

Middle Eastern Festivals Lesson Plan

Overview:

In this lesson plan, students will investigate Middle Eastern festivals as insights into the ways in which the peoples of the Middle East see themselves. The lesson begins with a discussion of festivals in the Middle East and moves to the larger question about what festivals tell us. By learning more about the particulars of the Middle East and its celebrations, students will start to draw parallels between the Middle East and their own forms of celebration. This lesson will aid students in their examination of the Middle East, its cultures, and its peoples, and can also be paired with units on Ramadan and Spring Festivals.

Objectives:

Students will:

1. Consider what festivals reveal about the people who practice them.
2. Research festivals from the Middle East in order to determine the secular, political, and religious implications of the holidays. (See Middle Eastern Festivals Information Sheet, as well as additional resources in the annotated bibliography. A Teachers Handout on festivals is also available from CSAMES.)
3. Examine the festivals of the Middle East.
4. Reflect upon the multi-dimensional contexts of festivals in the Middle East and the stories they tell about the peoples who practice them.

Activity:

1. Students respond to the following prompt in their journals (written on the board prior to class): "Make a list of five festivals that you are familiar with. Who celebrates these festivals? Why do they celebrate them? What symbols, activities, or foods are associated with them?" Allow students to share responses briefly.
2. As a class, discuss how festivals are part of the story people tell about themselves. They reveal the things they believe to be important, as well as the appropriate ways in which to celebrate them. Give some examples to show that festivals often have religious, secular/social, traditional, and political meaning.
 - a. Why do people celebrate holidays?
 - b. Can you think of a festival that is celebrated differently in different areas of the United States or even differently between families? Can you think of old traditions that appear in today's festivals?
 - c. Why are festivals specific to a certain people and place? What do they tell us about?
3. Review with photos and explanation the festivals of the Middle East. (See the Information Sheet on Festivals of the Middle East, as well as the annotated bibliography for further guidance. Contact CSAMES for a Teachers Handout on festivals.)

Focus on the following questions:

- a. Do you see any similarities between festivals that you celebrate and those that people in the Middle East celebrate? Similar symbols or activities?
- b. What is your favorite Middle Eastern festival? Why?

4. Structured Brainstorm

- a. First, invite students to work independently to create a “word web” that describes the characteristics that they would ascribe to the peoples of the Middle East based upon their festivals. Provide the focus question: “What people, objects, adjectives, symbols, or celebrations help define these cultures?”
- b. Share the lists as a class and perhaps create a larger word web on the board, circling key words and identifying any controversial or debatable points. For each item a student lists, he or she should explain its importance and/or relevance. Discuss as a class, what students think the peoples of the Middle East value and why.
- c. Display brainstorm word webs and encourage students to modify and add to their lists.

5. De Bono’s Hats

Encourage students to think about the various types of festivals in the Middle East, while discussing the ways in which the boundaries between types of festivals are fluid. 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 festivals 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/Secular Practices
- c. Traditional Practices
- d. Political Practices