

## ACTIVITY #11

### **Ethnicity, Religion and Citizenship: Examples From the Middle East**

Labels in the Middle East are generally confusing to Westerners. Because the Middle East is located at the intersection of three continents, geographical factors make labeling difficult. In fact, many of the people of that region consider themselves "West Asians" or "North Africans" rather than "Middle Easterners." Three of the world's major religions began there; each claims physical and emotional attachments to the land, further impeding efforts to define the region. Arabic became the predominant language following the spread of Islam in the 7th century, but numerous minority ethnic and language groups continue to inhabit the region. Political affiliations and the relatively recent establishment of independent states add additional complications to a discussion of the area. This activity explores some of the ways in which ethnic, religious and state identities ("citizenship") can interact within different individuals, raising questions regarding the meaning of "nationalism" in the Middle East.

Note to teachers: The intent of this activity is *not* to provide a vehicle for a complete study of the history and current situation of the entire Middle East. While students will learn a great deal in the course of this lesson, particularly in regard to the history of Islam, much of significance to any comprehensive study of the Middle East is not included here. The activity may be used equally well as an entrée into a unit on the Middle East, or as a concluding activity to such a unit. However, *it cannot stand alone*. A thorough reading of the lesson by the teacher is recommended prior to use, so that you may determine what kinds of additional information or knowledge are needed by your students prior to engaging in the activity.

The lesson is designed to illustrate the myriad ways in which different aspects of personal identity can combine in individuals living in the same, as well as different countries of the Middle East. It does so by presenting "profiles" of eight teenagers living in four different Middle Eastern countries. The countries and individuals were selected specifically for the purpose of illustrating issues of personal identity, and the ways in which ethnic and/or religious identity may conflict with state identity (citizenship) in the Middle East.

This activity does *not* provide any background or engage students in any analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This was a conscious decision on the part of the authors of the activity. It is our feeling that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict requires thorough, in-depth study including examination of various different perspectives of the many parties in conflict. Such study, if properly done, would by its nature take us well beyond the focus of this unit. We strongly encourage you to engage your students in a thorough, balanced study of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as it is a major (although by no means the only) issue confronting the nations (however defined) of the Middle East today.

Activity #11**Objectives:**

1. Students will become aware of the complexities of religious, ethnic and state identities in the Middle East through introduction to eight imaginary teenagers living in the countries of Syria, Iran, Iraq and Egypt.
2. Students will read excerpts from Nasser's "Egypt's Liberation: The Philosophy of the Revolution," and consider how different people in the Middle East might respond to the call for pan-Arab nationalism by role-playing the responses of the imaginary teenagers.
3. Students will reflect on the meaning of "nationalism" in the Middle East through a quick-write and class discussion.
4. Students will locate core Middle Eastern countries on an outline map.
5. Students will learn a number of key terms involving religion, ethnicity, and politics in the Middle East.
6. Students will review an abbreviated history of key events in the Middle East through use of a Timeline.

**When to Use:** In conjunction with the "Nationalism in the Contemporary World" or the "Unresolved Problems of the Modern World" units; anytime a study of diversity in the Middle East is desired.

**Time Required:** Two to four class periods, including homework assignments.

**Materials:** One copy for each student of Student Handouts 11-#1 ("Religion, Ethnicity and the State in the Middle East"), 11-#2 ("Locating Ourselves" including the outline map), 11-#11 ("Middle East Timeline"), 11-#12 ("Vocabulary Handout"), 11-#13 ("Egypt's Liberation: The Philosophy of the Revolution"); Enough copies of each Profile (Student Handouts 11-#3 - 11-#10) for every student in each group (e.g., if each Profile group has four students, you will need four copies of each Profile); A wall map that clearly shows the Middle Eastern countries used in this lesson: Syria, Iran, Iraq, Egypt; "Post-its" or a similar product that students can place on map.

**Procedure:**

1. Divide the class into eight groups of 3 - 5 students each, depending on class size. You should give some thought to assigning students in ways that promote diversity of academic ability levels, ethnic/gender mix, and leadership skills within each group.

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**2. Introduction and Geography:** This portion of the lesson should take about half to three quarters of a class period.

Distribute Student Handout 11-#1 "Religion, Ethnicity and the State in the Middle East" to all students. Give students approx. 5 min. to individually read the page. Briefly go over key concepts in the reading with the class as a whole, making sure everyone understands the distinctions between "state," "nation," and "ethnicity." (Note that the key difference between a "nation" and an "ethnic group" is that a "nation" has developed a very strong, self-conscious common group bond and a desire for political autonomy, whereas members of "ethnic groups," while aware of their common ethnicity, do not share aspirations for group political autonomy. Another important distinction is that "nations" always identify with a particular territory as their homeland and rightfully theirs to inhabit and rule, whereas ethnic groups often do not have strong emotional ties to a particular territory.)

**3. Distribute Student Handout 11-#2 "Locating Ourselves."** Have students work either individually or in pairs using classroom maps, atlases and/or maps in textbooks to fill in their outline maps. They should save their maps to refer to throughout the entire activity, and turn them in with other completed work at the end of the entire lesson.

**4. Timeline and Vocabulary:** This portion of the lesson includes a homework assignment and should take approximately half a class period.

Distribute the appropriate Profile (Student Handouts 11-#3 - 11-#10, Profiles #1 - #8) to each student according to group assignments; each student assigned to group #1 should get a copy of Profile #1, etc. Give every student a copy of Student Handout 11-#11 ("Middle East Timeline") and Student Handout 11-#12 ("Vocabulary Handout").

Tell students that as homework, they are to read their Profile carefully, thinking about the different identities that their person has, and whether these identities provide a sense of harmony and wholeness, or are a potential source of personal conflict. Then, using the profiles, they are to complete as many of the items as possible on the Timeline and the Vocabulary handouts. They will not be able to complete all of the items, but they should be able to find definitions of at least seven terms in their profile. They should bring the profile, map, timeline and vocabulary handout with them to the next class meeting.

Please Note: The Timeline is not meant to be comprehensive of all important events in Middle Eastern history. It is primarily keyed to the profiles the students will read, with a few additional dates added for historic context. You may wish to have students expand on the Timeline based on what they have already learned, or will learn, in their study of the Middle East.

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5. For the next class meeting, have prepared small signs or placards reading, "1, 3, 6, 7" and "2, 4, 5, 8." If your profile groups had three students in each group, you will need three signs of each type (i.e., three "1,3,6,7" and three "2,4,5,8"). If your profile groups had five students in each, you will need five signs of each type, etc.

Tell students that in a few minutes they will be meeting in small groups with students who were assigned Profiles different from the one they have. Once they get into their groups, they will have ten minutes to compare their answers on the Vocabulary Handout and the Timeline, and fill in missing items or improve on the definitions they already have. By the end of the ten minutes, every student should have a complete Vocabulary Handout and a close to complete Timeline.

Ask the students assigned Profile #1 to identify themselves; give each one a "1, 3, 6, 7" sign; do the same for students assigned Profile #2, giving each of them the "2, 4, 5, 8" signs. Assign each student holding a sign a working space that can accommodate four students. (If you have Profile groups of 3, you will have six groups total in this portion of the lesson; if you have Profile groups of 5, you will have ten groups, etc.) Tell the other students that they are to go to a group with the number of their Profile, but there cannot be more than one student with the same Profile number in each group. If done correctly, students should end up in groups of four, each representing a different Profile.

Allow the groups ten minutes to compare Vocabulary and Timeline answers, and complete their worksheets. Then quickly go over the sheets with the entire class, telling students they will be responsible for having correct, complete answers for all items. Ask students to volunteer answers, and provide corrections or fill in any missing detail by referring to the Answer Keys.

6. Role-playing the Profile Persona: This section of the lesson includes a short homework reading, and should take one to two class periods.

Distribute Student Handout 11-#13 "Egypt's Liberation: The Philosophy of the Revolution." Instruct students that, as homework, they are to re-read their Profile, and then read the excerpt from Nasser. Pretending that they are the person in their Profile, they should think about whether or not they agree with Nasser about each of the three circles he talks about. With which of the three circles, if any, do they most strongly identify? They should come to class tomorrow prepared to explain their reactions to Nasser.

7. Have students gather into the eight "same Profile" groups. As a group, they are to come to consensus regarding how the person in their profile feels about Nasser's comments, and which, if any, of the three circles they most strongly identify with. They are to prepare a short (2 minute) presentation that includes: 1) introducing their character by name, ethnicity, and religious affiliation; 2) telling what country they are from and placing a "post-it" on their country on the map;

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and 3) stating how they feel about what Nasser said, and why. At least three people from the group must participate in the presentation. Allow approximately 20 minutes for groups to reach consensus and prepare their presentation. They should be given a time signal at the 10 minute mark to indicate that they should now be preparing their presentation.

Have each of the Profile groups give their presentation. Depending on how much time you wish to spend on this activity, you may allow the class to ask questions following each presentation, or you may keep the presentations moving quickly along. Obviously, allowing questions and fuller discussion will provide richer and deeper understanding, and a higher degree of student involvement and critical thinking.

**8. Synthesis:** This should take approximately half to one class period.

Assign students (as either homework or classwork) a one page quick-write on one of the following questions (students may choose):

- 1) "What are three primary sources of personal identity in the Middle East, and how do these help or hinder the development of strong nationalistic movements there?"
- 2) "What are some of the reasons that it has been difficult to develop and sustain a strong sense of Arab nationalism in the Middle East? Use specific examples."
- 3) "Do you think the concept of "nationalism" is helpful in understanding the Middle East today? Why or why not? Give examples."

For each question, have several students share their answers. Conduct a general discussion with the class around the three questions.

**Answer Key for Middle East Timeline**

*Instructions:* As you read your profile, see if you can discover what happened during the dates that do not have an event listed. Write in those missing events you are able to locate. (You may not find all - or any - of the missing events in your profile.)

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event</u>
1240 B.C.	.....Exodus of Hebrews from Egypt
33 C.E.	.....Crucifixion of Jesus
70	.....Destruction of Second Temple in Palestine
476	.....Fall of the Roman Empire
570	.....Muhammad is born
610	.....Muhammad receives revelations from God, founds Islam
632	.....Muhammad dies
661	.....Ali is assassinated
661 - 750	.....Umayyad dynasty
750 - 1258	.....Abbasid dynasty
1258 - 1918	.....Ottoman Empire
1918 - 1946	.....European colonial rule over much of the Middle East
1946 - 1947	.....Most of the Middle East colonies become independent states

**Answer Key to Vocabulary Handout**

Numbers in parenthesis indicate the profile where the term is used.

1. Abbasid dynasty (3,5) - the ruling dynasty from 750 - 1258, with its capital at Baghdad; this was considered the "Golden Age of Islam," when the Islamic world excelled in literature, science, math and the arts.
2. Alawite (7,8) - members of a non-orthodox Shiite sect, most of whom live in Syria.
3. Arab (2,3,5,6) - a speaker of the Arabic language, and/or a person who identifies with Arab history and culture.
4. Baath Party (7,8) - a pro-Arab political party dedicated to Arab nationalism, to Arab socialism, and Arab unity; currently in political power in Syria (since 1963) and Iraq (since 1960).
5. Copt (5,6) - a member of the main Christian sect in Egypt.
6. Farsi (1,2) - the language spoken by Persians, inhabitants of what today is called Iran.
7. fundamentalist (5,6,8) - someone who believes that strict interpretation of religious law should provide the foundation for all aspects of life, including politics, government, and education.
8. Islam (2,4,6) - the religion begun by Muhammad, based on the belief that "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet."
9. Koran (1,6,8) - the Holy Book of Islam, believed to have been transmitted to Muhammad by God.
10. Kurd (3,4) - a person who speaks Kurdish as his or her first language and is part of a community known as Kurdistan located in parts of Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Armenia.
11. Muhammad (4,5,6) - the founder of the Islamic religion, believed by Muslims to be a prophet of God.
12. Muslim (3,4,7) - a follower of the Islamic faith.
13. Ottoman Empire (2,4,7) - controlled most of the Middle East from 1288 until the end of World War I.
14. Persia (1,2) - a five thousand year-old civilization in what today is called Iran.

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15. secularize/secularist (1,5,7) - to separate religion from other aspects of life, particularly politics; someone who believes that religion should be separate from the government and politics.
16. Shah (1,2) - title of the monarch or king of Iran; overthrown in the Iranian Revolution of 1979.
17. Sharia (1,3,6) - the religious law of Islam.
18. Shi'ite Muslim (1,2,7,8) - a Muslim sect; "followers of Ali" who believe that the leader of the Islamic community should be related by bloodline to the Prophet Muhammad. Shi'ites are opposed to secularization, and are more in favor of allowing religious leaders to rule.
19. Sunni Muslim (3,4,5,7) - the major Muslim sect, comprising about 85% of all Muslims; Sunni consider themselves the more orthodox Muslims, and are more open to separation of politics and religion than are the Shi'ites.
20. Umayyad dynasty (7,8) - the ruling dynasty from 661 - 1258 (following the assassination of Ali), with its capital at Damascus; it was during the Umayyad dynasty that Islam spread its influence from Spain in the west to India in the east.
21. umma (3,4) - the community of believers described in the Koran, who believe in one and only one God and that the Prophet Mohammed was his messenger.

## Religion, Ethnicity and the State in the Middle East

In order to understand nationalism in the Middle East, it is necessary to understand the differences between a **state** and a **nation**.

A state is made up of a population within a given territory, but the most important feature of the state is the existence of a government that controls the territory and is recognized by other states. The state, then, is a legal unit. It makes and enforces laws within a certain territory and is not under the control of any other state.

While a **nation** also consists of a population and identifies with a certain territory, it is not necessarily a legal entity. It may not have a government and it may not control the territory with which it identifies. Rather, a nation is a population or group of people who believe they are united by some common bond. A common language and a common cultural tradition - that is, a common **ethnicity** - are the ties that most frequently bind the nation together. Sometimes, religious identity can provide the basis for shared identity and create a strong sense of a common bond among people.

The state is held together with laws which apply to all citizens within its borders. Nations are held together by a sense of common identity which is shared by all members. It sometimes happens that the citizens of a particular state all share the same language, cultural traditions, and religion - that is, national identity and state identity are the same. But often this is not the case. Thus, nations may spill over the borders of a particular state, or a single state may have more than one national group living within its borders.

In the Middle East, religion, ethnicity (often based upon use of a common language), and state-membership are three very important ideas that people use to identify who they are. Sometimes, these three different kinds of personal identities come together in ways that complement each other. Other times, they are a source of potential conflict, with the individual being pulled by competing loyalties.

Over the next few days, our class will be studying the ways in which these different kinds of identities can combine in people who live in Middle Eastern countries. In the process, we will also learn a lot about the history, geography, and religion of the Middle East. You will be assigned a "personal identity" based on a profile of a teenager who might be living in the Middle East today. Read the profile carefully. Think about the different identities that this person has, and whether these identities provide a sense of harmony and wholeness, or are a potential source of personal conflict.

### Locating Ourselves

People often speak of the "Middle East" without specifying where or what they mean. "Middle of what?" you might very well ask. Because Europeans and Americans first used the term, the "Middle East" refers to the area between what used to be known as the "Near East" (generally, the area in today's Eastern Europe) and the "Far East" (India, China, Japan, etc.). Roughly speaking, the "Middle East" is the area where the continents of Africa, Asia and Europe meet. However, for reasons of history related to the spread of the Arabic language and the Islamic religion, the "Middle East" sometimes is defined to include much of North Africa, or areas as far east and north as Afghanistan and Turkey.

You and your classmates will be reading about teenagers who live in four of the countries in the "Middle East." To have a clear idea of the location of the places you will be reading about, find the following places by using a map or atlas, and fill them in on the attached outline map:

1. Iran
2. Iraq
3. Egypt
4. Syria
5. Turkey
6. Jordan
7. Israel
8. Lebanon
9. Yemen
10. Oman
11. United Arab Emirates
12. Kuwait
13. Tigris River
14. Euphrates River
15. Nile River
16. Cairo
17. Baghdad
18. Damascus
19. Tehran
20. Persian Gulf
21. Red Sea

Extra points for marking the locations of:

- Shatt al Arab waterway
- Basra, Iraq
- Armenia
- Asyut, Egypt



**Profile #1: Majid Faytollah****Iran // Shi'ite Muslim // Persian**

My name is Majid Faytollah. I am proud to be an Iranian, a Shi'ite Muslim, and a Persian. Like all Persians, I speak the Farsi language.

Persia (what is today called Iran) has a long and distinguished history. Cyrus the Great ruled Persia from 550-529 B.C. In 1502, the rulers of Persia proclaimed Shi'ite Islam as our state religion. Persia has always had its own rulers. The Persian Empire was never conquered by the Ottoman Empire, and it was never a European colony. In 1935, about the time my father was fifteen, the new Shah (the Persian monarch or king) gave Persia the new name of Iran.

Shi'ite Muslims are a sect or branch of Islam. The Shi'ites believe that the Prophet Muhammad selected his son-in-law, Ali, as his successor. When Ali took over as leader of the Muslims, some rejected his claim to the position and he was assassinated in 661. This marked the beginning of the Shi'ites, which means followers of Ali. We Shi'ites believe that the leader of the Islamic community should be related by bloodline to the Prophet Muhammad. We depend upon holy clerics to interpret the Koran, the Holy Book of Islam that was transmitted by God to Muhammad. At the present time more than ninety percent of Iranians are Shi'ite and Iran has the largest population of Shi'ites in the world.

Even though we have never been directly ruled by anyone else, Iran has been heavily influenced by foreign powers. Beginning in the nineteenth century, the British and the Russians tried to get economic concessions in Iran in things like tobacco and oil. In the 1930's, the Shah started trying to westernize Iran and to secularize the state, to separate it from religion. We Shi'ites believe the laws of the state should be the same as the Sharia, the religious laws of Islam. So it was clear to us that the programs the Shah instituted to secularize the state were threatening to the Shi'ites and to Iran.

In 1941, the British forced the Shah to abdicate in favor of his son, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. But around 1953, the younger Shah came under the influence of the United States. Things got even worse. The Shah seemed to forget that Iran was not a Western state but an Islamic state, a state run by religious leaders. In 1979, religious leaders, together with merchants, intellectuals and others favoring a democratic system, joined together in the Iranian Revolution to overthrow the Shah. A new constitution was approved which established Iran as a republic (instead of a monarchy) and an Islamic state.

Most Iranians support the Iranian Revolution. Almost everyone, even the non-Persian minorities, fought to defend Iran and the Revolution from the Iraqi invasion in 1980. None of us wanted any part of Iran to be taken over by Iraq, a secular state run by Iraq's minority Sunni Muslims. You see, we Iranians, the leaders of the Shi'ite Muslims, are very proud of our history and our revolution. We need to honor the late Ayatollah Khomeini, leader of the Iranian Revolution, by continuing to strengthen Iran and Shi'ite Islam.

**Profile #2: Jasmine Latif****Iran // Shi'ite Muslim // Arab**

My name is Jasmine Latif. I am an Iranian and like most other Iranians, I am a Shi'ite Muslim. However, unlike the majority of Iranians who are Persian, I am an Arab. I speak Arabic as my first language. But I also speak Farsi, the Persian language.

There is a strong sense of nationalism in Iran. Whether we are Persian and speak Farsi, or Arab and speak Arabic, or even if we speak some other language as our first language, we are all Iranians and we are all willing to fight to defend and protect Iran. Persia (what is today called Iran) can trace its history back about five thousand years to the time of Cyrus the Great. Iran has kept her independence for centuries. Even when the Ottoman Empire controlled most of the Middle East from 1288 until the end of World War I, Persia remained independent. And she was never colonized by European powers like happened to so many other parts of the Middle East.

In addition to our long history, Iranians are united by religion. In 1502 Shi'ite Islam was declared the Persian state religion, so for almost five hundred years we have been united as Shi'ite Muslims with a common history. More than ninety percent of Iranians are Shi'ite Muslims.

Shi'ite Muslims are a sect or branch of Islam, the religion that proclaims that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His prophet. The Shi'ites believe that the Prophet selected his son-in-law, Ali, as his successor. In 661, Ali was assassinated and this marked the beginning of the Shi'ites, which means followers of Ali. We Shi'ites believe that the leader of the Islamic community should be related by bloodline to the Prophet Muhammad. At the present time more than ninety percent of Iranians are Shi'ite and Iran has the largest population of Shi'ites in the world.

I live with my family in southwestern Iran near the Shatt al Arab waterway, the river which is formed where the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers come together just before they flow into the Persian Gulf. The Shatt al Arab is the southern border between Iran and Iraq. The border has been in dispute for a very long time, dating back to the sixteenth century. At the end of World War I, when Iraq was established under British control, there were clashes along the border. The border skirmishes continued after Iraq became independent. But the Iran-Iraq war that began in 1980 was much worse; it lasted longer and many were killed and wounded on both sides.

In fact, my older brother was killed defending Iran from the Iraqi invasion. My mother says my brother wanted to fight. He was angry that Iraq, an Arab nation, would attack other Arabs. He was even angrier that Iraq, a country with a majority of Shi'ite Muslims, would attack another country with a majority of Shi'ite Muslims.

Whether we were supporters of the new regime led by Ayatollah Khomeini, or defenders of the former Shah (king or monarch) who was overthrown in the Iranian Revolution, we all fought to defend and protect Iran. So I am comfortable being an Arab in Iran where the Farsi-speaking Shi'ite Muslims rule for all Iranians.

**Profile #3: Ali Abdullah Ali****Iraq // Sunni Muslim // Arab**

My name is Ali Abdullah Ali. I live in Iraq, I am a Sunni Muslim, and I am an Arab.

I live in the central part of Iraq, about thirty minutes by bus from Baghdad, the capital of Iraq. From 750 to 1258, Baghdad was the capital of the Abbasid dynasty. The period of the Abbasid dynasty was very important in Arab history, for it was the time when the Arab world was the world leader in art, architecture, and poetry, as well as math, science, and medicine. Often, when I visit my cousins in Baghdad, we go into the very old parts of the city and look at the mosques and walls left from the Abbasid period.

I am Arab. That means I speak the Arabic language and I can trace Arab history back many centuries. After World War I, when my great grandfather was a teenager, the British and the French divided the Arab part of the Ottoman Empire into separate colonies such as Iraq. Later these colonies became separate and independent states with the boundaries that the Europeans imposed on us. So not all Arabs live in Iraq. Even more curious is the fact that not all Iraqis are Arab. In the north there are the Kurds. They speak the Kurdish language as their first language and they have their own distinctive culture. I take considerable pride in being Arab and in learning about the time of Arab greatness when Baghdad was the capital of one of the greatest empires in Arab history.

I am a Muslim, a follower of the Islamic faith. In fact, I am a Sunni Muslim. Sunni Muslims are the major Muslim sect, comprising about 85% of all Muslims. Sunni Muslims consider themselves the more orthodox Muslims. In particular, Sunni frown upon translations and modern interpretations of the holy book. At the same time, we are more open to separation of politics and religion than are the Shi'ites. Religion is an important part of my life. I believe in the Sharia, the religious law of Islam. It is the law for all Muslims and the differences between different Muslim sects should not be overstated. If we are good Muslims, then we are part of the community of believers which in the holy book is called the umma. A Muslim's loyalty should be to the umma, to others who believe in one and only one God and that the Prophet Muhammad was his messenger.

Not all Iraqis are Sunni Muslims. In fact, the majority of Iraqis are Shi'ite Muslims, but Sunni Muslims are the most powerful politically and rule the country. I think this is good, for it means that Iraq can more easily identify with the Arab world, the majority of whom are Sunni, as well as with the broader Muslim world, which as I said, is about 85% Sunni.

As you can see, being a Sunni Muslim, being an Arab, and being Iraqi are all three identities of which I am proud. The Prophet Muhammad was Arab and the holy book is written in Arabic. And today, modern Iraqi and modern Baghdad have a role to play similar to that of ancient Baghdad under the Abbasids, to serve as a leader and the center for the Arab and Muslim worlds.

**Profile #4: Mustafa al-Barzani****Iraq // Sunni Muslim // Kurd**

My name is Mustafa al-Barzani. I live within the borders of the state of Iraq, but I am a Kurd. I am also a Sunni Muslim.

To be a Kurd means that I speak Kurdish as my first language. Kurdish is an Indo-European language. To be a Kurd also means that I am part of the larger Kurdish community known as Kurdistan, with our own history and culture. Our culture developed in our early history when most Kurds lived in the mountains as farmers and sheep herders. While we were separated from one another by lack of easy transportation and communication, occasionally our elders came together to settle disputes and to unite us against our common enemies in the north, the Turks; in the south, the Arabs; and in the east, the Persians.

Prior to the twentieth century most of the Kurdish people lived in the Ottoman Empire, which had control over much of the Middle East from about 1288 until the end of World War I. The Ottomans let us keep our own language and culture, and we were pretty free to move within Kurdistan, even to go into parts of Kurdistan which were just outside the Ottoman Empire. My great uncle remembers going to visit his distant cousins in part of Kurdistan that was in Persia, now known as Iran. When the Ottoman Empire collapsed after the First World War, Kurdistan was divided among five different authorities and we no longer had the freedom to move about within Kurdistan as a whole. Not only was Kurdistan divided up into many pieces, but the Kurds were a minority in each of the new countries. Everybody tried to make us give up our own identity. Of course, wherever we are, we resist this effort to divide and rule Kurdistan.

Besides being a Kurd, I am also a Muslim. In 610 A.D., Muhammad received revelations from God that convinced him that God had called him to found a new religion. By 750, Islam, the new religion started by Muhammad, had spread to Spain in the west, across North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, all the way to China and India and even beyond in the east. So it's not surprising that I am Muslim, a follower of the Islamic faith.

I am a Sunni Muslim, the largest sect of Muslims in the world. In fact, about 85% of all Muslims are Sunni. We Sunni Muslims are more orthodox than other Muslim sects. While we believe that our lives should be guided by our religion, we do not believe that our religious leaders should necessarily be our political leaders.

What is interesting is that, while Sunni Muslims are the majority of all Muslims, the majority of the population in Iraq belongs to the Shi'ite Muslim sect. The largest number of Shi'ite Muslims live in Iran, so you would think that Iran and Iraq would get along. In fact, they fought each other for almost eight years in the very costly Iran-Iraq war.

I am very proud to be a Kurd, and I am also comfortable with being a Sunni Muslim. But I have many problems being regarded as an Iraqi. My people are treated poorly at best, often exploited and sometimes ruthlessly attacked by the Iraqi authorities. Even though the current rulers in Iraq are Sunni Muslim just like we are, the fact that we are not Arab seems more important to them. The Koran speaks of the unity of the umma or the community of believers, people who believe in one and only one God and that the Prophet Muhammad was his messenger. But it seems that the leaders of Iraq don't believe much in the umma. So we Kurds will continue to try to gain political autonomy within Iraq, and hope and plan for the eventual establishment of an independent Kurdistan.

**Profile #5: Ahmed Muhammad Ali****Egypt // Sunni Muslim // Arab**

My name is Ahmed Muhammad Ali. I live in Egypt, I am a Sunni Muslim, and an Arab.

I am fifteen years old and I have just moved to Cairo. Cairo is the largest city in Egypt. It is also the largest city in the Arab world and in the Middle East. I live with an aunt and uncle and my three cousins in a one room apartment in Babalouk, a district in downtown Cairo. I hope to find some work soon but it will not be easy. My cousin Yussef, who is sixteen, is also looking for work and he says that every week thousands of people arrive in Cairo looking for work.

I am Arab, which means I speak Arabic and am part of the great Arab nation. We share a long, great and illustrious history as the Arab nation. This history goes back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad who, in 610 A.D., received revelations from God that convinced him that God had called him to found a new religion. Muhammad began preaching and converting the Arabs, who at the time, were mostly non-believers in the one God of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

Over the centuries the power and influence of the Arab nation have changed. Following the Prophet's death, the geographical size of the Islamic state continued to increase. By 750, from their capital at Damascus, (now the capital of today's Syria), the Arabs controlled much of the world known at the time, from Spain in the west, across North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, to China and India and even beyond in the east. During the Golden Age of Islam, from 750 to 1258 under the Abbasid dynasty, the Arab world reached a new height in civilization, with an unrivaled quality in the arts, in architecture, in poetry, in the sciences and medicines, and in administration. The capital for the Arabs was then in Baghdad, now the capital of today's Iraq.

Today, Cairo is the largest city in the Arab world. It attracts many persons from outside of Egypt who come here to work in business, to perform in the movies and theaters, and to study at the universities. While I am glad that I am in Cairo, I do miss my family in Asyut, which is a city alongside the Nile in southern Egypt. But I do not miss the tensions which were occurring in Asyut. Asyut is known as a place where Islamic fundamentalists are trying to organize Egyptian youth. Fundamentalists believe that all of our country's laws should be based on the religious law of Islam.

Like most Egyptians, I am a Sunni Muslim, the largest sect of Muslims in the world. In fact, about 85% of all Muslims are Sunni. We Sunni Muslims are generally more orthodox than other Muslim sects and we believe that the Koran provides a guide to how to live a good life. But most of us, and that includes me, are secularists. That is, we believe a distinction should be made between religion and the state. The state should provide for schooling and for the police, and religious leaders and political leaders should probably be separate. Even though almost all Egyptians are Muslims, there are some people who believe in different religions, like the Copts, who are Egyptian Christians. In any case, I hope that there won't be so many conflicts between the Islamic fundamentalists and the Egyptian authorities here in Cairo.

**Profile #6: Tahia Shukri****Egypt // Coptic // Arab**

My name is Tahia Shukri. I live in Asyut, Egypt, I am an Arab, and a Copt.

Asyut is a city in the southern part of Egypt on the Nile River, which flows from the south in Sudan to the north where it empties into the Mediterranean Sea. If it weren't for the Nile, we would be living in the desert. Today, Asyut is less dependent upon agriculture than it used to be, and more tied into commerce and industry and even government. In fact, my father works in an Egyptian government office. My mother teaches fifth grade in the government school.

Like all Egyptians, I am an Arab. I speak, read and write Arabic. By law, all citizens of Egypt are Arab. Both my parents and my older brother, Salim, voted in the last Egyptian election. When I am old enough, I plan to vote too.

I, and the rest of my family, are Copts. That means we are members of the Coptic religion which is part of the Christian faith. In fact, the holy family lived in Egypt when Christ was a child. The Coptic religion began in the third and fourth century, when many Egyptians were converted to Christianity. This was hundreds of years before the prophet Muhammad even began the religion of Islam. So Christianity has been in Egypt even longer than Islam. You might note the similarity between the words "Copt" and "Egypt." That's because the word "Copt" actually means native Egyptian of the Christian faith. Coptic Christians have some very interesting and beautiful traditions and rituals, quite different from the traditions of European Christians, but we all believe in Jesus as the Savior and Son of God.

Being a Copt is difficult sometimes. My older brother, Salim, was beaten up by four Muslims two months ago for no reason at all. They said that since he was a Copt, he wasn't an Arab. They say that you aren't a true Arab unless you are Muslim. Some of the Muslims even firebombed our church.

Some Muslims, especially the fundamentalists Muslims, believe that our schools should teach the Koran, the Holy Book of the Muslim faith, and that Egypt's laws should follow the Sharia, the religious law of Islam. They are angry about the Egyptian government's position on not teaching religion in the schools. The government argues that the schools should train us for jobs and employment. My mother says there are heated arguments among the teachers about whether the schools should teach Islamic beliefs in a country where an overwhelmingly majority - 93% - of the people are Muslim.

Salim was both hurt and angry after he was beaten up. After all, he is an Arab because he speaks Arabic and he is an Egyptian. Almost everyone in Egypt is Arab. We all speak Arabic. As I told you earlier, both my parents work for the Egyptian government, which is known as the Arab Republic of Egypt. I just don't understand these fundamentalists, who refuse to accept the fact that we are Egyptians and Arabs even though we are not Muslims. But it makes me feel confused and a little frightened. It sure doesn't make being a teenager easy!

**Profile #7: Salah Bitar****Syria // Sunni Muslim // Arab**

My name is Salah Bitar. I am a Syrian, an Arab, and a Sunni Muslim. If I had my way, there would be no conflict between any of these identifications. Unfortunately, I don't have it my way. So I am trying to keep my thoughts and opinions to myself because if I don't, I might be arrested for criticism of the present regime in Syria. Let me explain.

Shortly after the Prophet Muhammad's death in the 7th century, there was a dispute regarding who should be chosen as the new leader of the Muslims, that is, followers of the Islamic religion. There was such a difference of opinion that Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law who had been chosen as the successor, was killed in 661. This led to a permanent split between the Sunni Muslims and the Shi'ite Muslims. We Sunni are more orthodox than the Shi'ites, and we do not believe that our religious leaders should be our political leaders also. The Shi'ites, or "followers of Ali," believe that the leader of the Islamic community should be related by bloodline to the Prophet Muhammad and are more in favor of allowing religious leaders to rule. Over 85% of the Muslims in the world today are Sunni, so the Shi'ites are really just a minority.

Syria traces its history as an Islamic and Arab state back to the 7th century. From 661-750 A.D., Damascus was the capital of the Umayyad dynasty, the greatest state in Arab history, when the Arabs ruled from what is today Spain all the way to what is part of today's India. Later, Syria was controlled by the Ottoman Empire, which controlled much of the Middle East from about 1288 until the end of World War I. During World War I, Emir Feisal fought with Lawrence of Arabia against the Turks who had control of the Ottoman Empire, but he was ousted by the French following the end of the War. For awhile, Syria was a French colony, but we became an independent state in 1946.

Since independence there have been many changes of government, usually with the involvement of the military. But since 1970 there has been only one leader in Syria. That leader is Hafez al-Assad. His background is in the air force, he is a member of the Baath Party, and he belongs to the Alawite sect. These factors are the very ones that force me to keep my thoughts and opinions to myself. Allow me to explain.

First, I am opposed to the military ruling. I believe that civilians should rule. Second, I am opposed to the Baath Party. The party claims to be dedicated to Arab nationalism and to Arab socialism, but it doesn't behave that way. For instance, Syria supported Iran, a non-Arab state, in the Iran-Iraq war, even though Iraq is an Arab state and even though Iraq, like Syria, has a Baathist government. Third, I am opposed to the Alawites dominating the government of Syria. The Alawites are a non-orthodox Shi'ite sect, and they make up less than fifteen percent of the population.

It's inconsistent for the Baathists to claim that they are secularists, that they want to keep religion and politics separate, when most of the top party and government positions are given to Alawites. This is one of the reasons why some of the Sunni Muslims have joined the Muslim Brotherhood, an organization that wants a return to fundamental Islam. The Muslim Brotherhood opposes secularization and Alawite control of the Syrian government. But Assad's government is ruthless in putting down the opposition. My older cousin was killed in 1982, when he joined a group of Sunni Muslims who publicly defied the government. I was fourteen, and since then I have known it is best to be quiet about my religious and political beliefs. However, I believe that someday, if there is a change in government, the Sunni majority in Syria will be able to make Syria a true Islamic state defending Arab unity.

**Profile #8: Hassan al-Atassi****Syria // Alawite Muslim // Arab**

My name is Hassan al-Atassi. I am a Syrian, an Arab, and an Alawite Muslim.

I am proud to be a Syrian. Syria traces its history as an Islamic and Arab state back to the seventh century. From 661-750, Damascus was the capital of the Umayyad dynasty, the greatest state in Arab history, when the Arabs ruled from what is today Spain all the way to what is part of today's India. It was during the Umayyad dynasty that a split occurred between Muslims, or the followers of Islam. Shortly after Muhammad's death, there was a dispute regarding who should be chosen as the new leader of the Muslims. In 661, Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law who had been chosen as the successor, was killed, and this marked the beginning of the Shi'ite Muslims. The word Shi'ite means "follower of Ali." We Shi'ites believe that the leader of the Islamic community should be related by bloodline to the Prophet Muhammad.

To complicate matters, the Shi'ites are also split into a number of different sects. One of these is the Alawite sect, to which I belong. The Alawite are a non-orthodox Shi'ite sect. The majority of Muslims in Syria are Sunni, and it used to be that the Alawites were excluded from government and denied access to many of the schools and businesses in the country. Now, even though we are only about fifteen percent of the Syrian population, the Alawites have a large number of positions in government, including the presidency.

For a very long time, Syria was part of the Ottoman Empire, but after World War I, Syria became a French colony. We became an independent state in 1946. Since independence there have been many changes of government, usually with the involvement of the military. But since 1970 there has been only one leader in Syria. That leader is Hafez al-Assad. His background is in the air force, he is a member of the Baath Party, and he belongs to the Alawite sect. I am very proud of what President Assad has done for Syria since he was elected as President in 1971.

I support the Baath Party and its government. The party is dedicated to Arab nationalism and to Arab socialism, both of which are important goals for Syria. Under President Assad, Syria has become stronger and more unified as a state. Syria has prospered at home and has worked more forcefully for Arab unity throughout the Middle East. Sometimes, too, it makes sense for the military to rule, especially when civilian politicians are always squabbling with each other.

I am also proud of the involvement of the Alawites in the government of Syria. Even though we are a minority in Syria, we have done very well for ourselves. Some of the fundamentalists argue that there should be a closer tie between government and religion. They believe that study of the Koran, the Holy Book of Islam transmitted to the Prophet Muhammad by God, should be part of the public school curriculum. They also believe that Syria itself should be an Islamic state based upon Islamic religious law. However, if that were to be the case, the Sunni majority might impose its own way of doing things. That would leave the religious minorities, including the Alawites and the Christians, feeling threatened. So even though I am a Shi'ite, I guess you could say I believe that government and the state should be separate.

### Middle East Timeline

Instructions: As you read your profile, see if you can discover what happened during the dates that do not have an event listed. Write in those missing events you are able to locate. (You may not find all - or any - of the missing events in your profile.)

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event</u>
1240 B.C.	.....Exodus of Hebrews from Egypt
33 C.E.	.....Crucifixion of Jesus
70	.....Destruction of Second Temple in Palestine
476	.....Fall of the Roman Empire
570	.....Muhammad is born
610	.....
632	.....Muhammad dies
661	.....
661 - 750	.....
750 - 1258	.....
1258 - 1918	.....
1918 - 1946	.....European colonial rule over much of the Middle East
1946 - 1947	.....Most of the Middle East colonies become independent states

**Vocabulary Handout**

1. Abbasid dynasty
2. Alawite
3. Arab
4. Baath Party
5. Copt
6. Farsi
7. fundamentalist
8. Islam
9. Koran
10. Kurd
11. Muhammad
12. Muslim
13. Ottoman Empire
14. Persia
15. secularist/secularize
16. Shah
17. Sharia
18. Shi'ite Muslim
19. Sunni Muslim
20. Umayyad dynasty
21. umma

## The Philosophy of the Revolution

After the Egyptian revolution of 1952, in which the corrupt government of King Farouk was toppled, Gama Abdel Nasser emerged as the voice of the Egyptian people. As head of the country for eighteen years, Nasser established Egyptian political independence from the British, removed Britain from the Suez Canal in 1956, and helped develop a strong sense of pride in Egyptian nationalism among his people.

Nasser also strongly believed in the importance of common bonds uniting all the peoples of the Middle East, although his attempts to bring about unity throughout the Arab world were ultimately not successful. In the following excerpts from his book, "Egypt's Liberation: The Philosophy of the Revolution," Nasser talks about three circles which bind Egypt together with peoples in other places.

As you read, pretend you are the person in your Profile. Think about whether or not you agree with Nasser about each of the three circles he talks about. Which of the three circles, if any, do you identify with? Come to class tomorrow prepared to explain how you feel about Nasser's call for unity, arguing from the point of view of your Profile person.

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"There can be no doubt that the Arab circle is the most important, and the one with which we (Egyptians) are most closely linked. For its peoples are intertwined with us by history. We have suffered together, we have gone through the same crises...

We are also bound in this circle by a common religion. The center of Islamic learning has always moved within the orbit of its several capital cities - first Mecca, then shifting to...Damascus, next to Baghdad, and finally to Cairo.

Lastly, the fact that the Arab states are contiguous<sup>1</sup> has joined them together in a geographic framework...

If we consider the second circle - the continent of Africa - I may say without exaggeration that we cannot, under any circumstances...remain aloof from the terrible and sanguinary<sup>2</sup> conflict going on there today... We cannot do so for an important and obvious reason: we are *in* Africa. The peoples of Africa will continue to look to us, who guard their northern gate, and who constitute their link with the outside world... (Also), the Nile is the life artery of our country, bringing water from the heart of the continent... (and) the boundaries of our beloved brother, the Sudan, extend far into the depths of Africa...

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<sup>1</sup> *contiguous* - next to each other, touching each other

<sup>2</sup> *sanguinary* - bloody, murderous

There remains the third circle, which circumscribes<sup>3</sup> continents and oceans, and which is the domain<sup>4</sup> of our brothers in (Islamic) faith, who, wherever under the sun they may be, turn as we do in the direction of Mecca, and whose devout lips speak the same prayers...

When I consider the 80 million Muslims in Indonesia, and the 50 million in China, and the millions in Malaya, Siam, and Burma, and the nearly 100 million in Pakistan, and the more than 100 million in the Middle East, and the 40 million in the Soviet Union<sup>5</sup>, together with the other millions in far-flung parts of the world - when I consider these hundreds of millions united by a single creed, I emerge with a sense of tremendous possibilities which we might realize through the cooperation of all these Muslims, a cooperation going not beyond the bounds of their natural loyalty to their own countries, but nonetheless enabling them and their brothers in faith to wield power wisely and without limit."

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<sup>3</sup> *circumscribes* - draws a line around, encircles

<sup>4</sup> *domain* - region, area

<sup>5</sup> Note that Nasser was writing in 1955. Since then, Indonesia has become the country with the largest number of Muslims in the world - over 150 million - Siam has been renamed Thailand, Burma is now called Myanmar and the Soviet Union has broken into numerous independent republics.