

Rethinking The Region: New Approaches To 9-12 U.S. Curriculum On The Modern Middle East And North Africa

Dear Educators,

In the following pages, you will find 15 lesson plans (with appended and accompanying resources) to help US World History high school educators teach about the Middle East and North Africa in their classrooms. Born out of a need to contextualize the MENA region in a more nuanced manner, we grounded the project with a rigorous process of US World History textbook analysis and review, which subsequently served as a springboard for the curriculum design. In particular, we wanted to analyze how peoples and societies interacted collaboratively and fluidly at different political and historical junctures, and integrate this analysis into vibrant curricula for high school teachers. We find this critical analysis and subsequent curricular intervention particularly important in the current political milieu, when mainstream media often simplifies complex histories and identities of this region, exacerbating difference and ‘Otherness’ in ways that do not accurately reflect the MENA region in all its complexity.

While the Executive Summary explains the project more fully, we engaged in an intensive analysis of the most commonly used World History textbooks in US high school classrooms, and then shared these analyses with other researchers and experts in MENA History and Studies in the U.S. and in the Middle East. In consultation with the scholars, we synthesized and integrated new scholarship on the region, using this material to generate curricula, web-based materials, and study guides.

We framed our curriculum around the following themes: **Women and Gender, Plural Identities, Political and Social Movements, Empire and Nation, and Arts and Technology**. We chose these themes because they are often framed incompletely and reductively in the textbooks and we wanted to generate lessons and curricula that integrate the multiplicity and diversity of experiences and realities. The lessons—drawing heavily on primary source materials—were generated in specific response to the findings and are aligned with the Common Core Standards. These lessons can be taught sequentially or can stand alone, even within each theme, if a teacher chooses to do so. In this sense, they are designed for teachers to be able to choose when they want to pause and delve in more depth on a particular theme or topic, while still adhering to the state curriculum. We also attempted to use open source and web-based materials for many of the sources. In the event that something has been taken off the web, we hope that the references and titles provided will enable teachers to find the resources elsewhere.

In approaching the curricula, we not only wanted to illuminate how peoples and societies interacted in collaborative and fluid ways, but also how ordinary people were agents in shaping their own trajectories. Given the present political context in which the region and its peoples are demonized and misrepresented, this research and curriculum is necessary and urgent. Our textbook analysis reiterated the simplistic ways in which this denigration happens in that particular medium, and our curriculum is meant to interrupt some of the reductive narratives that proliferate.

We are truly excited to share these lessons with you, and feel they embody creativity, cultural responsiveness, and nuanced approaches to teaching more completely about the region.

Please feel free to contact us at info@teach-mena.org with questions, concerns, and feedback, as well as to inquire about possibilities for further workshops/trainings.

Sincerely,

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