



## LESSON PLAN

# Anti-Arab Stereotypes, Discrimination, and Hate Crimes

### Objectives

- Students will learn to recognize stereotypes, discrimination, and hate crimes against Arab Americans.
- Students will learn ways in which to dispel stereotypes and prevent discrimination and hate crimes against others, particularly the Arab-American community.
- Students will have a broadened appreciation for the culture and accomplishments of the Arab-American community.

### Stereotypes: Images and Reality

**Discussion Questions:** (Write student responses on the blackboard.)

Stereotyping:

- What is a stereotype? What stereotypes might you have about another ethnic or racial group?
- Have you ever been stereotyped by someone? How did it feel?
- Do you know of any stereotypes of Arabs or Arab Americans?

Arab Americans:

- What is an Arab American?
- Do you know any Arab Americans?

Arabs in the media:

- When you hear the word “Arab” what are the first things that come to mind?
- What are the images of Arabs that we see most frequently on TV, in the movies, in books?
  - o *Make a list of images and ideas which students associate with Arabs.*
- How many positive Arab or Arab-American characters can students identify on TV, in movies?



o *Key point: Media images of Arabs focus on the sensational, the violent and the picturesque. Not on normal life.*

Views of Arabs:

- What does an “Arab” typically look like?
- What does an Arab woman look like?
- Where do Arabs live? What do their homes look like?  
*Emphasize Arab diversity.*

Arab World:

- What is the Arab world?
- Which countries are Arab countries? *Have the students name as many countries as they can.*
- How is the Arab world different from the “Middle East.” *Select several Arab countries. Ask students to tell what they know about each country.*
- What makes them distinct? What do they have in common?
- Do students have distinctive images of different countries?

*Emphasize the diversity in the Arab world. Rich and poor, urban and rural, traditional and modern, multiple religious, ethnic, and linguistic groups.*

**Exercise 1:** Hand out copies of the exercise “Identify the Arab Americans” and ask students to match names and identities. Or you may want to do this as a verbal exercise, describing the person and letting students guess the name.

**Discussion and Exercises - Dispelling common stereotypes:**

**Topic: Where do Arabs live/come from?**

*Bedouin images:*

The Bedouin image of Arabs is outdated. The Arab world has always been an urban civilization. Most Arabs live in cities, towns and villages. The Bedouin image is about as typical of Arabs as cowboys and gangsters are of Americans. Bedouins make up about 2% of the population in the Arab world.

**Topic: Geography of the Arab world**

The stereotype is deserts, camels, and oases. There are extensive desert areas, but there are also fertile coastal regions and river valleys and mountainous areas.



### **Topic: Religion**

A popular stereotype is that “All Arabs are Muslims.” But not all Arabs are Muslims, and most Muslims are not Arabs. Interestingly, the vast majority of Arab Americans are Christian.

Muslims are commonly portrayed in the media as: fundamentalists, extremists, militants, fanatics, terrorists. Or that they: cut off hands, oppress women, and declare jihad as “holy war.”

### **Topic: Epithets**

Some common slurs or misnomers directed towards Arabs are: A-rabs, camel jockeys, towel-heads, sand-niggers, “Sheik,” harem, camels, nomads, warriors, genie, magic carpet, princess, evil vizier, etc.

Palestinians:

terrorists, suicide bombers, try to “destroy Israel” and “drive the Jews into the sea.”

Good Arabs:

minor characters, passive, culturally Western, dramatically insignificant, subordinate to Western heroes, rarely the main character or action hero.

Arab Men:

Oil Sheiks, fabulously wealthy, lavish and wasteful spending, “buying up America.”

Greasy merchants, swarthy, dirty, greedy, unshaven, uneducated, dishonest, manipulative, incompetent.

Mad dictators, ruthless, violent, treacherous, barbaric, hate Jews and America, secret plots to destroy America, cruel, deceitful, hot-tempered, irrational, abduction of blond western women.

Arab Women:

Oppressed by Arab men/Islam. Confined to home, veils, head coverings, long robes; passive, uneducated, voiceless, faceless, characterless.

Luxurious harem, scantily clad belly dancers; sensuous, beautiful woman in love with Western hero who rescues her from evil Arab man.

Older women:



hysterical, artificial grief in mourning rituals.

**Exercise 2:** Ask students to name the five largest Muslim countries. *Key point: only 1 of the 8 largest is Arab.*

<u>Country</u>	<u>Population of Muslims</u>
Indonesia	205 million
Pakistan	178 million
India	177 million
Bangladesh	149 million
Egypt	80 million (Only Arab country)
Nigeria	76 million
Iran	75 million
Turkey	75 million

(Source: Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. <http://features.pewforum.org/muslim-population/>.)

United States: Estimates of the number of Muslims in the U.S. range from 2.6 million (Pew Forum) to 8 million. The most commonly cited figure is 6 million.

Arab Christians:

There are millions of Christian Arabs, which make up approximately 8-12% of the Arab population. Arab Christian communities in Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Iraq trace their history back to the time of Jesus and the apostles.

Some are eastern-rite Catholics (Maronites, Melkites). A few are Protestants. Most belong to indigenous churches that have roots in the ancient world - Orthodox, Copts and others. They are distinct from both Protestants and Catholics.

Topic: Arab women

*The “backwards” image:*

Stress the diversity of women’s experience. According to Western standards, some are more traditional; others are more modern. Many Arab women are highly educated, professional, cosmopolitan women, who pursue careers in the professions. Many traditional village women have always been actively involved in agriculture. There are Arab women who are members of parliaments, work in government agencies, and attend universities all over the Arab world.



*“All Arab (Muslim) women are oppressed. They are forced to wear a head covering:”*

Stress that not all Arab women are Muslim; and that not all Arab Muslim women wear the head covering, or hijab. In some countries ruled by Islamic law, women are required to wear the hijab. In others, they are not. Oftentimes, even in the United States, Muslim women choose to wear the hijab of their own accord.

### **Discrimination and Hate Crimes**

Like other immigrant communities, Arab Americans have been the targets of discrimination and hate crimes for many years. The atmosphere after the events of September 11th has been especially negative towards Arab Americans. Discrimination of and hate crimes against the Arab-American community increased dramatically after September 11th. Arab Americans (and Muslim Americans) have been the targets of threats, public hostility, and physical violence, specifically because they are or are thought to be Arab Americans. Such discrimination and hate crimes have taken place against Arab-American students and teachers ranging from kindergarten to the university level. The following are some examples of discrimination and hate crimes reported to the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC):

- Teachers discriminating against students by making remarks such as “[All Muslims] hate [Americans]. That’s why we will keep on killing them.” (Florida, October 15, 2001). Other teachers are reported to have verbally lashed out at Arab-American students, even telling them to go home because they were not welcome; some allowed their Arab-American students to be verbally and physically harassed by other students because of their ethnicity, not punishing or discouraging these acts of discrimination.
- Students are reported to have verbally and physically harassed Arab-American and Muslim students wearing the *hijab*, yanking their hair from beneath their covering and kicking them in the legs.
- Students are reported to have beaten up other students on the basis of their Arab origin, sometimes without any reprimand from their school officials.
- Many Arab-American and Muslim students were verbally harassed with statements that they were terrorists and responsible for the events of September 11th. They were cursed at and told to go back to their country.

In light of these events it is extremely important for non-Arab teachers and students to understand the history, culture, and diversity of the Arab-American community.



Educators should more consciously apply to Arab Americans the policies and standards that guide relations among other racial and ethnic minorities.

**Scenario:**

*Have the students discuss what to do in the following situation, identifying the stereotypes that lead to discrimination, and why these stereotypes are wrong. The class can discuss this as a whole, or they can break down into small groups that then report on their discussions to the class as a whole.*

The U.S., as in the months following September 11, finds itself in the midst of a Middle East crisis. Public hostility against Arabs is gaining in strength. There have been incidents of verbal and physical harassment and vandalism against Arab Americans in your community.

Your school has a small group of Arab-American students whose families immigrated from the Arab world. They find the atmosphere at school somewhat uncomfortable. The teachers and students do not have a very clear understanding about life in and the history of the Arab world or the traditions and culture of Arabs and Arab Americans. A small but vocal group of non-Arab students are openly hostile to the Arab Americans, whom they do not know personally. They make jokes about Arabs, camels and terrorists. They call some of the Arabs “ragheads” and say the U.S. should “flatten the Middle East because all Arabs are Muslim terrorists.” One Arab-American, Muslim girl who wears the *hijab* was physically harassed when other students ganged up on her and tore her *hijab* off her head. Another Arab-American boy was cursed at and verbally threatened with comments like, “Terrorist! Go back to your country before we kill you and your family off!” This week there have been some arguments and physical encounters (pushing, shoving, and kicking) between the two groups at recess and after school.

*Questions:*

- What should the Arab Americans do?
- What should non-Arab students do?
- What should the faculty and administration do?

*Personalize the scenario by asking if any students have ever been in a similar position, either as the discriminator or the one being discriminated against. Have the students share their stories and dialogue about practical ways in which discrimination and hate crimes can be prevented between the students in the scenario, and between each other.*

**Note:**



*In similar circumstances, some schools have encouraged teachers to lead classroom discussions about the problem, giving everyone a chance to air their feelings and engage in open discussion. Current events can be discussed, making it clear that Arab Americans are not responsible for the political events in the Middle East. Other schools have invited Arab Americans to give presentations on the Arab-American community or on the culture of the Arab world, emphasizing its positive values. Sometimes Arab food or sweets are provided and traditional Arab clothing is displayed. Also, many schools also host a “Diversity Night” or “Multicultural Week.” These events provide a forum for discussing Arab-American culture (traditions, language, religions, art, food) and values along with those of other ethnic and racial minorities in the United States.*

#### **IDENTIFY THE ARAB-AMERICANS**

Arab Americans have achieved prominence in many spheres of life as writers, humanitarians, political and business leaders, athletes, entertainers and more. Some of them are household names, yet few people are aware of their ethnic origins. Here are some of the most well-known. Try matching names with identities.

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|--|-----------------------|
| 1) Poet / philosopher / author of <i>The Prophet</i> | ___ Paula Abdul       |
| 2) 2000 Presidential candidate and consumer advocate | ___ Casey Kasem       |
| 3) Former Senate Majority Leader                     | ___ Candy Lightner    |
| 4) Singer, dancer, choreographer                     | ___ Yasmien Bleeth    |
| 5) Corporal Klinger of “M*A*S*H”                     | ___ Danny Thomas      |
| 6) Longtime Dean of the White House press corps      | ___ George Mitchell   |
| 7) Producer of “Halloween” films                     | ___ F. Murray Abraham |
| 8) Disk jockey, creator of “American Top 40”         | ___ Helen Thomas      |
| 9) White House Chief of Staff, Bush Adm.             | ___ Doug Flutie       |



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|---|-----------------------|
| 10) NFL quarterback, Heisman Trophy winner              | ___ Ralph Nader       |
| 11) Indy 500 winner, National Race Car champion         | ___ John Sununu       |
| 12) Former CEO, Ford Motor Company                      | ___ Kahlil Gibran     |
| 13) The founder of "Mothers Against Drunk Driving"      | ___ Jamie Farr        |
| 14) Actor from "Men in Black" and TV's "Monk"           | ___ Moustapha Akkad   |
| 15) Oscar for Best Supporting Actor, "Amadeus"          | ___ Jacques Nasser    |
| 16) Comedian, founder of St. Jude's Children's Hospital | ___ Bobby Rahal       |
| 17) Former co-star of Baywatch                          | ___ Selma Hayek       |
| 18) U.S. Secretary of Energy, G.W. Bush Adm.            | ___ Shannon Elizabeth |
| 19) Actress in "American Pie" and "American Pie 2"      | ___ Spencer Abraham   |
| 20) Star of "Wild Wild West," "Frida" and "Desperado"   | ___ Tony Shalhoub     |

**ANSWERS TO QUIZ**

- 1) Kahlil Gibran
- 2) Ralph Nader
- 3) George Mitchell
- 4) Paula Abdul
- 5) Jamie Farr
- 6) Helen Thomas
- 7) Moustapha Akkad
- 8) Casey Kasem
- 9) John Sununu
- 10) Doug Flutie
- 11) Bobby Rahal
- 12) Jacques Nasser
- 13) Candy Lightner
- 14) Tony Shalhoub
- 15) F. Murray Abraham
- 16) Danny Thomas
- 17) Yasmeen Bleeth
- 18) Spencer Abraham
- 19) Shannon Elizabeth





20) Selma Hayek