



Teaching the Middle East: A Resource for High School Educators

The Question of Identity: Ethnicity, Language, Religion, and Gender, Before Islam - Part I: Diversity and Pluralism

Orit Bashkin, Assistant Professor of Modern Middle Eastern History,
University of Chicago

Lesson Plan 1: Women and Family in the Islamic World

General Description of Lesson Plan: Students will read selections from the Qur'an and a *New York Times* article on women in Islam, and speculate about why the Qur'an was revolutionary in its provisions for women when it was revealed, as well as why many parts of the Islamic world are often seen as backward in their treatment of women.

Created By: Laura Wangerin, Latin School of Chicago, Chicago, IL

Subject Area(s): History, Social Studies

For Grade Level(s): 7-10

Time Needed: 1 class period and 1 night's homework, or $\frac{1}{2}$ class period and 2 night's homework, or two class periods.

Outcomes/Objectives:

Research: Students will develop primary source analysis skills. Students will evaluate current news articles for bias.

Historic Understanding: Students will better understand the historic and modern place of women and family in the Islamic world.

Current Issues: Students will better understand how societies' attitudes and cultures are a part of their history, and why it is so hard for culture to change.

Materials:

The Qur'an:
EITHER Sura 4:1-26 (from your favorite translation of the Qur'an or from Qur'an Explorer <http://www.quranexplorer.com/>)

OR Selections on Women (from Sura 2 "The Cow" and Sura 4 "The Women"):
<http://web.archive.org/web/20001205120700/www.humanities.ccny.cuny.edu/history/reader/koranonwomen.htm>

Teaching the Middle East: A Resource for High School Educators

Lesson Plan 1: Women and Family in the Islamic World

Marlise Simons, "Cry of Muslim Women for Equal Rights Is Rising," *New York Times*, March 9, 1998:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20060209091603/www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/genislam.htm>

Suggested Procedure(s):

Before beginning, reinforce with your students that Islam is a family-oriented religion, and that not all parts of the Islamic world adhere to a conservative Qur'anic law (Turkey for example). Read (either as a class or as homework) the Qur'anic verses and the *New York Times* article linked above. Organize a class discussion around the following questions on the article and the Qur'an; assign the last critical thinking questions ("Putting it all together") as a homework exercise.

Marlise Simons, "Cry of Muslim Women for Equal Rights Is Rising," *New York Times*, March 9, 1998:

1. What modern social issues can you find in this article that are linked to Islamic law? Be specific in listing issue and cause.
2. How do the examples cited in the article compare to situations in the West? For example, if a husband repudiated his wife in Great Britain or the United States, how would his obligations and responsibilities to his wife and children be different than what the article describes?
3. What stereotypes about the Islamic world are reinforced by stories like the examples related in the article?

Qur'an, either Sura 4: 1-26 from your favorite translation of the Qur'an or from Qur'an Explorer <http://www.quranexplorer.com/>, or Selections on Women (from Sura 2 "The Cow" and Sura 4 "The Women"):

1. One of the interesting things about the Qur'an is that although it is mainly doctrinal in nature, it refers or relates directly to a lot of things that were current social issues at the time of Muhammad. Looking at these passages critically, what might you infer were some of these social issues relating to women and family based on these passages?
2. What would you infer was the position of women in the society that created this document?
3. How might these passages have been perceived as liberating for seventh century Middle Eastern women?
4. How might these commandments have served as a necessary and important social safety net in the Islamic world from the seventh century until the modern era?

Teaching the Middle East: A Resource for High School Educators

Lesson Plan 1: Women and Family in the Islamic World

Putting it all together:

1. The article mentions that many of these family laws used throughout the Islamic world are based on a literal reading of the Qur'an and commentary from the Middle Ages. What are some of the problems of applying gender and family laws created 1000-1400 years ago to twenty-first century social situations?
2. Compare the issues listed in the article about the situation of many women in the Islamic world today with the commandments of the Qur'an. Are these actions supported by the Qur'anic verses you read, or not?
3. One of the biggest problems in many parts of the modern Islamic world is a reaction against Westernization. What would have to change in these areas with regards to CULTURE and ATTITUDES toward rights of men, rights of women and children, and the idea of family? Why would these changes be perceived as a threat to their religion and lifestyle?

If a Westernized nation was asked to change its CULTURE and ATTITUDES to those examined in the *New York Times* article, how would its people react? How would YOU react? Why is it so hard to change ideas and worldviews?

Evaluation/Assessment Strategies:

Students should not be evaluated so much on whether their ideas are right or wrong, but focus should be on drawing reasonable conclusions about the meaning of the documents. Look for the depth to which students were willing to wrangle with the issues. Teachers should indicate to students where their logic may be flawed, but it should be reinforced that they can make good inferences about these kinds of documents even with limited background in these areas.

Use these guiding questions to spur discussion in your classroom:

1. What are some of the problems of applying gender and family laws created 1000-1400 years ago to 21st-century social situations?
2. Why is it so hard to change ideas and worldviews?
3. What stereotypes about the Islamic world are reinforced when we only hear about the bad things that happen in Islamic societies? How might this reinforce a false sense of superiority in Westernized nations?

Teaching the Middle East: A Resource for High School Educators

Lesson Plan 1: Women and Family in the Islamic World

Evaluation Rubric:

Analyzing Information: Women and Family in the Islamic World

Teacher Name:

Student Name: _____

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Identifies Important Information	Student identifies all the main points of the sources.	The student identifies most of the main points of the sources.	The student identifies some of the main points of the sources.	The student cannot identify important information.
Identifies Details	Student recalls several details in discussion to support their ideas without referring to the article.	Student recalls several details in discussion to support their ideas, but needs to refer to the article, occasionally.	Student is able to locate most of the details they need to support their ideas in discussion, when looking at the article.	Student cannot locate or discuss details with accuracy.
Critical Analysis	Student is able to infer meaning and draw meaningful conclusions from the sources.	Student is able to infer meaning but has difficulty drawing conclusions.	Student has difficulty inferring meaning, but understands the literal meaning of texts.	Student has difficulty understanding the literal meaning of the texts.
Completion of Homework Questions	Student thoughtfully answered questions in complete sentences, using examples to support his/her ideas.	Student thoughtfully answered homework questions in complete sentences.	Student answered questions, but answers were incomplete or not in complete sentences.	Student did not answer all questions, or answers did not address what the questions asked for.