

## THE MAGIC OF STEREOTYPES

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Students will identify stereotypes about Arabs.
- Students will distinguish between generalizations and stereotypes.

### VOCABULARY & CONCEPTS

generalization	racism	stereotype
----------------	--------	------------

### MEDIUM

Video clip from the Disney animated motion picture Aladdin (Total running time: 2 min, 54 sec)



### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Unit 1, Lesson 2 video from DVD or Web site

### TIME

25 minutes

### LESSON STEPS

1. Present *Introduction to the Lesson* (pg. 2) to the class.
2. Play the clip from the introduction to Aladdin while students note any stereotypes they hear or see.
3. Lead a decoding of the film clip using the *Questions, Suggested Answers and Evidence* (pg. 3).
4. Lead a discussion about generalizing, stereotyping, racism, the reasons behind stereotyping, and the impact of stereotypes using *Further Questions* (pg. 3).

## INTRODUCTION TO THE LESSON

One of the important ways that we learn about other groups and cultures is by making generalizations, “reasoning from detailed facts to general principles” (Answers.com). We may notice that the little boys we see are often playing with trucks while the girls often play with dolls. We learn from observation that first graders often need help crossing the road, while seniors in high school rarely need help getting across. And we learn that most Middle Easterners practice Islam while most people in the U.S. are Christian. Generalizations help us to learn about other people, places and cultures, but they risk becoming stereotypes.

A stereotype is an oversimplified, exaggerated, and often offensive generalization about a culture or group. We may make a generalization that boys tend to like trucks based on our observations, but if we assume that ALL boys like trucks or that girls DON'T like trucks, we have internalized a stereotype. The mass media (television, movies, songs, etc.) often give stereotypical messages, particularly about minority groups and other cultures. Few stereotypes exist for dominant groups in a society since they are often depicted in many different ways in media. For instance, few Americans stereotype white people since there are so many different images of white people in the U.S. media. People of color are at a much greater risk of being stereotyped. The limited representations of Muslim, Arab and Middle Eastern people in the media often reinforce stereotypes. When we have little direct experience with a people or culture we are particularly vulnerable to internalizing stereotypes.

Most of us have grown up watching Disney movies, and they often hold a special, even “magical” place in our childhood memories. Because of this, it is particularly challenging, and particularly important, to analyze these films for stereotypical messages. We are going to watch the 3-minute introduction to the Disney film, Aladdin. The movie received two Academy Awards and was one of Disney's most profitable films ever. As you watch the clip, note any stereotypes about Arab people you see or hear. They could be in the images, the lyrics, the spoken words, the music, or the character portrayal. You will be asked to give evidence from the clip to back up your answers. Be ready to explain why you think they are stereotypes (exaggerated, oversimplified or offensive) rather than merely cultural generalizations.

- **Play** the video clip.
- **Lead** a decoding of the film clip using the *Questions, Suggested Answers and Evidence*.
- **Use Further Questions** to lead a discussion about generalizing, stereotyping, racism, the reasons behind stereotyping, and the impact of stereotypes.

QUESTION **What are the messages in this clip about the character of Arab people? Give evidence.**

SUGGESTED ANSWER They are mysterious, untrustworthy and perhaps dangerous

EVIDENCE Mysterious – Smoke, fire, shadows and music all suggest mystery. The storyteller begins, “Welcome to Agrabah, city of mystery.”  
Untrustworthy – The merchant talks fast in a high-pressure sales pitch. He says, “It will not break” about the combined hookah, coffee maker and fry cooker that immediately breaks. He fakes the sound of the vacuum seal breaking on the “famous Dead Sea Tupperware.” He is trying to pass off Tupperware as an antiquity.  
Dangerous – The song lyrics say, “I come from a land, from a faraway place...It’s barbaric, but hey, it’s home.” The storyteller says that his tale begins as “a dark man waits with a dark purpose.”

QUESTION **What are the messages in this clip about the appearance of Arab people? Give evidence to support your ideas.**

SUGGESTED ANSWER They have big noses and sinister eyes. They are brown-skinned and have facial hair. They wear turbans.

### FURTHER QUESTIONS

Are these stereotypes or generalizations?

Do you see these messages about Arabs repeated other places in popular culture?

(Help students to recognize that generalizations based on cultural patterns become stereotypes when they are repeated over and over again with little to contradict their message.)

Critics claimed that Disney drew the hero, Aladdin, as light-skinned with more European features than the villain, Jafar, who had a hooked nose and spoke with an accent. They say that these characterizations, along with others in the movie, perpetuate racist stereotypes of Arab people.

Do you agree think the movie Aladdin perpetuates racist stereotypes?

Why would Disney use stereotypes in their film?

(Help students to understand that stereotypes are easy to communicate and understand. They are passed down from generation to generation, and audiences, particularly those not targeted by the stereotype, often find them familiar and amusing.)

What is the impact of stereotypes?

(Help students to understand that stereotypes, even when they communicate positive attributes [e.g. all Asians are good at math], inaccurately label whole groups of people. They can foster prejudice against [or for] certain groups, and they can instill a negative self-image in people and groups that are the target of stereotypes. This can also happen when a member of a group doesn't fit a positive stereotype [e.g., an Asian who isn't good at math.]

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Aladdin opened in theaters with slightly different lyrics to the song “Arabian Nights” than you heard in this clip. The original film score began this way: “Oh I come from a land, from a faraway place, where the caravan camels roam. Where they cut off your ear, if they don’t like your face. It’s barbaric, but hey, it’s home.” Public pressure on Disney forced them to change these lines to the ones you heard for the video release. A New York Times editorial at the time said, “To characterize an entire region with this sort of tongue-in-cheek bigotry, especially in a movie aimed at children, borders on the barbaric” (qtd. in Shaheen 51).

### **REFERENCES**

Aladdin. Film. Walt Disney. 1992.

Shaheen, Jack, G. Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People. New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001.