Welcome To My World: Letter from Syria

Students learn important lessons about cultural differences by reading a fictitious letter from a Syrian girl then writing about it.

Author
Barbara Martin

Grade Level
6-8

Duration
1-2 class periods

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Geography Standards</th>
<th>Arizona Geography Strand</th>
<th>Other Arizona Standards</th>
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<tr>
<td>ELEMENT TWO: PLACES AND REGIONS</td>
<td>Concept 2 Places and Regions</td>
<td>Strand 2 World History Grades 6-8</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. How culture and experience influence people's perceptions of places and regions.</td>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>Concept 9: Contemporary World</td>
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<td></td>
<td>PO 3 Describe the interactions of people in different places and regions.</td>
<td>PO 2. Identify the connection between current and historical events and issues studied at this grade level using information from class discussions and various resources (e.g., newspapers, magazines, television, Internet, books, maps).</td>
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<td>PO 5 Describe the physical and human characteristics of places and regions of a Middle Eastern country.</td>
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<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>Reading Standards for 6-8 for Literacy in History/Social Studies</td>
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<td>PO 1 Describe the human and physical characteristics of places and regions.</td>
<td>Key Ideas and Details</td>
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<td>PO 3 Compare the historical and contemporary interactions among people in different places and regions.</td>
<td>6-8.RH.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.</td>
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<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>Integration of Knowledge and Ideas</td>
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<td>PO 1 Identify common characteristics of contemporary and historical regions on the basis of climate, landforms, ecosystems, and culture.</td>
<td>6-8.RH.7 Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.</td>
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<td>Writing Standards for 6-8 for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects</td>
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<td>PO 1 Discuss the</td>
<td>Text Types and Purposes</td>
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<td>Concept 4 Human Systems</td>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>6-8.WHST.2 Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/ experiments, or technical processes.</td>
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<td>PO 5 Identify cultural norms that influence different social, political and economic activities of men and women.</td>
<td>a. Introduce a topic clearly, previewing what is to follow; organize ideas, concepts, and information into broader categories as appropriate to achieving purpose; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., charts, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.</td>
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<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>b. Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.</td>
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<td>PO 1 Discuss the</td>
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ARIZONA GEOGRAPHIC ALLIANCE
Welcome to My World: Letter from Syria

Objectives

- Implications of the demographic structure of places and regions.
- PO 6 Describe the distributions and patterns of cultural characteristics (e.g., religions, language, standard of living) over time.

Grade 8
- PO 3 Describe the characteristics and locations of various cultures throughout the world.
- PO 6 Describe the aspects of culture (e.g., literacy, occupations, clothing, property rights) related to beliefs and understandings that influence the economic, social, and political activities of men and women.

Materials

- Letter from Syria (a fictitious pen pal letter written by a twelve-year-old Syrian girl who lives in Damascus with her extended family. The letter describes her culture and daily activities).
- Zayna Letter Worksheet
- Photos included with the lesson
- Writing paper
- Writing Prompt

Overview

In many countries of the world today, a person's role and status is determined by culture and gender. Because American students live in an open society that stresses civil rights and equal opportunities for all its citizens, they may not realize that for people in some countries the situation is very different.

Purpose

In this lesson, students compare their lives to those of a young person in a Middle Eastern country. The result is that there are similarities and differences to our lifestyles.

Procedures

SESSION ONE
1. Have students locate Syria on a world map or in an atlas. Discuss some generalities about what life might be like in Syria. Project the photographs included with the lesson. Ask students what they think is going on, or what the building might be, or why something is happening. Then, give students the actual background or information.

2. Students should read the letter from the Syrian girl describing her daily activities and how her culture plays a part in her life.

3. As they are reading, students should record any similarities or differences between their lives and hers on the worksheet. Students could highlight those parts of the letter that describe the girl's culture that may be different from theirs.

SESSION TWO

The student will be able to:

- determine the factors that may lead to economic and lifestyle choices in various parts of the world.
- explain how culture and gender could influence a person's role in society.
Welcome to My World: Letter from Syria

Students are to write a response to the Syrian girl in the form of a friendly letter. Their responses will describe their lives and the part culture plays in it.

**Assessment**

The teacher will use the Six-Trait writing rubric to assess the students' friendly letters, specifically ideas and organization. Mastery will be considered 4 out of 6 on the rubric.

**Extensions**

Students may research other countries to determine the cultural influences on men and women.

Students could include a picture they have drawn or duplicated from a book or off the internet to show the Syrian girl a favorite sight of theirs in America.

If students had access to cameras, they could "re-create" the scenes using local people and places. For example, students could photograph an American girl in school uniform on an outing, a local vendor in a small business, a church, synagogue, or an old mission. Then, the photographs could be displayed side-by-side along with a comparison/contrast essay.

**Sources**


Tucker, Judith. "The Arab World In The Classroom," Center for Contemporary Arab Studies/Georgetown University, 1991