessons, like all media, also has a point of view and a bias. As teachers use the lessons, they may identify opinionated language, selective facts, missing information, and many other subjective decisions that went into constructing this view of history. The same questions the curriculum applies to other documents can be applied to this media construction: Who produced this curriculum for what purpose and what is its bias? Teachers and students could and should be asking critical questions about the editorial choices that went into constructing these lessons. For instance, why did we choose to focus on certain countries, regions, and ethnic groups (e.g., Israel/Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran), but not others (e.g., Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt)? And, what is your evidence for these conclusions? When using these materials teachers will make their own decisions of what to include and to edit, what questions to use and what issues to avoid. All of these decisions, both by the creators and users of the curriculum, will influence the view of history that students receive. Teachers should encourage students to thoughtfully analyze and discuss the stories, the perspectives, and the biases celebrated and criticized within our own classrooms. Those skills and practices are core to an educated democratic citizenship.

Critical Analysis of Media Documents

The classroom critique of political and cultural documents (e.g., songs, paintings, TV news clips, excerpts from films, Web page) is essential to the development of core literacy skills in our media saturated democracy. To enable educators to fulfill the mission of teaching these core civic objectives, Project Look Sharp has created media literacy integration kits using a variety of different media documents for critical analysis in the classroom. The documents in this curriculum are presented for the purpose of direct critique and solely to be used in an educational setting.