



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.

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Grade Level	6-8
Duration	1-2 class periods

National Geography Standards

ELEMENT TWO: PLACES AND REGIONS

6. How culture and experience influence people's perceptions of places and regions.

Arizona Geography Strand

Concept 2 Places and Regions Grade 6

PO 3 Describe the interactions of people in different places and regions.

PO 5 Describe the physical and human characteristics of places and regions of a Middle Eastern country.

Grade 7

PO 1 Describe the human and physical characteristics of places and regions.

PO 3 Compare the historical and contemporary interactions among people in different places and regions.

Grade 8

PO 1 Identify common characteristics of contemporary and historical regions on the basis of climate, landforms, ecosystems, and culture.

Concept 4 Human Systems

Grade 6

PO 5 Identify cultural norms that influence different social, political and economic activities of men and women.

Grade 7

PO 1 Discuss the

Other Arizona Standards

Strand 2 World History

Grades 6-8

Concept 9: Contemporary World

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).

Reading Standards for 6-8 for Literacy in History/Social Studies

Key Ideas and Details

6-8.RH.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

6-8.RH.7 Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

Writing Standards for 6-8 for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

Text Types and Purposes

6-8.WHST.2 Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/ experiments, or technical processes.

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.

b. Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.

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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.

c. Use appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.
d. Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.
e. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone.
f. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented.

Production and Distribution of Writing

6-8.WHST.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

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.

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

Objectives

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.

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

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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

Khalidi, Ramla and Tucker, Judith. "Women's Rights In The Arab World," Middle East Research & Information Project, No. 173, November-December, 1991.

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