

**What about ME?:  
Teaching World History through the Middle East**

NCSS 2018

Dr. Shaadi Khoury and Mr. Michael Levasseur

## **Approaching the History of the Middle East in the Classroom**

### **Do I know enough about the Arab region, history, and culture to teach this book?**

- Approach it as an exploration of a region, a culture, and a people that deserve to be heard and understood.
- Give students ownership of the material and let them become the experts.
- Model lifelong learning. The teacher is no longer the fountain of all knowledge, but teach them to find the answers themselves.

### **How do you introduce a lesson or subject that comes from such a misunderstood and contentious region?**

- This is a problem that you will face with any controversial topic that you choose to tackle in the classroom.
- The key is students need to be able to draw connections between themselves and the other, between the familiar and the foreign in order to realize that they are not so different after all. End with an activity that encourages empathy and a chance for students to analyze similarities and differences.
- Provide a safe space for students to think about the topic, to share their ideas, to hear other perspectives, and, ideally, to come away from the discussion with a better understanding in order to inform their opinions.

### **Where do I start?**

- Start with the familiar. All teachers have their own arsenal of tools that they rely on. You can use those same tools here.
- You have three lesson plans which connect historical examples from the Middle East with larger historical themes and essential questions. The activities are the same ones you would use when teaching any other subject.

## **Lesson Plan 1: The House of Wisdom in the Islamic Golden Age**

### **What was the House of Wisdom?**

The eighth century Abbasid Caliph Abu Jafar al-Mansur founded *Bayt al-Hikma*, or the House of Wisdom, in the capital of his realm which he also founded, Baghdad. The House of Wisdom “came to comprise a translation bureau, a library and book repository, and an academy of scholars and intellectuals from across the empire,” in historian Jonathan Lyons’ words. For two centuries, the scholars and scientists of the House of Wisdom translated bodies of knowledge from other world traditions and innovated their own discoveries. For the purposes of this lesson, the House of Wisdom refers to learned efforts and cultural achievements in both Abbasid Iraq and Neo-Umayyad Spain, which together experienced the Islamic Golden Age.

### **Lesson Overview**

Each student or pair of students is assigned one scholar or scientist from the Islamic Golden Age to research and write a brief report about. Students then assume the identity of their figure and participate in a Harkness discussion/symposium in which they debate themes of intellectual and historical import.

### **Themes**

- Syncretism
- Intellectual history and knowledge
- Faith vs. science/reason
- Cultural interaction
- Political development and patronage

### **Essential Questions**

#### Syncretism and Diversity

- How do cultures combine, mix, and adapt ideas and grow?
- How does syncretism impact societies?

#### Knowledge

- How do people learn and where does knowledge come from?
- How does knowledge drive change and innovation?
- What is the relationship between religion and science? Faith and reason?
- What defines a Golden Age? How do golden ages represent the larger society and civilization?

### **Assigned Readings**

Al-Khalili, Jim. *The House of Wisdom: How Arabic Science Saved Ancient Knowledge and Gave Us the Renaissance*. London: Penguin Books, 2010.

Bobrick, Benson. *The Caliph's Splendor: Islam and the West in the Golden Age of Islam*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012.

Kennedy, Hugh. *When Baghdad Ruled the Muslim World: The Rise and Fall of Islam's Greatest Dynasty*. Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2009.

Lyons, Jonathan. "Chapter 3: "The House of Wisdom." *The House of Wisdom: How the Arabs Transformed Western Civilization*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009. 55-77.

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://plato.stanford.edu/index.html>

### **Lesson Plan Steps**

#### **Step 1: Warm-Up Questions**

1. What are other historical Golden Ages we have studied this year?
2. What are the major characteristics of a Golden Age?
3. Are we living in a Golden Age now? Why or why not?

#### **Step 2: Assign Students their Scholars**

Prominent Scholars and Scientists of the Islamic Golden Age:

1. Al-Khwarizmi (780-850)
2. Albumazar (787-886)
3. Al-Kindi (800-870)
4. Al-Razi (865-920)
5. Al-Farabi (870-950)
6. Al-Masudi (893-956)
7. Ibn Sina/Avicenna (980-1037)
8. Omar Khayyam (1048-1131)
9. Ibn Bajjah/Avempace (1085-1139)
10. Ibn Tufayl (1109-1185)

11. Al-Idrisi (1100-1165)
12. Ibn Rushd/Averroes (1126-1198)
13. Moses Maimonides (1135-1204)
14. Ibn al-Athir (1160-1233)
15. Ibn al-Arabi (1165-1240)

**Step 3: Students Research their Scholars**

Research Questions for Assigned Scholar:

1. Name of Scholar:
2. Year and place of birth:                      Age at death:
3. Where did your scholar live most of their life? Did your scholar travel? Where?
4. Did your scholar know other scholars? Student of others? Teacher of others?
5. What was the principal field of study for your scholar?
6. What was your scholar's most remarkable achievement?
7. How did your scholar learn from or build on previous legacies of learning--such as Greek or Indian intellectual traditions?
8. Did your scholar have pronounced views on religious questions? What were they?
9. How would you describe your scholar's relationship with the government or reigning Caliph of their day?
10. Briefly describe 2 or 3 noteworthy events from your scholar's life.

**Step 4: Harkness Discussion/Scholarly Symposium**

1. Why are your scholar's achievements significant and enduring?
2. How does your scholar's work relate to that of another scholar at the discussion table?
3. How are your scholar's life experiences similar to or different from those of your peers?
4. How might the present scholars collaborate or form partnerships on research projects?
5. How might your scholars consider the question of Reason vs. Revelation--or human knowledge and science in relation to religious teachings and Holy Law?
6. What would your scholars make of the state of learning in today's society?

## Lesson Plan 2: The Circle of Justice in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire

### What was the Circle of Justice?

Formalized in the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century, a political theory which detailed the ideal relationship between the people and the state. This relationship was comprised of four key, interdependent elements: the ruler's authority, the power of the military, the wealth of the state, and the people.

"The world is a garden, hedged in by sovereignty

Sovereignty is lordship, preserved by law

Law is administration, governed by the king

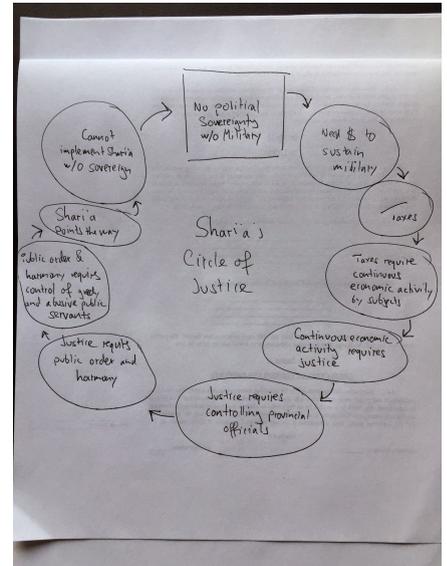
The king is a shepherd, supported by the army

The army are soldiers, fed by money

Money is revenue, gathered by the people

The people are servants, subjected by justice

Justice is happiness, the well-being of the world."



### Lesson Overview

Students will explore the similarities and differences between how thinkers during the Ottoman Empire and European Enlightenment conceptualized the relationship between the people and the state. Students will learn about key ideas surrounding justice and political development from each era and then apply those lessons to modern examples where the Circle of Justice may be relevant.

### Themes

- Democracy
- Social contract
- Caste system
- Absolutism
- Syncretism

### Essential Questions

#### Syncretism and Diversity

- How do cultures combine, mix, and adapt ideas and grow?
- How does syncretism impact societies?

#### Justice

- What is justice?
- What are key rights and liberties?

#### Power

- What should be the relationship between the people and their ruler?
- When is power considered legitimate?

#### Assigned Readings

Frick, Carole Collier. "Excerpts from Key Enlightenment Thinkers." *The Enlightenment: A Unit of Study for Grades 7-12*. National Center for History in the Schools: UCLA, 1999.

Hamilton, Gail, and Gabriella Mercado. "Who Were the Enlightenment Thinkers?" *WHFUA: Big Era Six: Closeup Teaching Unit 6.6.1: Leaders of the Enlightenment, 1650–1800 CE*. SDSU: World History for Us All.  
[http://worldhistoryforusall.ss.ucla.edu/units/six/closeup/06\\_closeup661.pdf](http://worldhistoryforusall.ss.ucla.edu/units/six/closeup/06_closeup661.pdf)

Thompson, Elizabeth. "Chapter 1: Mustafa Ali: Ottoman Justice and Bureaucratic Reforms." *Justice Interrupted: The Struggle for Constitutional Government in the Middle East*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013. 13-36.

#### Lesson Plan Steps

##### Step 1: Warm-Up Questions

What is justice? What should the relationship between a ruler and the people be like? Why?

##### Step 2: The Circle of Justice

Students read and annotate pages 17-21 of Thompson's *Justice Interrupted*.

##### Step 3: Draw It!

Based on their reading, students draw an image of the Ottoman Circle of Justice.

##### Step 4: Reflection and Writing

Students return to their responses to the Warm-Up Questions and refine their responses. Students respond to the prompt, "How would you change your answers based on what you learned about the Ottoman Circle of Justice?"

##### Step 5: Introduction to the Enlightenment: Jigsaw

Students read about a different Enlightenment philosopher and annotate the assigned text with the questions of, "What is justice? What should the relationship between a ruler and the people be like?" in mind. Enlightenment philosophers include Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Charles Montesquieu, Francois-Marie Voltaire, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Then, students share their understanding with their classmates in a Jigsaw.

**Step 6: Warm-Up Question**

Students view an image of Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan and share observations. Questions could include, "Which Enlightenment philosopher do you feel this image best represents and why? What does this tell you about the relationship between the people and the ruler?"

**Step 7: Draw It!**

Based on their reading and discussion, students draw an image of the Circle of Justice according to the European Enlightenment philosophers.

**Step 8: Numbered Heads Together**

Students are paired in groups of 3-5 and each student is given a specific number (from one to the maximum number in each group). The teacher asks a question and the students in each group discuss their ideas. At the end of the discussion, the teacher calls a specific number and that student from each group shares her or his group's ideas with the whole class. The focus of this activity is having students compare and contrast their Ottoman and European versions of the Circle of Justice. Questions could include, "What similarities do you find between the Ottoman and European versions? Why might this be? What differences do you find between the Ottoman and European versions? Why might this be? What is the relationship between the people and the ruler in each version?"

**Step 9: Research and Application**

Students find an article and/or current event that serves as a modern example of the Circle of Justice. A sample prompt could be, "Find a contemporary crisis in which the Circle of Justice has broken down." After students have found a modern example, they will share and discuss their examples with their classmates.

**Step 10: RAFT**

Students complete a RAFT assignment to apply their learning about the Circle of Justice. Students should take one of the contemporary crises and come up with innovative solutions to solve that crisis using the lessons they have learned about the relationship between the state and the people and the Circle of Justice. A sample prompt could be:

Role: Policy advisor

Audience: Haitian President Jovenel Moïse

Format: Video

Topic: Potential responses to recent protests

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/23/world/americas/haiti-protests-unrest-instability.html>

### **Lesson Plan 3:** **Nazik al-Malaika: Pioneering Poet of the Modern Arab Renaissance**

#### **Who was Nazik al-Malaika?**

Nazik al-Malaika (1923-2007) was an influential Iraqi poet who was among the first to experiment with free verse and express modernist themes in the Arabic language. Born in Baghdad, al-Malaika also studied at Princeton University and completed a Master's degree at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She taught at the University of Basra and the University of Kuwait before retiring in Cairo, Egypt. Her work bears eloquent witness to the social and political upheavals of the twentieth century Middle East.

#### **Lesson Overview**

Students will read and discuss articles and an interview about Iraqi poet Nazik al-Malaika (1923-2007), as well as a sampling of her poems in translation, and produce a social media platform page for her. Students will reflect on the relationships of literature, gender, and history, and of classical styles, modernism, and modernity.

#### **Themes**

- Syncretism
- Gender
- Feminism
- Tradition
- Modernity
- Literary history

#### **Essential Questions**

##### Syncretism and Diversity

- How do Nazik al-Malaika's life, work, and ideas combine both East and West? Tradition and modernity?
- How does Nazik al-Malaika balance the dichotomy between classic and innovative poetry, such as free verse? Between understanding others and expressing yourself?

##### Gender

- How does Nazik al-Malaika challenge the hegemony of the patriarchy and offer an alternative for society's gender relations?
- How do we understand Nazik al-Malaika's work in the larger feminist literary tradition? In comparison with feminism today?

##### Poetry and Art

- How does poetry/art contribute to our understanding of self, others, and the world?
- How does the use of voice empower an individual?
- How does poetry/art reflect and inspire societal change?

### **Assigned Reading**

*The Poetry of Arab Women: A Contemporary Anthology*, Nathalie Handal (ed.)

<https://www.aljadid.com/content/nazik-al-malaika-1923-2007-iraqi-woman%E2%80%99s-journey-changes-map-arabic-poetry>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/27/arts/27malaika.html>

<https://arablit.org/2013/09/05/on-nazik-al-malaikas-revolutionary-romantic-poetry/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2007/aug/06/guardianobituaries.poetry>

### **Lesson Plan Steps**

#### **Step 1: Warm Up Questions**

1. What other prominent writers, especially women writers, have we read about this year?
2. Poets and poetry are usually studied in English classes. How might they also be valuable to read in History classes?
3. Who are some writers, especially women writers, who effectively represent the present day in their work?

#### **Step 2: Students Read and Discuss Articles and Interview**

Students read articles about Nazik al-Malaika by Simone Stevens and Alissa J. Rubin, and interview with her translator, Emily Drumsta. In small groups, students discuss the texts and write questions as if for an interview of al-Malaika herself.

#### **Step 3: Students Read and Discuss al-Malaika's Poems**

Each group of students is assigned a poem from among the following: "Cholera," "A Song for Mankind," "New Year," "Love Song for Words." After discussing significant elements from their own group's poem, they identify common themes and related imagery in those of the other groups.

#### **Step 4: Students Produce a Social Media Platform Page for Nazik al-Malaika**

Students transform al-Malaika's poems into "posts," combined with insights from the articles and interview. How would al-Malaika respond to certain current events or contemporary social and political issues? Students may then pen poems in al-Malaika's style.