

RETHINKING THE REGION:

New Approaches to 9-12 U.S. Curriculum on the Middle East and North Africa

UNIT:

ARTS AND TECHNOLOGY

TOPIC

Arabic Music Across Time and Space

LESSON OVERVIEW	<p>Students will listen to two popular pieces of music by Egyptian musician and composer Sayed Darwish (1892-1923) and examine the lyrics to the songs. Students will explore the social, political, and economic context of his artistic production, in particular, the period surrounding the Egyptian Revolution of 1919. They will learn that Sayed Darwish’s many songs have since been reinterpreted and performed by countless musicians from different countries of MENA and elsewhere over the last century. These songs have been translated into various genres of music including, more recently, hip-hop, techno, and hard rock. Widely known across the region, Darwish’s songs are performed by the region’s most notable artists as often as they are sung at family and other informal social gatherings. Students will reflect on what makes particular pieces of music transcend time and space and how music has been used in MENA as a medium for social and political engagement. They will also consider the use of popular oral sources as primary material in historical research.</p>
ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do lyrics convey the social, political, and/or economic conditions or viewpoints from a particular historical period? • How is musical expression shaped by a particular historical moment? What makes it transcend time and space? • How can popular music be used as primary source material in historical research? What might it allow us to learn that other primary source material might obscure?
LESSON OBJECTIVES	<p><u>Learners will be able to</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore music as a forum where social, political, and/or economic

	<p>conditions, ideas, and viewpoints have been, and continue to be, discussed and engaged in the Middle East and North Africa.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the nature and types of sources used by historians to examine social, political, and/or economic conditions, ideas, or viewpoints of a particular period. • Consider popular oral primary source material, such as lyrics, as significant sources for historical research.
STANDARDS	<p><u>Common Core Standards</u></p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2 Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4 Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5 Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9 Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.10 Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.</p> <p>(Optional assignment) CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7 Conduct short as well as</p>

more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

(Optional assignment) CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

(Optional assignment) CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

New York State Standards

Learning Standards for the Arts:

Standard 3, Music: 3. Students will demonstrate the capacity to listen to and comment on music. They will relate their critical assertions about music to its aesthetic, structural, acoustic, and psychological qualities. Students will use concepts based on the structure of music's content and context to relate music to other broad areas of knowledge. They will use concepts from other disciplines to enhance their understanding of music.

Standard 4, Music: 4. Students will develop a performing and listening repertoire of music of various genres, styles, and cultures that represent the peoples of the world and their manifestations in the United States. Students will recognize the cultural features of a variety of musical compositions and performances and understand the functions of music within the culture.

Learning Standards for Social Studies:

Performance Indicators Students will:

Standard 2, Key Idea 1

- Analyze historic events from around the world by examining accounts written from different perspectives
- Understand the broad patterns, relationships, and interactions of cultures and civilizations during particular eras and across eras
- Analyze changing and competing interpretations of issues, events, and developments throughout world history

	<p><u>Standard 2, Key Idea 2</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze evidence critically and demonstrate an understanding of how circumstances of time and place influence perspective Explain the importance of analyzing narratives drawn from different times and places to understand historical events Investigate key events and developments and major turning points in world history to identify the factors that brought about change and the long-term effects of these changes <p><u>Standard 2, Key Idea 3</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze the roles and contributions of individuals and groups to social, political, economic, cultural, and religious practices and activities Explain the dynamics of cultural change and how interactions between and among cultures has affected various cultural groups throughout the world Examine the social/cultural, political, economic, and religious norms and values of Western and other world cultures <p><u>Standard 2, Key Idea 4</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interpret and analyze documents and artifacts related to significant developments and events in world history Analyze different interpretations of important events, issues, or developments in world history by studying the social, political, and economic context in which they were developed by testing the data source for reliability and validity, credibility, authority, authenticity, and completeness; and by detecting bias, distortion of the facts, and propaganda by omission, suppression, or invention of facts (Taken from National Standards for World History)
MATERIALS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Computer with Internet access and speakers to play two songs by Sayed Darwish: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> “El Helwa Di” (“This Beautiful One”), sung by beloved Lebanese diva Fairuz: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Xrr1bgzbUw (2:47 min.) “Aho Da Li Sar” (“This Is What Happened”), sung by Egyptian singer

	<p>and actor Ali El Haggar: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XTTSUDRf5TQ (3:50 min.) NB: These songs are widely available and can also be downloaded and played using other audio technology. If available, the use of a projector for the second song would allow students to view images from the 2011 Egyptian Revolution.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handout 1: Lyrics to “El Helwa Di” (one copy per student). • Handout 2: Lyrics to “Aho Da Li Sar” (one copy per student). • Optional supplementary material: Biographical sketch of Sayed Darwish and/or article “Egyptians campaign for independence, 1919-1922” from the Global Nonviolent Action Database. Links to both texts are available under Additional Resources below.
<p>NOTES TO TEACHER</p>	<p><u>Lesson pairing</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This lesson can be used as part of a unit of study on imperialism, specifically in studying the British Empire during the early part of the 20th century, including the Egyptian Revolution of 1919. The lesson can also be paired with the units on Empire and Nation and on Political and Social Movements in this curricular resource guide. Where a school music program is available, teachers may consider partnering with a music teacher for cross-disciplinary thematic instruction. <p><u>Note on the song lyrics</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sayed Darwish partnered with lyricist Badie Khairy for several of his songs, including the two presented in this lesson. Importantly, unlike the custom of the period, the songs are performed in a distinctly Egyptian variety of colloquial Arabic, regardless of whether they are sung in Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia, or New York. This is an oral and popular form of the Arabic language. • Social, political, and economic context is important to understanding the songs. “El Helwa Di” describes an early morning in Egypt as day laborers rise to go to work. Some have described it as embodying the optimism of the poor; others interpret the lyrics as having a hint of irony. “Aho Da Li Sar” speaks more directly to the political situation, namely, frustrations with British occupation. It was written just before the nonviolent revolution of 1919 and has been interpreted as a revolutionary song. As primary source material, popular lyrics from this period reveal that anticolonial ideas and

	<p>sentiments were in circulation among people from various classes, regions, and backgrounds and were not just the domain of the intellectual elite.</p> <p><u>Note on the artist</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sayed Darwish has been considered the “people’s artist.” His music constitutes a shift away from music that was created for the “elite” to popular audiences. Some would suggest that the magnitude of his contributions has been largely overlooked. A brief biographical sketch is available under Additional Resources below and may be used in conjunction with this lesson. His music has maintained its relevance for other peoples in the region in various eras, and has been reinterpreted and performed by many notable artists within and outside the MENA region. His music was sung at the mass protests in Tahrir Square in Cairo during the 2011 Egyptian Revolution.
<p>PROCEDURE</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>Introducing the lesson (5 minutes)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce the essential questions and lesson activity by saying that you will be exploring popular music as a forum where social, political, and/or economic conditions, ideas, and viewpoints have been, and continue to be, discussed and engaged in MENA. • Divide the class into groups of 2-4 students each. • Tell students that you are going to play an excerpt of music for them by an Egyptian composer from the early 20th century. Ask them to listen for musicality, tone, rhythm, and expression. While they are listening, they should consider the following questions: What might the artist be feeling or singing about? What makes them think so? 2. <u>Warm-up activity (5 minutes)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to the first segment of the song “El Helwa Di” (through 0:41 min.). • Discussion: What might the artist be feeling or singing about? What makes you think so? (Note: some students may notice the sound of the rooster “cou cou cou cou” and rightly suggest that the song might be about morning time.) From the musicality, tone, rhythm, and expression, do you think this is an upbeat or optimistic song? Consider taking a quick class survey by having students put their thumbs up if they think it is upbeat or

optimistic, down if they think it is downbeat, sad, or pessimistic, or sideways if they are not sure or consider it to be neither upbeat nor downbeat.

3. **Small-group work (30 minutes)**

- Distribute Handout 1 to each student, containing the lyrics to the song “El Helwa Di.” Explain to students that the song was written by Sayed Darwish in the early part of the 20th century.
- Give students 10-12 minutes to read and discuss the lyrics in their groups and to take notes in response to the guiding questions on their sheets. (Optional: Play the song again. This time ask students to follow along with the lyrics.)
- Distribute Handout 2 to each student, containing the lyrics to the song “Aho Da Li Sar.” Explain that this song was also written by Sayed Darwish and dates from the 1919 Egyptian Revolution. Play the song and ask students to follow by reading the lyrics in English.
- Give students another 10-12 minutes to read and discuss the lyrics in their groups and to take notes in response to the guiding questions on their sheets.
- Optional (Additional 10 mins): Distribute supplementary material on Sayed Darwish and/or the 1919 Egyptian Revolution. Ask students to brainstorm and map what was happening at the time in the region.

4. **Class discussion (10 minutes)**

- Facilitate a discussion around the following questions. (Alternative: Give one question for each group to tackle and present to the larger group.)
 - a. What do the lyrics of the two songs convey about the social, political, and economic conditions or viewpoints in Egypt at the beginning of the 20th century?
 - b. Explain to students that songs like “Aho Da Li Sar” have become anthems across multiple generations and peoples in the MENA region, and Sayed Darwish has been called “the voice of the people.” Why do you think this is? What is an anthem? (Oxford Dictionaries defines *anthem* as “a rousing or uplifting song identified with a particular group, body, or cause.”) Why might these songs appeal to people across the

MENA region? Across time?

- c. Given what you discerned from his songs about the social, political, and economic conditions of the early 20th century, why do you think protesters in Cairo’s Tahrir Square sang Sayed Darwish’s songs during the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, almost a century after they were written?
- d. Other sounds of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution included rap and hip-hop. In your view, what do these genres have in common with Sayed Darwish’s music?

5. Questions for further reflection/Connections to today

- Historical sources: Historians have generally privileged written and “official” or “elite” sources, at the expense of popular and oral sources, to examine particular phenomena, whether for ideological reasons (e.g., the belief that these sources are more “accurate”) or for practical reasons (e.g., these sources may be easier to access, or they have been better preserved). How does the choice of sources shape the ways that history is narrated? How might the examination of popular and oral sources (e.g., the lyrics of popular songs, poetry in colloquial Arabic, etc.) help to reveal alternative and multiple viewpoints or experiences of a given period? How might it provide insights into the movement of ideas, across time and space? Into shared experience?
- Multicultural connection: (1) Ask students to identify or research a musician from their own background, or a musical tradition with which they are familiar, whose music has transcended time and space and/or whose lyrics address social, political, and economic conditions of a particular period of time. Or (2) ask students to research contemporary Arab hip-hop, Khaleeji, or Rai artists. What social-political issues do their lyrics convey? How do these relate to youth concerns in the United States? How do they reflect a sense of shared past? (Consider screening *Sling Shot Hip Hop* as a jumping off point for a discussion on hip-hop). Or (3) ask students to compose a stanza of lyrics that convey their feelings about social, political, or economic concerns.
- Sayed Darwish’s legacy: Have students search online for contemporary versions of the songs they heard in class. How many performance artists or musical genres (e.g., hip-hop, jazz, techno, hard rock, dance interpretations, etc.) can they identify for a given song? Which rendition appeals to them the most and why?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More on Arabic music: (1) Have students explore the website Afropop Worldwide, which features music across Africa (see link under Additional Resources below). (2) Have students explore the Foundation for Arab Music Archiving and Research website to learn more about the region’s musicians in historical perspective (see link under Additional Resources below).
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES	<p>Sayed Darwish:</p> <p>Lagrange, F. “Shaykh Sayed Darwish (1892-1923).” <i>Artistes Arabes Associés AAA 096 Les Archives de la Musique Arabe</i>. 1994. http://almashriq.hiof.no/egypt/700/780/sayed-darweesh/. A brief biographical sketch.</p> <p>Serene, A. “Sayid Darwish: Voice of the people.” <i>Al Akhbar</i>. 2011. http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/2858. This article discusses Sayed Darwish’s relevance to protests in Cairo’s Tahrir Square during the 2011 Revolution.</p> <p>Kelani, R. “Songs for Tahrir: What makes a composer a legend? And what makes a revolt a revolution?” BBC. 2012. http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/radio4/2012/01/songs_for_tahrir_what_makes_a.html. This article includes a link to the radio program “Songs for Tahrir.”</p> <p>Music in MENA:</p> <p>Foundation for Arab Music Archiving and Research: http://www.amar-foundation.org. This is an excellent resource for learning about Arab musicians and their contributions. It includes an interactive timeline, biographical sketches of musicians and their contributions (including original sound bites), and historical documents and podcasts.</p> <p>Afropop Worldwide: http://www.afropop.org. This website features posts and video and audio programs, including on various types of North African music.</p> <p>Maira, S. & Shihade, M. “Hip-Hop from ‘48 Palestine: Youth, Music, and the Present/Absent.” <i>Social Text</i>. 2012. http://www.socialtextjournal.org/blog/2012/11/hip-hop-from-48-palestine-youth-music-and-the-presentabsent.php. This research-based article and multimedia supplement provides an</p>

overview of the Palestinian hip-hop scene inside Israel.

Egyptian Revolution of 1919:

Bisgaard-Church, E. "Egyptians campaign for independence, 1919-1922." *Global Nonviolent Action Database*. 2011.

<http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/egyptians-campaign-independence-1919-1922>.

This resource provides a snapshot of the nonviolent revolution of 1919 that can be used in class to supplement this lesson.

Films:

Abol Naga, Khaled and Abdallah, Ahmed. *Microphone*. 2010.

<http://www.microphone-film.com/>.

This award winning feature film looks at the underground art scene in Alexandria, Egypt.

Sling Shot Hip Hop. 2008. <http://www.slingshothiphop.com/>.

This highly acclaimed documentary looks at the lives and artistic production of several of Palestine's top hip-hop artists living in Gaza, the West Bank, and Israel, the challenges they face and how they use their music to transcend the social, political, and economic boundaries and conditions imposed by occupation.