



Duke-UNC Consortium for Middle East Studies Outreach Program

Ideas for Teaching about the Diversity of the Middle East

The Middle East is oftentimes discussed as if it were one monolithic bloc. On the contrary, the Middle East is rich in diversity with a variety of religions, ethnicities, languages, and more. These activities attempt to celebrate the diversity of the Middle East, broadening perspectives of the region and presenting the region as one that is more than conflict. The ideas below can be used to teach about the Middle East in conjunction with current events, world history, or integrated throughout the school year to ensure student understanding of the region.

For other links on teaching about the diversity of the Middle East and numerous additional topics, visit the Middle East Consortium's Website with Teaching Resources at: <http://ncmideast.org/outreach/teaching/>.

Is this the Middle East? Photo Activity

As a warm up activity, show your students a variety of photos that may or may not depict the Middle East (for example, on [this PowerPoint](#) by the Consortium slides 3-19). First, show the images one by one and ask students to write down whether or not they think each one shows the Middle East. Then, go back through the photos and reveal where they are actually taken.

As a class, discuss the following:

- Which photos surprised you? Why?
- What kinds of images do we usually associate with the Middle East?
- How do these images expand our understanding of the Middle East?



Exploring Religious Diversity

The Middle East contains much religious diversity. The Middle East is the birthplace of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, all monotheistic religions that grew from the same Abrahamic tradition. In addition to the large Jewish population in Israel, there are also significant Christian and small Jewish communities throughout the region. It is important to remember that "Arab" and "Muslim" are not synonymous; many Arabs follow different faiths and live all over the world. There are Christian Arabs and Jewish Arabs living in the Middle East. Muslims are also found all over the world, with the largest population in Indonesia. Only about 18% of Muslims are Arabs.

- Have your students read "Religion in the cultures of the Middle East" from PBS Global Connections to learn more about the religions found in the Middle East: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/themes/culture/>.
- As individuals or in small groups, ask students to research different prominent places of worship for different religions and either write about their research, or create a final creative product such as a poster. Examples could be St. Thaddeus Monastery in Iran, the Maronite Church of Saidet et Tallé in Lebanon, Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, Sardis Synagogue in Turkey, Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, Umayyad Mosque in Syria, etc.

Exploring Geographic Diversity

Assign students a country, region, or geographical feature in the Middle East. Examples could include Arabian Desert, Zagros Mountains (Iran, Iraq), Hindu Kush Mountains (Pakistan), Taurus Mountains (Turkey), Anatolian Plateau (Turkey), Persian Gulf, Jordan River, Forest of the Cedars of God (Lebanon), Cappadocia (Turkey), etc. Instruct students to design a postcard that depicts the uniqueness of this geographical feature.

Final postcards should:

- Include visuals such as art work, pictures, symbols, etc. that represent the geography
- Contain text or phrases that teach or interest the viewer regarding the location
- Be creative, colorful, and show that that the creator put forth thought, time, and effort into the design
- Extension Activities: Have students write a note to someone on the back of the postcard, describing their visit to this location and the activities they completed there.
- Create a Gallery Walk with the postcards. Texts should be displayed “gallery-style” - in a way that allows students to disperse themselves around the room. Ask them to take informal notes about what they see around the room. As a class, discuss what you learned.



Exploring Linguistic/Ethno-Linguistic Diversity

There are many different languages spoken in the Middle East today. We often think of this ethnic and linguistic diversity as a source of conflict. However throughout history, this multicultural variety was a source of great intellectual prosperity and cultural exchange.

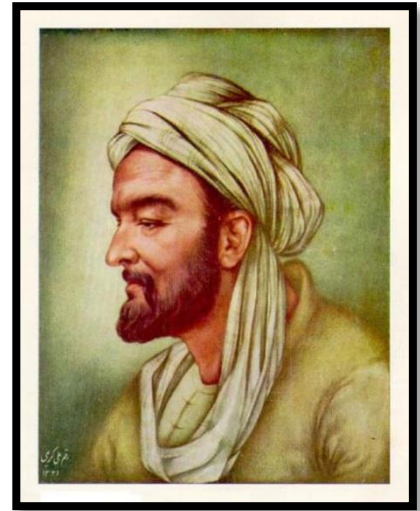
- Send students on an investigation to find all of the languages spoken in the Middle East. They will be excited and amazed by the languages that they have never heard of.
- Have students listen to pop music in these different languages so that they can hear the differences and similarities in the way they sound. For example, select music in Turkish, Persian, Armenian, Arabic, Hebrew, and Kurdish. Ask students to record their impressions of the music, or you can create a graphic organizer for students to complete as they listen to the music. Ask students to
 - What is the tonality of the language? Does it sound familiar to you?
 - What adjectives can you use to describe the way the language sounds?
 - What do you know about the people who speak this language? Where do they live?
 - What alphabet does this language use? What does it look like?
 - Are there any English cognates that you recognize? (words that sound the same or are similar)

The Adventures of Ibn Battuta on Google Maps

Ibn Battuta was a Moroccan Muslim scholar and traveler who traveled over 75,000 miles throughout the Islamic World in the 14th century. The stories of his travels are an excellent way to have your students adventure through the Middle East and explore the diversity of the region. His extensive travels demonstrate that the concept of a region called the “Middle East” is a relatively recent and unstable construction. Since the term was first coined at the beginning of the 20th century, it has been applied to different sets of countries and territories. To complicate matters further, territories which have at times been categorized as “Middle East”

have also attracted other designations: Near East, western Asia, eastern Mediterranean, the Arab world, and so on. These designations all represent different ways of conceptualizing what these territories have in common and how they relate to other parts of the world. Upon returning to Morocco, Ibn Battuta dictated his story to a scribe, who wrote the account in a classical narrative style, published as *The Rihla* (journey). Additional resources about Ibn Battuta can be found at:

<http://ibnbattuta.berkeley.edu/resources.html>.



- The Office of Resources for International Affairs and Area Studies at UC Berkeley has created a website/timeline of Ibn Battuta's journey: <http://ibnbattuta.berkeley.edu/index.html>. As homework, ask students to read through this Virtual Tour and answer comprehension questions such as those below.
 - What was Ibn Battuta's reason for embarking on his travels?
 - What did he hope to accomplish? Did he accomplish it?
 - What are three things that he learned during his journey?
 - Where did he travel? Why?
 - Who did he meet along the journey?
 - Were there any challenges on the journey?
- Ask students to compare the travels of Ibn Battuta with other explorers such as Marco Polo, Lewis and Clark, etc. Have students research each explorer, or complete a jigsaw activity in which students are assigned into groups to discover information about the explorers and answer comprehension questions such as those listed above.
- Ask students to research parts of Ibn Battuta's adventure using Google Maps. Students should:
 - Sign in to Google and open Google Maps
 - In the top left, click the Menu icon (part of the Search bar)
 - Click Maps
 - Click Create Map
 - Search Locations
 - Create Markers

On their maps, students should include 5-10 sites that Ibn Battuta visited on his journey. Ask students to write a paragraph about each location from a historical or contemporary viewpoint (or compare and contrast both!). Students should attach at least one image with each site. Successful maps will:

- Include at least 5 sites where Ibn Battuta traveled on his journey
- Include appropriate visuals such as pictures that represent each location
- Contain text that teach the reader about the location
- Demonstrate the diversity of the Middle East by including locations that speak different languages and have different cultures
- Be creative and show that that the creator put forth thought, time, and effort into the project

For questions regarding these ideas or additional information, contact Emma Harver, Program/Outreach Coordinator for the [Duke-UNC Consortium for Middle East Studies](http://duke-unc-consortium.org): harver@email.unc.edu.