Unit 2: Expressions of Religion in the Arab World

Lesson 4: Four Women of Egypt

About this Lesson:

In the previous lesson, students analyzed commonalities between religious traditions and discussed a caricature of the conflict between Muslims and Christians in Egypt. In this lesson, students watch the documentary film *Four Women of Egypt* (Canada, 1997), which provides insight into the identities of four Egyptian activists. Through their analysis, students will move from an exaggerated view of religious tension to a more nuanced understanding the ways that people from many faiths and backgrounds negotiate their relationships.

*Four Women of Egypt* (Canada, 1997): This feature documentary invites the viewer to partake in a discussion between four Egyptian women of different political and religious stripe. Amina, Safynaz, Shahenda and Wedad are Muslim, Christian, or non-religious, but they are first and foremost friends. They listen to one another’s views and argue openly, without ever breaking the bond that unites them. How do we get along with each other when our views collide? A timely question, and a universal one. *Four Women of Egypt* takes on this challenge, and their confrontation redefines tolerance.

In this lesson, students will:

- watch *Four Women of Egypt* (Canada, 1997), directed by Tahani Rached.
- create Venn diagrams to compare and contrast the characters from the film.

Time: 100 minutes (2 classes)
Key Terms:

1952 Revolution: This Revolution, led by the Free Officers, initially aimed to overthrow King Farouk. Upon successfully deposing the King, the Free Officers abolished the constitutional monarchy put in place by the British and established an independent Egyptian Republic.

Aswan Dam: Built by Gamal Abdel Nasser to prevent the annual flooding of the Nile River, the Aswan Dam was a key strategic initiative to industrialize Egypt following the Egyptian Revolution.

Free Officers: A group of nationalist officers in the Egyptian military, established by Gamal Abdel Nasser, who led the revolution against King Farouk in 1952.

Fuedalism: social system in which people work and fight for the upper class, who give them protection and the use of land in return.

Naguib, Muhammad: The first president of Egypt. He was later removed from office and put on house arrest for 18 years.

Nasser, Gamal Abdel: Nasser served as the second president of Egypt from 1956 until his death in 1970. He implemented a series of socialist initiatives and modernization efforts including the creation of the Aswan Dam and the nationalization of the Suez Canal.

Obscurantism: the practice of keeping knowledge or understanding about something from people: the policy of not letting people know something.

Sadat, Anwar: Sadat was a member of the Free Officers movement and served as President of Egypt from 1970 until his assassination in 1981. He was considered a great hero for leading Egypt in the 1973 war against Israel and successfully reclaimed the Sinai Peninsula. Later in the year, he engaged in negotiations with Israel which ultimately led to the Israel-Egypt peace treaty. The Egyptian people, and the Arab world at large, demonstrated mixed reactions to the treaty.

Serfdom: The status of peasants under a feudal society.

Sharia: The moral code and religious law of Islam. Political Islamists call for the implementation of Sharia as national law.
Enduring Understandings

- Religion is more than a personal choice in the Arab world; it relates to identity and an individual’s association with their family and society.

- Though Islam is the predominant religion and present in daily life in the Arab world, there is great diversity in the individual practice of the religion.

Curriculum Framing Questions

- What characterizes the relationship between different religious groups in the Arab world?

- What does religious identity in the Arab world entail on personal and community levels?

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- identify shared and unique experiences and viewpoints between individuals of different faiths and philosophies
- compare the identities, goals, challenges, experiences, and convictions of two of the four women in “Four Women of Egypt”

Assessment & Evaluation of Student Learning:

- Venn diagram comparing two women from Four Women of Egypt.
- Active engagement in class discussion.

Materials Needed:

- Four Women of Egypt
- Four Women of Egypt Chart
- Four Women of Egypt Teacher Guide
- Flip chart paper and markers
Implementation:

Before Class:

1. At home, students will watch the film *Four Women of Egypt* (1997, Canada), directed by Tahani Rached and take notes on the *Four Women of Egypt Chart*. Remind students that during the previous lesson, they compared fictional depictions of Egyptians whose primary identity was either “Christian” or “Muslim.” In this lesson, they look at the varied experiences four real Egyptian women.

In Class:

2. Divide the students into pairs. Ask each pair to create a Venn diagram comparing two of the women from the film. They should consider the political convictions, personal challenges and perspectives on religion of the women they compare. Students may choose to compare whichever two women they’d like, or the teacher may assign various combinations to assure that all possible combinations are addressed.

3. When the diagrams are completed, display them around the classroom. Ask students to walk around the room and compare the various diagrams.

4. Once everyone has had a chance to see their classmates’ work, conduct a closing discussion with the class. Use the following questions as a guide:
   - What is in the “shared” section of all the diagrams?
   - How do each of these individual women represent a community and a position in Egypt’s national discourse?
   - How are these communities linked and what can we learn from the diagrams about the communities’ dynamics?

Optional Extension:

You may want to review the film with the students by showing the select clips below and conducting a conversation about the role of religion in the relationships of the women depicted.

- 0:00-2:40: The women discuss what unites them and allows them to be friends.
- 11:18-16:54: The women discuss how they met and how they associate each other with various political and religious positions.
• 19:02-23:25: Safynaz and Amina talk about their contrasting and intertwining histories.
• 29:15-33:48: Safynaz talks about cross cultural dialogue and religious conviction.
• 39:00-45:28: The women discuss how their fundamental values impact their actions.
• 56:27-80:00: The women argue and discuss each other’s religious convictions.

Common Core State Standards 9-10

Speaking and Listening
• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.
• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.5 Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

History/Social Studies
• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.
• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.7 Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g., charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital text.

Common Core State Standards 11-12

Reading: Informational Texts
• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3 Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.
Speaking and Listening

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.5 Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

History/Social Studies

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

National Standards for Foreign Language Education

Standard 2.1 Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied