



Ideas for Teaching about WWI and the Middle East

The aftermath of World War I transformed the Middle East. The Ottoman Empire, with its rich linguistic, religious and ethnic variety, was divided into a collection of small states, each with its own ruling group under the control of European powers. These new economic, social, and political realities continue to influence the region to the present day. Postwar borders and states are being contested today more than at any time over the past century, as groups like al-Qaeda seek to redefine membership and ISIS/Daesh works to reconfigure the regional map. These classroom activities explore the legacies of WWI in the Middle East.

The End of the War

Brief description: In this lesson, students will become familiar with the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence, the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and their continued legacies in the Middle East. Students will creatively write letters to Emir Faisal before he attends that Paris Peace Conference to express their wishes for an independent Arab state.

Objectives: Students will be able to explain differences between the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence, the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and the requests of Emir Faisal at the Paris Peace Conference.

Students will analyze the discrepancies of the promises made to the Arabs and the Western nations.

Students will use their knowledge to compose an original letter.

Materials Needed: Primary source documents: Letter from Henry McMahon to Sharif Hussein and Sykes-Picot agreement, Maps

In preparation for this lesson, teachers should provide background information on why the British entered into discussions with the Arabs. Explain that many British officers believed that an Arab revolt against the Ottomans would ruin the Empire and give Britain an advantage in the war. As a result, Sir Henry McMahon of Britain and Sharif Hussein entered into negotiations. Students should have a basic understanding of WWI.

Step 1: Explain that the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence refers to letters between Sir Henry McMahon of Britain and Sharif Hussein, the ruler of Mecca. Sharif Hussein was promised that he would have an Arab kingdom after the war in return for an Arab revolt against the Ottomans. The boundaries of the territories that were to be given to Sharif Hussein were vague.

Pass out copies of the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence sheet. Distribute the map that corresponds with this letter, or project it in the classroom. In small groups, have students read the primary source document together and answer the following questions (adapted from the National Archives and Records Administration [Written Document Analysis Worksheet](#)). Teachers may assign cooperative learning roles such as Facilitator, Time Keeper, Recorder, Reporter, etc.

- What kind of document is this?



- What is the date of this document?
- Who are the author(s) of this document?
- What is this document about?
- Why do you think this document was written? What was the author's purpose?
- What evidence in the document helps you know why it was written? Provide quotes from the document.
- List 2 things that the author said that you think are important.
- What is the intended audience for this document? Was this written in private, or was it for public eyes?
- What questions do you have about this document?

Briefly invite the reporters from each group to summarize their understanding of the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence.

Step 2: After discussing the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence, turn to the Sykes-Picot agreement. The Arab army was led by Sharif Hussein's son, Prince Faisal. After the First World War ended the Arabs were confident that they would gain independence as promised to them by McMahon. However they soon discovered that Britain and France had made a secret deal in 1916, Sykes-Picot Agreement. Explain to the students that the agreement—named after the British and French diplomats who signed it—was “entered in secret, with Russia’s assent, in May 1916. The agreement was made to divide the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire into British and French spheres of influence” (Ruthven). In this agreement, the French and British ended up taking territories that had been promised to the Arabs, directly contradicting the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence.

Pass out copies of the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Distribute the map that corresponds with this letter, or project it in the classroom. In small groups, have students read the document and answer the same questions. After students are done answering questions in their small groups, invite the reporters from each group to summarize their understanding for this document.

Step 3: As a class, ask the students to speculate on the factors that led to the French, British, and Russian leaders going back on their promises to the Arabs. The following questions might guide the discussion.

- Why do countries have imperial ambitions? (Answers could include: raw materials and resource gain, strategic advantage, nationalism, social Darwinism, etc.)
- Why did Britain seek out support from the Arabs during the war? (War planners believed that an alliance with the Arabs would help weaken the Ottoman empire)
- Why did the Arabs enter into an agreement with the British? (Sharif Hussein dreamed of an Arab state created from Ottoman lands and needed help from the Great Powers)
- Why was France interested in Syria? (Answers could discuss that France had protected Lebanon’s Christian population in the past, France had a relationship with the Ottoman Sultan to protect Christians in the Middle East, imperial ambitions, [this article](#) provides more information)
- Why did Britain side with France in dividing the land? (Answers could involve the Prime Minister of Britain needed French consent to secure British claims to Iraq and Palestine. Britain and France were allies.)

Step 4: After the war’s end, Emir Faisal (Sharif Hussein’s son) presented his case for Arab independence to the Supreme Council of the Paris Peace Conference in January 1919 (Rogan). Outline Faisal’s requests at the Paris Peace Conference.



He requested immediate and full independence for Arab kingdoms in Greater Syria (corresponding to the territory of the modern states of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and Palestinian territories) and the Hijaz (part of Western Saudi Arabia), then ruled by his father, King Hussein. He accepted foreign mediation in Palestine to resolve conflicting Arab and Zionist aspirations. And he acknowledged British claims to Mesopotamia, while expressing his belief that these territories would eventually join the independent Arab state he hoped to persuade the peacemakers to create. While accepting less than he believed the allies had promised, Faisal demanded more than the British could deliver (Rogan).

Activity: In this activity, students act as constituents of Emir Faisal. They will write letters asking him to attend the Paris Peace Conference and expressing their opinions about an Arab state. Possible characters could include:

- A Palestinian Arab who is uncertain about future consequences of Zionist aspirations. He/she is interested in *more* territory than Emir Faisal planned to outline.
- A Syrian Arab who is fearful of asking for too much land from the Allied powers. This individual worries that by asking more than the Allied powers can grant, they will become impassioned and grant less land. He/she advises to ask for *less* territory than Emir Faisal planned to request.
- A Lebanese Arab who is Christian. He/she doesn't mind continued French influence and protection in Lebanon.

Students should write their advice papers as formal letters, for the Emir. They should use acceptable grammar and spelling, be persuasive, and be respectful to the Emir.

Assessment:

Informal Student Performance Assessment: Observation of each student participating in the group reading activities, and in their presentation to the rest of the class.

Group Assessment: How well does the group work together?

Formal Assessment: Student letters - successful letters will:

- Demonstrate acceptable grammar and spelling
- Portray a persuasive and respectful tone?
- The student's argument "work" to persuade Emir Faisal to a particular course of action?
- The information in the letter is correct
- The student reached realistic conclusions and effectively analyzed their individual's situation

Sources:

Rogan, Eugene. "A Century After Sykes-Picot." *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*. Fall 2015. Web. 8 February 2016. <http://www.thecaireview.com/essays/a-century-after-sykes-picot/>

Ruthven, Malise. "The Map ISIS Hates." *The New York Review of Books*. 25 June 2014. Web. 8 February 2016. <http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2014/06/25/map-isis-hates/>

Letter from Henry McMahon to Sharif Hussein

October 24, 1915.

I have received your letter of the 29th Shawal, 1333, with much pleasure and your expression of friendliness and sincerity have given me the greatest satisfaction. I regret that you should have received from my last letter the impression that I regarded the question of limits and boundaries with coldness and hesitation; such was not the case, but it appeared to me that the time had not yet come when that question could be discussed in a conclusive manner. I have realised, however, from your last letter that you regard this question as one of vital and urgent importance. I have, therefore, lost no time in informing the Government of Great Britain of the contents of your letter, and it is with great pleasure that I communicate to you on their behalf the following statement, which I am confident you will receive with satisfaction. –

The two districts of Mersina and Alexandretta and portions of Syria lying to the west of the districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo cannot be said to be purely Arab, and should be excluded from the limits demanded. With the above modification, and without prejudice to our existing treaties with Arab chiefs, we accept those limits.

As for those regions lying within those frontiers wherein Great Britain is free to act without detriment to the interests of her ally, France, I am empowered in the name of the Government of Great Britain to give the following assurances and make the following assurances and make the following reply to your letter:

- (1) Subject to the above modifications, Great Britain is prepared to recognise and support the independence of the Arabs in all the regions within the limits demanded by the Sherif of Mecca.
- (2) Great Britain will guarantee the Holy Places against all external aggression and will recognise their inviolability.
- (3) When the situation admits, Great Britain will give to the Arabs her advice and will assist them to establish what may appear to be the most suitable forms of government those various territories.
- (4) On the other hand, it is understood that the Arabs have decided to seek the advice and guidance of Great Britain only, and that such European advisers and officials as may be required for the formation of a sound form of administration will be British.
- (5) With regard to the *vilayets* of Bagdad and Basra, the Arabs will recognise that the established position and interests of Great Britain necessitate special administrative arrangements in order to secure these territories from foreign aggression to promote the welfare of the local populations and to safeguard our mutual economic interests.

I am convinced that this declaration will assure you beyond all possible doubt of the sympathy of Great Britain towards the aspirations of her friends the Arabs and will result in a firm and lasting alliance, the immediate results of which will be the expulsion of the Turks from the Arab countries and the freeing of the Arab peoples from the Turkish yoke, which for so many years has pressed heavily upon them. I have confined myself in this letter to the more vital and important questions, and if there are any other matters dealt with in your letters which I have omitted to mention, we may discuss them at some convenient date in the future...

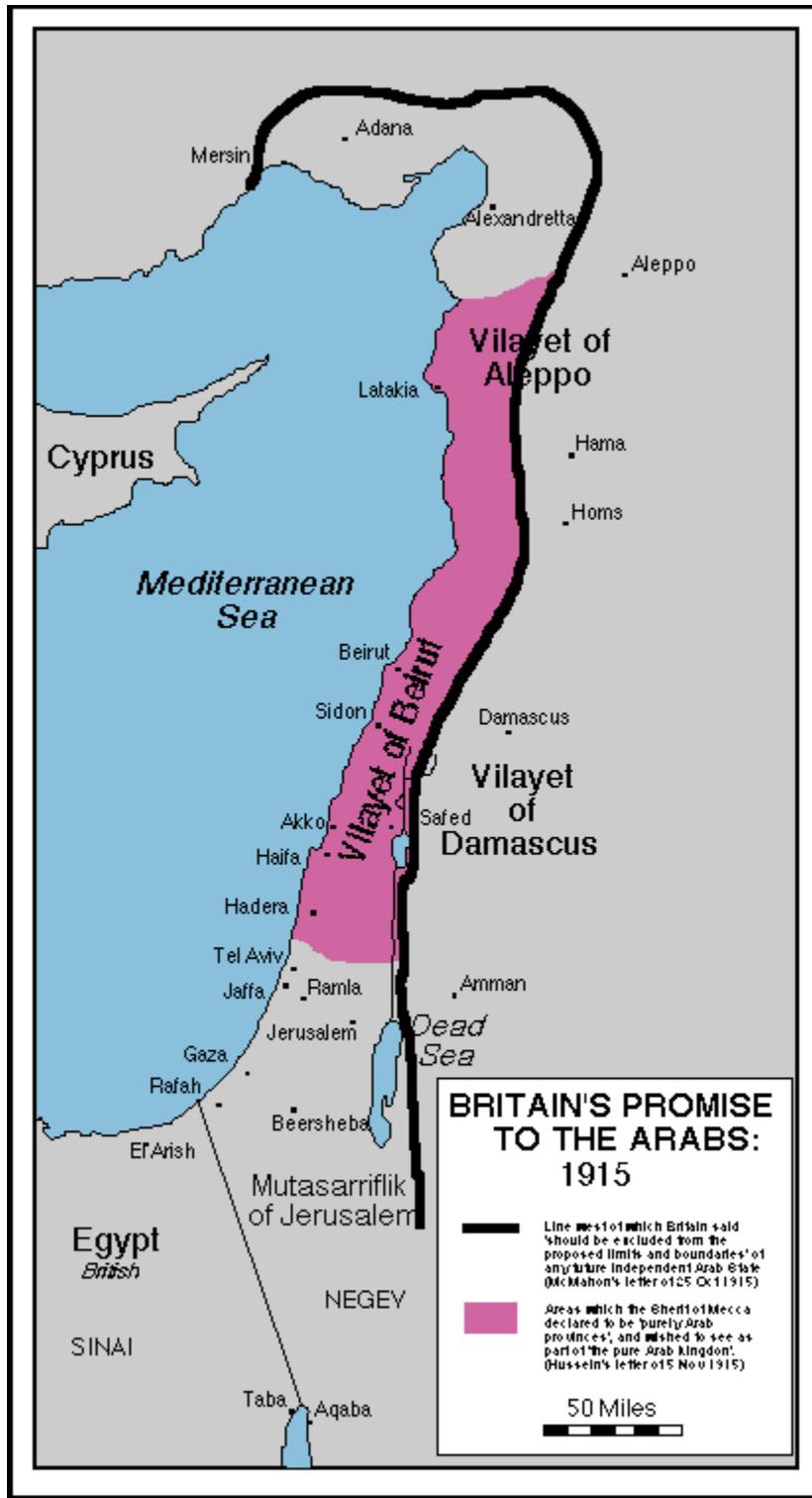
I am sending this letter by the hand of your trusted and excellent messenger, Sheikh Mohammed ibn Arif ibn Uraifan, and he will inform you of the various matters of interest, but of less vital importance, which I have not mentioned in this letter.

(Compliments).

(Signed): A. HENRY MCMAHON.

Source: The World War I Document Archive. 30 June 2009. Web. 16 February 2016.
http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Letters_between_Hussein_Ibn_Ali_and_Sir_Henry_Mcmahon.

Map interpreting the McMahon-Hussein Correspondence



Bold Black Line: Line west of which Britain said should be excluded from the proposed limits and boundaries of any future Independent Arab State, as stated in McMahon's letter, October 1915

Pink Area: Areas which the Sharif of Mecca declared to be 'purely Arab provinces' and wished to see as part of 'the pure Arab kingdom,' as stated in his letter to McMahon, November 1915

Source: Middle East Maps, <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~gov46/>

The Sykes-Picot Agreement : 1916

It is accordingly understood between the French and British governments:

That France and Great Britain are prepared to recognize and protect an independent Arab states or a confederation of Arab states (a) and (b) marked on the annexed map, under the suzerainty of an Arab chief. That in area (a) France, and in area (b) Great Britain, shall have priority of right of enterprise and local loans. That in area (a) France, and in area (b) Great Britain, shall alone supply advisers or foreign functionaries at the request of the Arab state or confederation of Arab states.

That in the blue area France, and in the red area Great Britain, shall be allowed to establish such direct or indirect administration or control as they desire and as they may think fit to arrange with the Arab state or confederation of Arab states.

That in the brown area there shall be established an international administration, the form of which is to be decided upon after consultation with Russia, and subsequently in consultation with the other allies, and the representatives of the Shereef of Mecca.

That Great Britain be accorded (1) the ports of Haifa and Acre, (2) guarantee of a given supply of water from the Tigres and Euphrates in area (a) for area (b). His Majesty's government, on their part, undertake that they will at no time enter into negotiations for the cession of Cyprus to any third power without the previous consent of the French government.

That Alexandretta shall be a free port as regards the trade of the British empire, and that there shall be no discrimination in port charges or facilities as regards British shipping and British goods; that there shall be freedom of transit for British goods through Alexandretta and by railway through the blue area, or (b) area, or area (a); and there shall be no discrimination, direct or indirect, against British goods on any railway or against British goods or ships at any port serving the areas mentioned.

That Haifa shall be a free port as regards the trade of France, her dominions and protectorates, and there shall be no discrimination in port charges or facilities as regards French shipping and French goods. There shall be freedom of transit for French goods through Haifa and by the British railway through the brown area, whether those goods are intended for or originate in the blue area, area (a), or area (b), and there shall be no discrimination, direct or indirect, against French goods on any railway, or against French goods or ships at any port serving the areas mentioned.

That in area (a) the Baghdad railway shall not be extended southwards beyond Mosul, and in area (b) northwards beyond Samarra, until a railway connecting Baghdad and Aleppo via the Euphrates valley has been completed, and then only with the concurrence of the two governments.

That Great Britain has the right to build, administer, and be sole owner of a railway connecting Haifa with area (b), and shall have a perpetual right to transport troops along such a line at all times. It is to be understood by both governments that this railway is to facilitate the connection of Baghdad with Haifa by rail, and it is further understood that, if the engineering difficulties and expense entailed by keeping this connecting line in the brown area only make the project unfeasible, that the French government shall be prepared to consider that the line in question may also traverse the Polgon Baniyas Keis Marib Salkhad tell Otsda Mesmie before reaching area (b).

For a period of twenty years the existing Turkish customs tariff shall remain in force throughout the whole of the blue and red areas, as well as in areas (a) and (b), and no increase in the rates of duty or conversions from ad valorem to specific rates shall be made except by agreement between the two powers.

There shall be no interior customs barriers between any of the above mentioned areas. The customs duties leviable on goods destined for the interior shall be collected at the port of entry and handed over to the administration of the area of destination.

It shall be agreed that the French government will at no time enter into any negotiations for the cession of their rights and will not cede such rights in the blue area to any third power, except the Arab state or confederation of Arab states, without the previous agreement of his majesty's government, who, on their part, will give a similar undertaking to the French government regarding the red area.

The British and French government, as the protectors of the Arab state, shall agree that they will not themselves acquire and will not consent to a third power acquiring territorial possessions in the Arabian peninsula, nor consent to a third power installing a naval base either on the east coast, or on the islands, of the red sea. This, however, shall not prevent such adjustment of the Aden frontier as may be necessary in consequence of recent Turkish aggression.

The negotiations with the Arabs as to the boundaries of the Arab states shall be continued through the same channel as heretofore on behalf of the two powers.

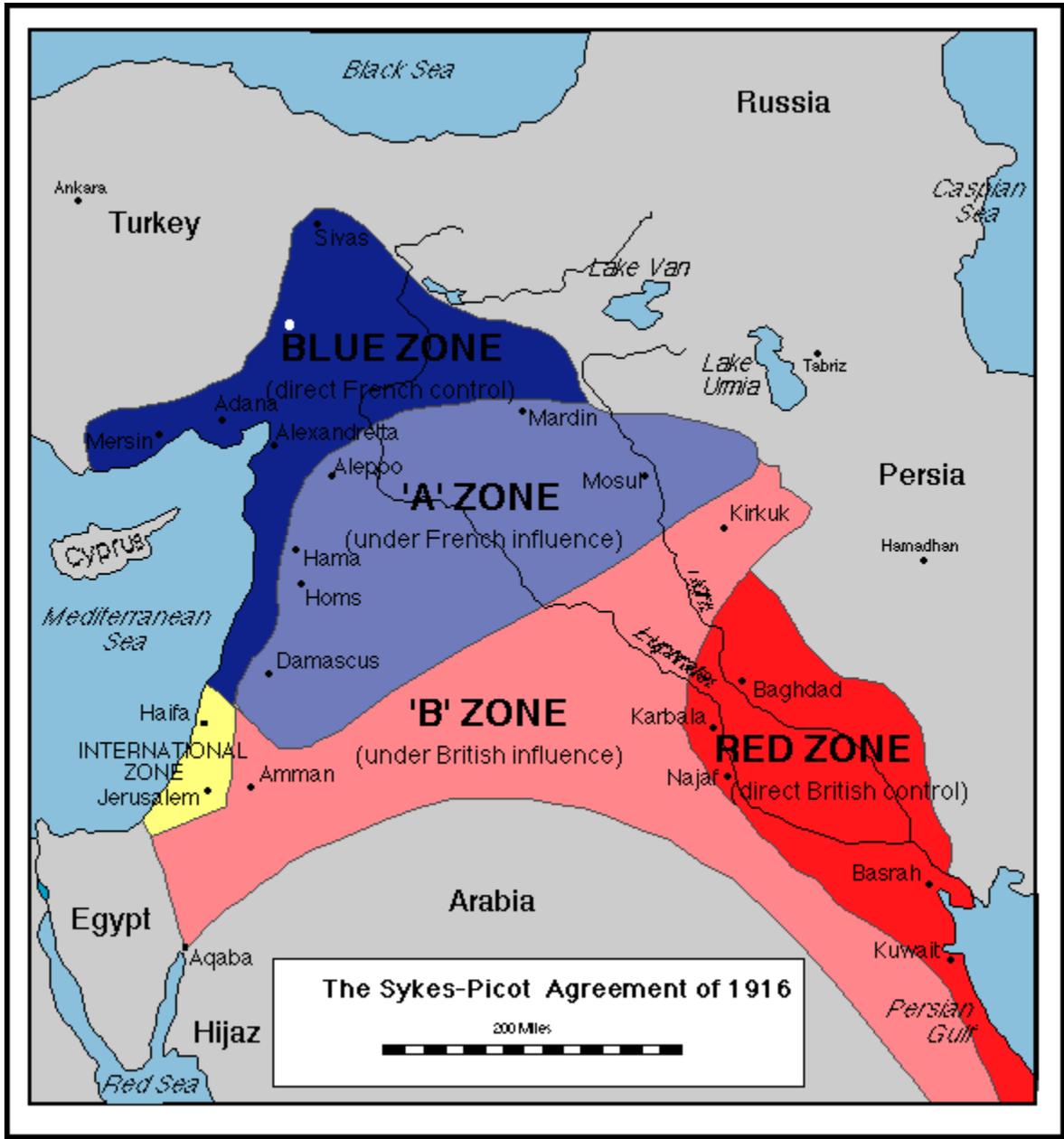
It is agreed that measures to control the importation of arms into the Arab territories will be considered by the two governments.

I have further the honor to state that, in order to make the agreement complete, his majesty's government are proposing to the Russian government to exchange notes analogous to those exchanged by the latter and your excellency's government on the 26th April last. Copies of these notes will be communicated to your excellency as soon as exchanged. I would also venture to remind your excellency that the conclusion of the present agreement raises, for practical consideration, the question of claims of Italy to a share in any partition or rearrangement of turkey in Asia, as formulated in article 9 of the agreement of the 26th April, 1915, between Italy and the allies.

His Majesty's government further consider that the Japanese government should be informed of the arrangements now concluded.

Source: The Avalon Project. 2008. Web. 16 February 2016. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/sykes.asp.

The Sykes-Picot Agreement



Source: Middle East Maps, <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~gov46/>

Utilize Music to teach about the Middle East

Brief description: Arab music displays strong aspects of unity due to the sharing of old musical legacies and from the presence of common elements in the various Arab musical traditions. Though the end of World War I resulted in the creation of new states, Arab music represents the cultural unity of a people deceptively divided into new nation-states. For more information, read A.J. Racy’s article “Arab Music” [here](#).

Objectives: Students will begin to view the Middle East beyond conflict. Students will understand aspects of Arab cultural unity.

Step 1: Share a quote about Arab Music, such as “Music is the language of the spirit. It opens the secret of life bringing peace, abolishing strife.” — Kahlil Gibran

Explain a little bit about the author: Khalil Gibran (1883-1931) was a Lebanese-American artist, poet, and writer. Khalil Gibran was born in the Ottoman Empire, north of modern-day Lebanon, and his family moved to the United States before World War I. He was born into a Maronite Christian family. He was influenced not only by his own religion but also by Islam.



As a class, discuss the following:

- What does this quote say about music?
- Why do people make music?
- Why doesn’t every culture in the world have similar music?
- What emotions has music evoked in you?
- Can music “heal” people?
- Does a music tell us something about the people who make it?
- What role does music play in culture generally?

Step 2: Explain that Arab music displays strong aspects of unity due to the sharing of old musical legacies and from the presence of common elements in the various Arab musical traditions. Whether from Morocco, Egypt, or Iraq. A major process influencing Arab music was the Ottoman Empire. Here, Arab music interacted with Turkish music, which had already absorbed musical elements from Central Asia, Persia, and medieval Islamic Syria and Iraq.

Ask students to identify musical elements that music from around the Arab world might have in common. Answers could include: a connection between the music and the Arabic language, complex melodies and intricate ornaments, rhythmic patterns, musical instruments, content of Arab social and religious life. Show the Arab and Western musical instrument comparison chart. Ask students to note the similarities and differences.

Step 3: Explain that the aftermath of World War I transformed the Middle East. The Ottoman Empire, with its rich linguistic, religious and ethnic variety, was divided into a collection of small states, each with its own ruling group under the control of European powers. New borders dislocated long-established trading networks, separated family and tribal collectives, and required the creation of new “national” consciousness. The end of the war resulted in struggles over belonging, identities, and the map of the Middle East. Music serves as a way to recognize that Middle Eastern culture transcends national boundaries.

Assign students songs by various Arab artists. Divide students into small groups. Ask each group listen to their own song. As a group, have students answer the following:

- Who created this song?
- What was the song's historical context?
- What are the musical elements of this song?
- What emotions does this song bring up?

Artists could include a mix of older and contemporary musicians, such as:

[Umm Kulthum](#) (Egypt): [NPR Article](#), Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PzsM0sjkOsE>

[Marcel Khalife](#) (Lebanon): Listen here: http://www.marcelkhalife.com/?page_id=164

[Anouar Brahem](#) (Tunisia): Listen here: <http://www.anouarbrahem.com/discography/souvenance-2/>

[Simon Shaheen](#) (Palestinian-American): [More information here](#), Listen here:

[AJ Racy](#) (Lebanon): Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LevaaKS8JNc>

You can also turn this into a jigsaw. Divide the class into mixed groups of four with one member assigned to each artist and distribute the questions above. Working individually, have them answer the following questions, and then briefly share with their group.

Next, gather students into "expert" groups, in which all members are assigned the same artist. Students revisit their initial responses to these questions and synthesize information. Then have students return to their "jigsaw" groups to share their learning. Afterwards, as a class, discuss the differences and similarities in the songs that the students have identified.

Step 4: Explain that other forms of art, like poetry, were influenced by the division of the Ottoman Empire after World War I. Some poets expressed their concerns with rule of the imperial powers.

Ask students to write their piece of post-WWI Ottoman art in the form of a short poem or stanza. Students should write as an Arab living in the Middle East after World War I. Poems should represent their emotions after the war, as new state identities are being formed. Poems could express a new nationalism for a state, or a longing for a time before divisive borders were created.

Have students illustrate or create a collage or artwork to go along with their poem.

Links for Additional Ideas, Lesson Plans, and Resources

- Check out our LiveBinder, WWI & the Transformation of the Middle East, here: <http://www.livebinders.com/edit/index/1898441?tabid=76321710-5b10-ce2e-85fc-b5660875233d#>. This has additional articles about WWI's legacy in the Middle East, Primary Source Documents, Lesson Plans created by other teachers, and more!

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

Arabic vs. Western Instrument Comparison

Drums

Zithers

Plucked-String Lutes

Double-Reed Woodwinds

Blowhole Woodwinds



Naqara Drum



Qanun



Oud



Zurna



Ney



Timpani Drum



Chorded Zither



European Lute



Oboe



Recorder