

Cross-Cultural Veiling

Overview:

In this lesson plan, students will investigate Middle Eastern head coverings through a cross-cultural comparison. The lesson begins with a general discussion of dress codes and uniforms gradually moving students into a discussion of the reasons for certain types of dress. By looking at various examples of covering up around the world and how it is treated in various cultures, religions, and historical contexts, students will come to see veiling as a product of cultural, historical, religious, and traditional ways of dressing. This lesson will aid students in seeing the veil as more complex, rather than an oppressive form of Islamic dress.

Objectives:

Students will:

1. Consider dress codes, regulations and traditions.
2. Research dress from the Middle East in order to determine the practical, political, and religious implications. (See Middle Eastern Dress Vocabulary Lesson Plan)
3. Examine other contexts in which veiling appears including historical, religious, social, and aesthetic. (See Cross-Cultural Head Covering Handout)
4. Reflect upon the multi-dimensional contexts of covering.

Activity:

1. Students respond to the following questions in their journals (written on the board prior to class): “Does your school have a dress code, require uniforms, or have a standard of dress you must adhere to? If so, why do you think these standards are in place?” Allow students to share responses briefly.
2. As a class, discuss other people who often wear particular types of dress. Dress often reflects our jobs, beliefs, fashion trends, culture, and environment. Give some examples to show that ways of dress change and reflect upon particular regions.
 - a. Can you think of other people who have dress codes? (nurses, doctors, firemen, priests/clergy, judges, etc.)
 - b. Why do they wear certain types of clothing? (related to job, tradition, beliefs, etc.)
3. Review with photos and explanation the dress of women in the Middle East, focusing on the hijab and niqab (See lesson plan on Middle Eastern Dress Vocabulary). Focus on the following questions:
 - a. What is the hijab and why do Middle Eastern women wear them?
 - b. What is the niqab? Why do women in the Middle East wear them?
 - c. Besides the practical uses of these items, what political or religious uses do they have?

4. Complicate and compare the headdresses of women in the Middle East with cross-cultural examples. (See lesson plan on Cross-Cultural Head Coverings). Focus on the following questions:
 - a. Are head coverings unique to the Middle East?
 - b. Who else wears head coverings?
 - c. Why and when do they wear head coverings?
 - d. Can you think of any famous women who wear head coverings? What do they have in common with each other? How do they differ? Do they wear head coverings for the same reasons?

5. De Bono's Hats/Head Coverings

Encourage students to think about the various perspectives from which women approach head covering by having them occupy a particular side of the issue. Provide hats for the students. Introduce the nature of the hats one at a time. Give each group ownership of one hat. They will be responsible for making a case for their perspective. Ask each group to give examples of head coverings that fall into their particular category, including the rationale for their inclusion. As students develop their cases, stress the blurring of boundaries that takes place between the groups.

- a. Religious Practices
- b. Social Practices
- c. Traditional Practices
- d. Political Practices

Teachers: Please contact Angela Williams, CSAMES Outreach Coordinator, at aswillms@illinois.edu, for the answer key to the Middle Eastern Dress Quiz, Crossword Puzzle, and Word Search.