



## Teaching the Middle East: A Resource for High School Educators

### Writing and Literature, Islamic Period

Michael Sells, John Henry Barrows Professor of Islamic History and Literature, Divinity School, The University of Chicago

#### Lesson Plan 1:

#### Religion and the Written Word in Islamdom and Christendom

**General Description of Lesson Plan:** Expository essays on the connection between religious texts, cultural homogeneity, heterogeneity, and political influence.

**Created By:** Peter M. Scheidler, Kenwood Academy High School, Chicago, IL

**Subject Area(s):** History, Religious Studies, and Geography

**For Grade Level(s):** 10–12

**Time Needed:** Three class days - one day to assign and discuss the project, one day for discussions of the reading, (which is rather dense for this age group,) and one day for discussion of student responses.

**Outcomes/Objectives:** Students will reflect on the influence of shared language and belief systems, and how these cultural attributes extend to political influence.

**Materials:** None needed.

**Suggested Procedure(s):** Students should be told they have two days to submit 2-3 double-spaced typed pages in response to four specific essay questions related to an article they will be reading.

**Evaluation/Assessment Strategies:** Students may be asked to show the notes from their assigned reading, or informal assessment may be used instead. The rubric that is provided for this plan is specific to the final paper.

#### Lesson Plan:

Students are to read Michael Sells' module, *Middle Eastern Literature: The Islamic Period*. (<http://teachmiddleeast.lib.uchicago.edu/historical-perspectives/writing-and-literature/islamic-period/index.html>) They should then tackle the following questions, answering each with a paragraph or two. These are to be rather long, sophisticated paragraphs covering at least half of a typed page each.

# Teaching the Middle East: A Resource for High School Educators

## Lesson Plan 1: Religion and the Written Word in Islamdom and Christendom

1. Examine the following image, and compose an original paragraph that relates to the scene depicted. Accurately use the terms **Qur'an**, **Hadith**, and **Naj al Balagha** in your work.



2. Look for the description of the above image at the end of Sells' module (image #3), and relate the content of that description to the development of the European Renaissance.
3. The following is an excerpt from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vulgate>, a Wikipedia article on the *Vulgate*; a Latin translation of the Bible produced by St. Jerome about 400 CE:  
In terms of its importance to the culture, art, and life of the Middle Ages, the Vulgate stands supreme. Through the Middle Ages and onto the Renaissance and Reformation, St. Jerome's monumental work stood as a last pillar of Roman glory and the bedrock of the Latin Church as it strove to unite a fractured Europe through the Catholic faith. As the version of the Bible familiar to and read by the faithful for over a thousand years (c. 400–1530 CE), the Vulgate exerted a powerful influence, especially in art and music, as it served as inspiration for countless paintings, hymns and popular religious plays.

Consider the above text with the assertions of Dr. Sells regarding the Qur'an, and comment on the impact of the fusion of religion and language on art, culture and politics in Christendom and Islamdom, respectively. Note the time periods involved in the above and in Dr. Sells's article.

# Teaching the Middle East: A Resource for High School Educators

## Lesson Plan 1: Religion and the Written Word in Islamdom and Christendom

4. Closely examine two maps available at <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Muslims-en.jpg> and [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Age\\_of\\_Caliphs.png](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Age_of_Caliphs.png) and comment on the shift in the population of the Muslim world from the second century AH to the present.

### Evaluation Rubric:

<b>Writing Rubric Content and Conventions: The Expansion and Influence of Muslim Literature 600-1600 CE</b>				
<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Content: FOCUS</b>	Topic/subject is clear, though it may/may not be explicitly stated.	Topic/subject is generally clear though it may not be explicitly stated.	Topic/subject may be vague.	Topic/subject is unclear or confusing.
<b>Content: ORGANIZATION</b>	Organizational structure establishes relationship between/among ideas/events.	Organizational structure establishes relationships between ideas/events, although minor lapses may be present.	Organizational structure establish some relationship between/among some of the ideas/events. The structure is minimally complete.	Organizational structure does not establish connection between/among ideas/events. The overall structure is incomplete or confusing.
<b>Content: STYLE - Vocabulary</b>	Exhibits skillful use of vocabulary that is precise and purposeful	Exhibits reasonable use of vocabulary that is precise and purposeful.	Exhibits minimal use of vocabulary that is precise and purposeful.	Lacks use of vocabulary that is precise and purposeful.
<b>Conventions</b>	Conventions scale is 0-2 -->	Conventions scale is 0-2 -->	Exhibits REASONABLE CONTROL of grammatical conventions appropriate to the writing task: sentence formation; standard usage including agreement, tense, and case; and mechanics including use of capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.	Exhibits MINIMAL CONTROL of grammatical conventions appropriate to the writing task: sentence formation; standard usage including agreement, tense, and case; and mechanics including use of capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.
<b>Content: STYLE - Sentence Fluency</b>	Demonstrates skillful sentence fluency (varies length, good flow rhythm, and varied structure).	Demonstrates reasonable sentence fluency.	Demonstrates minimal sentence fluency.	Sentence fluency is lacking.

# **Teaching the Middle East: A Resource for High School Educators**

## **Lesson Plan 1: Religion and the Written Word in Islamdom and Christendom**

### **Use these guiding questions to spur discussion in your classroom:**

1. Which institutions facilitated the change from an oral tradition to a written one?
2. What concerns are associated with the translation of religious texts?
3. What resources and innovations help to facilitate the dissemination of knowledge and beliefs? Consider factors relevant to the modern world and those that were relevant several centuries ago.