

Arab Culture Through Literature and Film / A Five Unit High School Curriculum

Unit 5: Daily Life: Kinship, Marriage and Family

Across the Arab world, kinship and familial association are cornerstones of society and the experience of every individual. Though each kin group functions in a unique way, there is a pervasive pattern of reliance on family networks regardless of religion, gender, ethnicity, or class. In Arab societies, any action or inaction reflects on the individual as well as their entire network of relatives. As surely as family networks will always provide for their members, the individual members also have a responsibility to prioritize their family's well-being above other goals and obligations. This does not mean family members cannot have personal goals and obligations outside their family networks, merely that they are secondary to those that involve family. Most often, kinship works to open opportunities and increase the strength of individual voices for the advancement of the entire kin group. The concept of constantly weighing family needs when making decisions may seem restrictive to those unfamiliar with the system of strong kinship associations, yet the reality for most people is that the serves family as a source of comfort and safety not restriction and obligation.

This unit explores concepts and structures of family in Arab societies from a variety of angles. Students will explore Jordanian customs and consider the values behind them and their relation to family. They will also hear from gay and lesbian Middle Easterners who reflect on their concepts of family and its impact on their coming-out processes. Students will read select short stories and poems and watch *Ajami*, a film in which the plot is fueled by character reactions to their families' needs. In the final lesson of this unit, students will synthesize all of the lessons above to create an Arab kinship themed version of Chutes and Ladders that demonstrates the role of kinship in setting and realizing individual goals.

Enduring Understandings:

- Family is the central social and economic structure in Arab society and kinship stands at the root of social, economic and political decision-making.
- Relations of kin serve as the primary affiliation, resource and responsibility for individuals in the Arab world.
- The Arab family structure, extending well beyond the nuclear family, supports and protects its members by prioritizing family unity and well being above other obligations.
- Decisions, actions and behaviors of individuals can have a real and critical impact on the family.
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Curriculum Framing Questions:

- What is the role and function of kinship in Arab culture?
- What aspects of an individual's identity determine their role in the family?
- How do familial associations and networks increase and/or restrict an individual's voice and agency?
- What can we learn about the Arab world from the depiction of families in film and literature?

Overview:

Lesson 1: Family and Kinship in the Arab World

This lesson introduces the concept of kinship and the notion of the family as the central social and economic structure in Arab society.

Lesson 2: Family Support in the Arab World

Students continue to explore the centrality of family in Arab culture by watching the film *I Exist* (US, 2003).

Lesson 3: Mothers without Children and Children without Fathers

Students read Arabic fiction and explore the lives of those who do not fit into the traditional Arab family.

Lesson 4: The Consequences of My Actions

students explore the pressures of family obligation and the impact of those responsibilities on the lives of individuals.

Lesson 5: Family Games

Students articulate the obligations, benefits and repercussions of Arab family by designing game of Chutes and Ladders.