



ANTI-ARAB DISCRIMINATION

What Teachers Can Do

Perhaps the most important first step is to remember to include Arab Americans and the Arab world in your multicultural curriculum. Avoid the standard laundry list -- “White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American” -- which usually includes Arab Americans as “White” but renders them culturally invisible. Persuade your colleagues and the school/district to make this a matter of policy.

One way to avoid excluding Arab Americans and the Arab world would be for the school and the school district to create an Arab-American category on data forms listing racial and ethnic categories. This would encourage educators to look Federal regulations do allow this, since such data can be re-amalgamated back into the “White” category.

The Basics

Learn— read. There is no substitute for serious study. Many excellent resources are now available. Arab history and culture is an intrinsically interesting topic. Check the book catalogues on the websites of Interlink or the Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, or contact ADC.

Reach out to the Arab-American community. Invite Arab-American parents and others to give presentations to classes; plan field trips to Arab American community institutions. Reach out to Arab-American educators. Ask ADC if there is a local ADC chapter in your community. Attend Arab-American speakers, films, forums, and community events. Develop relationships with Arab-Americans community leaders. Really “getting it” is a slow process of cultural osmosis. There is no substitute for personal contact.

Consciously integrate Arab materials into all classes at your school: American and world history, literature, music, geography, math and science history, government and democracy, sociology, current events, cooking, reading, and so forth.



Teach students to appreciate the Arab world — one of the great cultures when Europe was still a backward, under-developed region on the periphery of world civilization. Study how the efflorescence of the European later Middle Ages and Renaissance was made possible in part through trade, cultural and scientific links to Arab-Islamic civilization. Celebrate the values found in the contemporary Arab world: families ties, hospitality, ethics and morality, community. There is poverty in Cairo, for example, but little street crime or violence. The streets are safer than in many U.S. cities.

Resources: Ask the district Social Studies or Curriculum office to review, approve and purchase key educational resources recommended by ADC. Also, ADC has lesson plans, articles, bibliographies, fact sheets and other resources on its website (www.adc.org).

Check the ADC website to for the latest action alerts about Arab-American civil rights and civil liberties. Ask students to write letters of concern about anti-Arab incidents and media stereotyping.

Anti-Arab Incidents: Use incidents as learning opportunities. Anti-Arab “jokes” and epithets are common problems. This often is simply hurtful adolescent frivolity. It is a chance to bring home to students the truth that personal identity is serious, that others’ feelings matter and should be respected. The movement from frivolity to a deeper seriousness is one of the most important of all lessons.

Counteract the stereotypes which children absorb from popular culture. Teach students to recognize stereotypes. Give them an in-depth understanding of social, cultural and historical reality of the Arab world. Teach them critical thinking skills; prepare them to critique the rhetoric of the media, government officials and “experts.” This is basic preparation for responsible citizenship.

Report problems and their solutions to ADC. Let others learn from your experience.

Look at textbooks, curricula, and other resources for with a critical eye to identify bias. Review library resources. Compare the coverage of the Arab world with the coverage of other regions and civilizations. Textbook critiques prepared by the Middle East Studies Association may be



useful. Beware of student current events periodicals which sensationalize issues. Inform ADC about problems you identify. We may be able to help.

Don't avoid the Middle East conflict as "too complex" or "too controversial." The Middle East is a major part of modern world history; students need to understand the region in order to be responsible citizens.

Persuade educational officials to recognize Ramadan and other Muslim holidays; allow Muslim students time off; and/or, arrange the state and school testing schedule to avoid Islamic holidays. Remember not to order pepperoni or sausage for the class pizza party.

Write articles for educational periodicals about your experience of teaching Arab-American students or about the Arab world. ADC may be able to assist you in getting them published.

Professor James Banks has numerous books and articles envisioning a more "transformative" approach to multicultural education. See, for example, "Integrating the Curriculum with Ethnic Content: Approaches and Guidelines" in James A. Banks and Cherry A. Banks, Eds., *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1989) or "Transforming the Mainstream Curriculum" in *Educational Leadership* (May, 1994).

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