

PICTURING THE MIDDLE EAST

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Students will identify the assumptions, misperceptions, generalizations and stereotypes they carry about the Middle East.
- Students will reflect on the sources of accurate, inaccurate and stereotypical thinking about the Middle East.
- Students will recognize the cultural bias in the terms “Middle East” and “Near East.”
- Students will identify the varied geographic boundaries of the Middle East.
- Students will understand the concept of media literacy and be introduced to the Media Construction of the Middle East curriculum.

VOCABULARY & CONCEPTS

assumption	Jerusalem	misperception	Near East
chador	Jesus	Muhammad	South East Asia
ethnocentrism	<i>keffiyeh</i>	monotheism	stereotype
euro-centrism	media literacy	mosque	Roman Empire
generalization	Middle East	Muslim	Western Wall

MEDIUM

Slideshow with 12 photographs from the Middle East and around the world and three maps of the Middle East



MATERIALS NEEDED

- Unit 1, Lesson 1 slideshow from CD or Web site
- *Student Worksheet* (pg. 9) for the slides
- *Teacher Answer Sheet* (pg. 10) for discussing the slideshow

TIME

60 minutes

LESSON STEPS

1. Present *Introduction to the Lesson* (pg. 3) to the class.
2. Ask students to silently write down a list of words and images that come to mind when they think of the Middle East.
3. Distribute the *Student Worksheet*, one per student. For each photo they will check if they think it is or is not from the Middle East and give a brief explanation.
4. Project slides 1-12 as students fill in the *Student Worksheet*.

5. Project slides 13-36 and use the *Teacher Answer Sheet* to present information about each of the 12 photographs.
6. Use slides 37-38 to discuss assumptions, misperceptions, generalizations and stereotypes we may carry about the Middle East and the sources of our impressions.
7. Use slide 39 to explain the cultural bias in the terms “Middle East” and “Near East” and to illustrate the lack of scholarly agreement about the boundaries of the region.
8. Use slides 40-45 to introduce students to media literacy.

INTRODUCTION TO THE LESSON

Has anyone in our class visited the Middle East? How do you know about a place you've never visited in person? You might have seen a picture or video image from that place. Maybe you read a story or heard a song from that place. It's possible that you can't even remember where you learned about the place, but you've got ideas about it anyway – images, words, sounds, opinions. In this lesson, we'll explore what you already have in your mind about the place some call the Middle East.

- **Ask** students to silently write down a list of words and images that come to mind when they think of the Middle East.
- **Distribute** the *Student Worksheet*, one per student. Explain that they will see a dozen photographs that may or may not have come from the Middle East. For each photo, they should indicate on the worksheet if they think the photo is or is not from the Middle East, and provide a brief explanation of their reasoning. They will only have ten seconds per slide, so they should note their impressions quickly.
- **Show** slides 1-12 for ten seconds each. Students should note answers on their worksheets, without talking.
- **Project** the 12 images again using slides 13-36. For each photo, ask for a show of hands as to whether students think it is from the Middle East and why.
- **Advance** to the next slide, which includes a brief explanation of each photo. Use the *Teacher Answer Sheet* to share more information about each slide. (Students will return to a more in-depth exploration of many of the issues raised by these slides in Unit 1, Lesson 2.)
- **Use** slide 37 to introduce the terms assumption, misperception, generalization, and stereotype. You may have the class try to define each word as it comes on the screen and/or skip to the next slide that gives a definition.

Assumption: Something taken for granted or accepted as true without proof
Misperception: Something perceived incorrectly or misunderstood
Generalization: Reasoning from detailed facts to general principles
Stereotype: A generalization, usually exaggerated or oversimplified and often offensive, that is used to describe or distinguish a group.

SLIDE 37

→ **Have** students discuss the following questions in small groups or with the whole class. The questions appear on slide 38. These are very challenging issues to discuss. Here are a few points to try to weave into the conversation.

- Stereotypes are most dangerous when they are about minority groups that are otherwise unknown to most members of the majority group. When most people have few personal experiences or images that contradict stereotypes, they are more likely to believe the stereotypes. Most Americans have little experience with Arab or Muslim people and there are limited representations of these people in the media. The few representations of Middle Eastern people that are in the media are often stereotypical.
- Stereotypes in the media often reflect the views and experiences of the dominant culture or group. Although more women, people of color and young people are producing media, the majority of mass media messages are still produced by middle class white men. The media messages they create reflect their life experiences, perspectives and biases, as well as the media messages they grew up with.
- Stereotypes are familiar, easy to understand and less confusing to a majority audience than images that contradict stereotypes. When media makers such as advertisers are trying to communicate to a mass audience they often rely upon simple characterizations that will appeal easily and quickly to the largest audience.
- We are all influenced by the stereotypes we see, read and hear. We can learn to identify stereotypes, to criticize them and to express our concerns. Many individuals and groups are working to challenge stereotypes in the media. Here is a listing of a few groups working to challenge stereotypes in the media:

Young African Americans Against Media Stereotypes

<http://www.yaaams.org/>

Raises questions, provokes thoughts, and exposes differences (subtle or blatant) concerning the treatment of African-Americans in the media

About Face

<http://www.about-face.org/>

Questions negative and demeaning images of women

Media Watch

<http://www.mediawatch.com/>

Challenges abusive stereotypes and other biased images commonly found in the media

Why might people living in the United States carry stereotypes about the Middle East, Arab people, Muslims and the religion of Islam?
Where do these stereotypes come from?
How can we challenge these stereotypes?

SLIDE 38

→ **Explain** that slide 39 shows three different maps from the Internet labeled “Middle East” or “Near East.” These terms reflect the point of view of people from outside the region. The term “Middle East” was first used in a 1902 article by a naval historian from the U.S. named Alfred Mahan (Dudley 12). For Mahan, the area he was describing was located between two other points of reference: Europe, as the center, and the “Far East”- India, China and Japan as the outer rim. Other Westerners called the same area the “Near East,” another definition based on how close the place was to the main point of reference – Europe. For Westerners, the position of the Middle East is defined by its relation to Europe. This, of course, is not true for the millions of people who had lived for many centuries on this land before Mahan named its location. As Priit Vesilind says in the introduction to the National Geographic Atlas of the Middle East, “The people of the Middle East have never seen themselves as halfway to anything, but rather in the center of it all” (National Geographic 8).

The word “ethnocentrism” refers to a belief in the superiority and centrality of one’s own ethnic group. Westerners have often been ethnocentric when it comes to their view of the Middle East. The Middle East is vast, larger than the United States both in population and in area, covering approximately 3.7 million square miles with a population of 350 million people (Dudley 12). There are many reasons why the Middle East seems so often to draw the world’s attention. It is situated between the continents of Africa, Asia and Europe. As such, it is the historic crossroads of people as they move from one shore to the other. It is the place containing two-thirds of the world’s proven deposits of oil, the primary fuel of the twentieth century. It is the birthplace of the world’s main monotheistic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam. For all these reasons, the Middle East is today, and has been for thousands of years, a center of conflict around land, trade, resources and religion.



SLIDE 39

→ **Ask** the following question about slide 39.

QUESTION | **Compare these three maps. What countries do these three different maps consider to be inside and outside of the “Middle East” or “Near East”?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER | Map 1 shows the Middle East entirely in Asia, bordered by China and India to the East. It includes Pakistan and Central Asia and excludes all of Africa, including Egypt.
Map 2 includes the African countries of Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Djibouti. It includes Afghanistan in the East, but not Pakistan or the other Central Asian countries.
Map 3, “The Near East” includes all of the Arab countries of North Africa but not the African nations south of Egypt. Turkey and Afghanistan are also left off.

→ **Explain** that there is no agreement, even among scholars, about what nations should be included in the “Middle East” or “Near East.” In addition to the ethnocentric bias of the terms, there is not even agreement about their geographic meaning.

→ **Use** slide 40 to explain that this is the first lesson in a curriculum called Media Construction of the Middle East. The curriculum intends to teach about the Middle East through media literacy.

Media Construction of the Middle East
www.projectlooksharp.org
Ithaca College

SLIDE 40

→ **Use** slide 41 to review different forms of media. Explain that Project Look Sharp defines (mass) media as messages communicated through visuals, language and/or sound that are produced for a remote audience using some form of technology. Therefore, books, although ancient, are media while traditional telephones are not.

What are different forms of media?

- television, radio, movies (in theaters and on video)
- the Internet, video games, recorded music
- newspapers, magazines, comic books
- advertising in all of its forms
- bumper stickers, posters, billboards
- books (including textbooks)
- others...

SLIDE 41

→ **Use** slides 42-45 to introduce students to media literacy.

What is media literacy?
The ability to access, analyze, evaluate and produce communication in a variety of forms.

SLIDE 42

Five Key Concepts of Media Literacy

1. All media messages are “constructed.”
2. Each medium has different characteristics, strengths, and a unique “language” of construction.
3. Different people may interpret the same media message in different ways.
4. Media messages are produced for particular purposes, including profit, persuasion, education, and artistic expression.
5. Media messages have embedded values and points of view.

SLIDE 43

Six Questions to Ask About Any Media Message

1. Who made – and who sponsored – this message, and for what purpose?
2. Who is the target audience and how is the message specifically tailored to that audience?
3. What are the different techniques used to inform, persuade, entertain, and attract attention?
4. What messages are communicated (and/or implied) about certain people, places, events, behaviors, lifestyles, etc.?
5. How current, accurate and credible is the information in this message?
6. What is left out of this message that might be important to know?

SLIDE 44



SLIDE 44

FURTHER QUESTION

Spend a few moments looking at the map of the Middle East in your classroom or textbook. Given what you have learned in this lesson about point of view in maps, how would you evaluate the map in your classroom or textbook?

REFERENCES

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---."Near East." Map. <<http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/asia/neareast.htm>>

Unless otherwise noted, photographs #1 through #12 are found at these Web sites:













< <http://www.istockphoto.com> > or <<http://www.BigStockPhoto.com>>

NAME _____

DATE _____

DIRECTIONS

Select an answer for each of the photographs. Give an explanation for each of your answers.

 <p>1</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Middle East <input type="checkbox"/> No, not Middle East</p> <p>Explanation:</p>	 <p>7</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Middle East <input type="checkbox"/> No, not Middle East</p> <p>Explanation:</p>
 <p>2</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Middle East <input type="checkbox"/> No, not Middle East</p> <p>Explanation:</p>	 <p>8</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Middle East <input type="checkbox"/> No, not Middle East</p> <p>Explanation:</p>
 <p>3</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Middle East <input type="checkbox"/> No, not Middle East</p> <p>Explanation:</p>	 <p>9</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Middle East <input type="checkbox"/> No, not Middle East</p> <p>Explanation:</p>
 <p>4</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Middle East <input type="checkbox"/> No, not Middle East</p> <p>Explanation:</p>	 <p>10</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Middle East <input type="checkbox"/> No, not Middle East</p> <p>Explanation:</p>
 <p>5</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Middle East <input type="checkbox"/> No, not Middle East</p> <p>Explanation:</p>	 <p>11</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Middle East <input type="checkbox"/> No, not Middle East</p> <p>Explanation:</p>
 <p>6</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Middle East <input type="checkbox"/> No, not Middle East</p> <p>Explanation:</p>	 <p>12</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Middle East <input type="checkbox"/> No, not Middle East</p> <p>Explanation:</p>

 <p>1</p>	<p><u>X</u> Yes, Middle East These women from the country of Oman are wearing chadors. A chador is a full-length veil chosen by some Muslim women to symbolize dignity and honor.</p>	 <p>7</p>	<p><u>X</u> Yes, Middle East This is a modern shopping mall in Saudi Arabia. The Middle East is home to the oldest cities in the world but also ultra-modern development. For instance, Saudi Arabia has one of the most sophisticated telecommunications systems in the world.</p>
 <p>2</p>	<p><u>X</u> No, not Middle East Many Muslim women from outside the Middle East wear a chador as well. These women are from Brazil.</p>	 <p>8</p>	<p><u>X</u> No, not Middle East These storefronts are from Arab-owned businesses in Dearborn, Michigan. The Census Bureau counted nearly 1.2 million Arabs living in the United States in 2000, nearly double the 1980 figure. Figures for Muslims in America range from five to eight million.</p>
 <p>3</p>	<p><u>X</u> No, not Middle East The snorkelers are in Malaysia, a country in Southeast Asia where more than half the population is Muslim. They are wearing keffiyehs, headdresses often associated with Arab or Bedouin men. Islam spread throughout much of South East Asia beginning in the 7th century.</p>	 <p>9</p>	<p><u>X</u> Yes, Middle East These fishermen are from Turkey. Turkey straddles both Europe and the Middle East. Although 99% of Turkey's population is Muslim, less than 2% of Turks are Arab.</p>
 <p>4</p>	<p><u>X</u> No, not Middle East This mosque is in Dearborn, Michigan. About one third of Dearborn's population is of Arab origin. Many Muslim families originally from the Middle East have founded their own places of worship in the United States.</p>	 <p>10</p>	<p><u>X</u> Yes, Middle East These Roman ruins are in Lebanon, a country in the heart of the Middle East. Two thousand years ago, the Roman Empire united the Mediterranean world, including much of the Middle East, North Africa and Europe.</p>
 <p>5</p>	<p><u>X</u> No, not Middle East This image of a camel and his driver is from the desert in the state of Rajasthan in India. Although wild Arabian camels were originally found only in the Middle East, domesticated camels can now be found in many other parts of the world.</p>	 <p>11</p>	<p><u>X</u> Yes, Middle East This image is from Jerusalem, a sacred city for Jews, Christians and Muslims. The mosque in the background is the Dome of the Rock, the third most holy site for most Muslims, after Mecca and Medina. The Prophet Muhammad departed for his mystical journey to heaven and hell from this spot. Not far from here are Christian holy sites where Jesus lived, died and was resurrected. The wall in the foreground is the most sacred spot for Jews. The Western Wall is all that remains of the Jewish temple destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.</p>
 <p>6</p>	<p><u>X</u> Yes, Middle East This is a cotton field in Israel. Although much of the Middle East is arid with expansive deserts, there are also fertile areas with extensive agriculture.</p>	 <p>12</p>	<p><u>X</u> Yes, Middle East These modern skyscraper towers are in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, which has one of the highest standards of living in the world.</p>