

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE EAST

A Lesson for Oregon FCE



Developed by Anna Massingham and Alene Showers

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Leaders, you may want to read this excerpt from the book "Infidel" before you begin the lesson.

Virginity Tested (Intro to The Role of Women in the Middle East.)

Yassi and I were standing in front of the green gate at the entrance to the Allameh Tabatabai University. Next to the gate there was a small opening with a curtain hanging from it. It was an aberration that attracted attention, because it did not belong there: it gaped with the arrogant authority of an intruder. Through this opening all the female students, including my girls, went into a small, dark room to be inspected. Yassi would describe later, long after that first session, what was done to her in this room: "I would first be checked to see if I have the right clothes: the color of my coat, the length of my uniform, the thickness of my scarf, the form of my shoes, the objects in my bag, the visible traces of even the mildest makeup, the size of my rings and their level of attractiveness, all would be checked before I could enter the campus of the university, the same university in which men also study. And to them the main door, with its immense portals and emblems and flags, is generously open."

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Leaders' Guide

Most of us in America have certain ideas about how women in the Middle East, and particularly Muslim women live. Images in the media often portray Middle Eastern women as religious, conservative, oppressed, swathed in veils, lacking any meaningful personal freedoms, forced to live their lives as second-class citizens, and largely relegated to domestic roles, as a mother, a wife, a sister, or a maid. We have all seen the news clips of conservatively-dressed and veiled Arab women, heard about the laws in Saudi Arabia which prevent women from driving cars, and maybe have heard about how Muslim women and men are segregated in the mosque. But as usual, the reality is much more complex than we might think. It is true that some Middle Eastern women dress conservatively, some wear hair and/or face veils. It is true that women are not allowed to drive cars in Saudi Arabia, and it's true that men and women worship separately from each other in the mosque. But it's also true that throughout the history of the region there have been many great women religious figures, writers, politicians, and intellectuals, and that the daily life of women in the Middle East is not as restricted and confined as most of us here in America might think.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Discover the location/countries that make up the Middle East
- Discover the role women have played in this region
- Dispel some of the myths currently held

MATERIELS NEEDED:

- Large map of the region (wall size and/or individual size for each participant)
- Copy of the Quran (if available)
- Display copies of books written by women authors
- Samples of clothing worn by Middle Eastern women

REMINDER: Practice pronouncing the Arabic names prior to the lesson

ALSO NEEDED:

- Participant Packet
- Evaluation form

Adapted (with permission) for Oregon FCE from the lecture on "Women in the Middle East," produced by the Teaching Resource Center at Harvard University.

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TEACHING THE LESSON

This lesson will last about 30 to 45 minutes, depending on the length of time spent on each activity.

- 1. You may want to begin the lesson by reading the “Virginity Tested” document, included in the Leader Guide Packet; or you may begin with the introduction at the top of the previous page of the Leader Guide. (spend no more than 2 minutes on the introduction.)**
- 2. Hand out the Participant Packet and have the group complete ACTIVITY 1 In order for the group to get an in-depth understanding of the Middle East, they should know where it is and a little about the history of each nation. (spend no more than 15 minutes on this activity)**
- 3. Leaders may take turns reading the lesson, or one leader may choose to give the reading, and the other leader may cover the introduction and closing. (spend no more than 15 minutes on this part of the lesson)**
- 4. Leaders may want to read one or two of the book reviews or may have participants read; if time is short, point out the reviews in the packet and let the participants read them later. Also, point out the recommended reading list. (spend no more than 1 to 6 minutes on this activity)**
- 5. Read the summary/closure part of the lesson and hand out the evaluation forms; be sure to have the evaluations returned to you; and be sure to send them to your county council, after you have read and compiled the info.**

WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE EAST

What countries make up the Middle East? Ask participants to name a few.

To give you an idea of what we are talking about when we speak of the Middle East, let us take a look at a map of the region. (Display a wall map and/or give each participant a handout of the map.) In your participant packet you will find a map of the Middle East and a brief history of each nation that makes up this region. Infoplease.com identifies the Middle East as a loosely defined geographic region. Most of the Middle East countries are part of Asia, with the exception of Egypt, which is part of Africa, and the northwestern part of Turkey, which is part of the European landmass.

ACTIVITY 1: hand out the participant packets; have the participants identify the Middle Eastern countries; correct the answers given; then ask for volunteers to read the excerpt on the countries from the handouts.

It is easy to see by the number of countries, the terrain, and the history of each that this is a diverse and complicated area. Painting the women of this region with one brush would be misleading at best and a disservice to them at the worst.

Let us begin our discussion by taking a look at the role women have played in Middle Eastern societies throughout history. We will look at some notable women and their achievements in the areas of religion, literature, and politics; then we will look at some of the issues of daily life for these women, and try to paint a more balanced picture of the roles they play in different countries. The goal is to give us a better understanding of women in this region, with the ultimate goal of reducing our suspicions and fears and giving us a better appreciation for our neighbors in the Middle East.

Women and Religion

The first thing to remember when talking about religion in the Middle East is that there are many different religions in the area. Many Middle Eastern countries have large Muslim majorities, but there are also Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Coptic Christian, and Orthodox Christian Middle Easterners, to name a few. In this lesson, however, we will deal only with women of Islam: first because Islam is the majority religion, and second, because unlike Christianity and Judaism, it is a religion that many people in the United States may not have a very clear idea about.

What is Islam? (Elicit a few responses from the audience; limit to 1 or 2 responses)

The word Islam is an Arabic word that means “submission to the will of God.” The word for God in Arabic is Allah. A Muslim is, literally, one who submits to the will

of Allah, or God. "Islam" is the name of the religion and "Muslim" is the name used for believers.

Islam began in Arabia in the year 610, according to our calendar. Muslims believe that God's word was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad and recorded in the Quran, the holy book of Islam. (Participants who want to take a closer look at Islam, may want to read about the five basic duties for followers of this religion.)

Famous Women in Islam

Throughout Islamic history, women have played a prominent role in religious affairs. The first convert to Islam was Muhammad's wife Khadijah, who is often considered, in a symbolic sense, the mother of all believers. After Khadijah died, one of Muhammad's later wives Aisha, often gave advice on religious matters to both men and women. She was widely recognized, even among men, as an authority on the Islamic religion, and was respected for her religious knowledge and her piety. Another famous woman in Islamic history was Rabia al-Adawiyya, often referred to as The Mystic. She was born in 717 CE in Basra (a city in modern day Iraq) to a poor family, and is considered to have been a saint by the Sufis (Islamic Mystics.)

Women and Literature

Fiction written by Arab women goes back only fifty years, according to Evelyn Accad, a professor of contemporary literature. Yet, she notes, the literature has gone through several distinct phases of development from focusing on loss of cultural identity to preoccupation with personal identity and the search for the self among female characters, to generalized critiques of Middle Eastern societies. Let us look at some of the most prominent Arab women writers who have published in the past 15 years.

Azar Nafise was a professor of English literature at the University of Tehran when extremist Muslims, under the leadership of the Ayatollah Khomeini, came back into power. Because Nafise refused to cover her hair and face in the traditional Islamic fashion, she was removed from her teaching position. Recognizing the importance of literature as a conduit for understanding across cultures, Nafise invited seven of her most promising students, some of whom had been imprisoned for "improper display" of their bodies (not wearing the veil) into her home each Thursday, where they secretly read and discussed forbidden works of Western literature. Nafise's book *Reading Lolita in Tehran: a memoir in books* rebelled against the cultural restraints placed on females. Her memoir takes the reader on a fascinating journey inside Iranian culture.

Although no birth records are kept in Nujood Ali's village in Yemen, relatives report that Nujood was 10 years old (however, she could just as well have been eight or nine) in 2008 when her Aba (father) arranged for her to be married to a man three times her age. Her book, *I Am Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced*, explores what it

is like for a married woman, even a married female child wed against her will, to obtain a divorce in the villages of Yemen.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali was born in Somalia, into a traditional tribal Muslim family, where the word of male clan members was law, and women held no value, except as chattel. In her book titled, *Infidel*, Ali exposes the female mutilation and brutal beatings she suffered at the hands of her female relatives, her forced marriage to a man she had never met, her estrangement from her family when she ran away and sought asylum in the Netherlands, and her continued efforts to speak out against extremism and advocate for women's rights at every opportunity despite the fatwa (death sentence) imposed on her life by members of extremist Muslim leaders.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali's *The Caged Virgin* is an emancipation proclamation for women. In this story, Ali gives "a crisp, very clear indictment of Islamic misogyny..." says The Philadelphia Inquirer. The Las Angeles Times declares it to be "a call for women to awaken to the brutal religious and cultural oppression of Islam and for Muslim women to free themselves from its outdated cult of virginity...." This book is a defiant argument for clear thinking and for an Islamic Enlightenment, and Salman Rushdie says that it "should be read as widely as possible, because it tells the truth—the unvarnished, uncomfortable truth."

Another important memoir is Mukhtar Mai's book *In The Name of Honor*. Mai is from an impoverished village in Pakistan, where "honor" involves such barbaric practices as gang rape. Mai's 12 year-old brother supposedly brought dishonor on a neighboring family by being in the vicinity of one of their female children. The aggrieved family claimed the "right" of gang rape of the sister of the offender as a means of restoring their honor. Mai's fight to reclaim her own honor contributed to the enlightenment of Muslim women in Pakistan and throughout the world. Her "school for girls" set up with the money she won in her law suit against her attackers will help to ensure that women are educated against such practices as honor rape.

These authors, and many others, have enlightened the world about Muslim prohibition of discussions on subjects such as honor and virginity, work and education for women, marriage, polygamy, divorce, obedience, and the very touchy subject of genital mutilation. Enclosed in your participant packet are three reports written on books reviewed by Carol Jung of the Lost Creek Study Group. Two of the books were written by American men, but their insight into Muslim life make them no less relevant. The third report is about the lives of two women growing up in Afghanistan in recent times. A second set of reviews is also in the packet.

Women and Politics

Although it is true that women have historically been excluded from public life in

the Middle East, there are several notable exceptions to this. One of them was Halide Edib Adivar, a famous Turkish nationalist. Born in 1883 in Istanbul, Halide was the daughter of the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid's secretary. After completing her education, she wrote frequent articles for the liberal Turkish press about literature and the emancipation of women. During World I Halide traveled to Lebanon and Syria, where she worked to establish orphanages and schools for refugee children. Halide is considered to be one of the founders of the Turkish nationalist movement.

Huda Sharawi is another Middle Eastern woman who was prominent in the public life of her country, Egypt. She founded a school for girls, as there was only one such school in her country at that time. She was active in the protest against British actions in Egypt and traveled extensively to other nations to bring these actions to the light. She founded a women's union and began a magazine called "The Egyptian Woman" to publicize the goals of the organization: education for women, raising the minimum age for marriage for girls, equal job opportunities, abolishment of prostitution, and the establishment of orphanages. In 1923 she removed her face veil in public and never again wore the veil. Although her husband divorced her for removing her veil, she continued to believe in and advocate for her ideals.

One female politician in the Middle East whom you might have seen on television is Hanan Ashrawi. Ashrawi became very well known through her role as the spokeswoman for Palestine's delegation to the peace process, which culminated in the signing of a peace agreement between the PLO and Israel in 1993. She is now a member of the Palestine Parliament and the Palestine Minister of Education.

Women and Daily Life

These are just a few of the Middle Eastern women who have played prominent roles in their societies in religion, literature, and politics. But what is daily life like for Middle Eastern women? Obviously it is very difficult to make generalizations about the Middle East. As in the rest of the world, people of different religions, ethnicity, regions, and social and economic classes tend to live differently. However, there are some topics and issues that face the majority of women in the Middle East, and in this section we will discuss a few of them.

Marriage and Family: Most Middle Eastern societies place great emphasis on marriage and having a family. Premarital sex is not generally socially acceptable, nor is homosexuality, and children are valued very highly. While some marriages are still arranged, with the bride and groom not meeting, or not meeting alone until their wedding day, more and more young couples are marrying "for love," that is, choosing their prospective spouses themselves, and after knowing them as neighbors, colleagues, and friends.

Polygamy: Probably one of the most publicized aspects of Islam is the ability of men to have more than one wife at a time. According to most interpretations of the Quran, a man may marry up to four women at one time, provided that he treats them all equally. Women are not allowed to have more than one husband at a time, however. In pre-Islamic Arabia, there was no limit to the number of wives and concubines a man could have. By limiting the legal number of wives to four, the Quran is said to have advanced the rights of women. Despite this, however, it is difficult for many people to believe that polygamy, even when limited to four wives, should be allowed. Muslim religious scholars and feminists are currently advocating the abolishment of polygamy, asserting that the Quran has been wrongly interpreted in this area.

Divorce: Another issue connected with marriage and the family is the right of divorce. Historically, the right to divorce was exclusively a male right, and a man could divorce his wife simply by saying to his wife in the presence of witnesses "I divorce you" three times. Customs and practices are slowly changing in this area: in Egypt, for example, women have the right to divorce their husbands for specific reasons; and, since 1979, a man can no longer simply repudiate his wife. Some restrictions apply, and while change is slow in coming, progress is happening.

The Veil: the history of the veil is somewhat ambiguous. Veils were sometimes worn by women in pre-Islamic times and the Quran made it obligatory for Muhammad's wives to veil their hair and face when going outside the home. Although the Quran does not explicitly instruct women believers to veil their faces some think that women should emulate Muhammad's wives, since they are considered to be exemplary believers.

There are many different types of veiling, from a simple head scarf to the more complete style of covering which hides not only the hair but also the neck, chest, face, and hands. (Demonstrate the veil here.) A woman's hair is considered to be an attraction, and the Quran instructs women believers to cover their ornaments so as not to tempt men. Some believe that this passage means that women must cover their hair. Verse 9 of the Quran also instructs believing women to "Draw their cloaks close around them" so that they might be recognized as virtuous Muslims and as such they will not be harassed when they leave their homes. Although there has been a growing trend towards veiling in recent years, for various reasons, many younger Middle Eastern, particularly more educated women, do not veil their hair or their faces.

Education and Employment: Education and employment are perhaps the biggest concerns for women in the contemporary Middle East. Many Middle Eastern countries are poor, with relatively few natural resources and large populations. The economic situation in many of these countries has necessitated the entry of more and more women into the work force. Education for women has not progressed at the

same rate as education for men. There were no girls' schools in the area until the beginning of the last century, when foreign missionaries began them in Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon. By the end of the century there were native as well as foreign schools, but women did not enter the universities of the Middle East until the late 1920's.

As the countries of the region gained their independence, education became a priority and was recognized as a way for a nation to advance. Many countries made primary education compulsory for boys and girls. These laws have not been strictly enforced, however, and it is still not uncommon to hear people express that it is more important for a boy to be educated than it is for a girl to be educated.

Education for children differs from country to country in the Middle East. In some areas, such as Saudi Arabia, gender segregation is mandatory; therefore, girls and boys attend separate schools. In Egypt government-run schools also separate the genders, while private schools allow girls and boys to attend classes together, and in Tunisia and Turkey, girls and boys attend the same schools.

Likewise the employment opportunities for women differ from country to country. In Saudi Arabia women do work outside the home, but because of gender segregation, they work in separate offices and must have separate quarters. Many people believe that the women of Iran face a similar situation, yet this is not the case. Iranian women serve as doctors, lawyers, police officials, members of parliament and work alongside of men, although they wear Islamic dress. In other less religiously conservative countries, women work in the same occupations as men. In Egypt women are employed in all sectors of the economy. However, a high percentage of working women in Egypt still work in menial jobs and make very little money. In almost all countries of the Middle East, women are still the primary caretakers of children and the home. Even working women spend much of their time taking care of their families and their homes. But the situation for working women has changed and is continuing to improve, as women demand more and more of what they see as their legitimate rights.

SUMMARY

Women in the Middle East live diverse and ever changing lives. Many factors contribute to the diversity—religion, topography (i.e. isolationism v modern cities), culture, politics, and most of all educational and employment opportunities. The latter two factors—educational and employment opportunities—have been the major contributing factors in the changes that have affected the lives of Middle Eastern women. As Middle Eastern women become better educated and have larger roles in their employment and political worlds, they grow more like their Western neighbors. They learn to appreciate the opportunities afforded to them in a more open, tolerant society.

Likewise learning about our neighbors from the Middle East should teach us to be more accepting and tolerant of our sameness and our differences. Learning about others helps us to let go of our suspicions and fears; just because someone doesn't look or think like us does not mean that one is good and the other is bad.

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Participant Activity Packet

(part of the leader guide)

Directions:

- **Hand out the Participant Activity Packets**
- **Divide the participants into groups of four**
- **Introduce the activity by explaining that the participants will want to be familiar with the make up of the “Middle East” and its history**
- **List the names of the countries in the Middle East (these are identified in the packet as well)**
- **Ask the groups to read through the information and identify each country**
- **Participants may refer to the map of the region provided with the packet**
- **Participants will have only 5 minutes to complete this activity**
- **At the end of 5 minutes, ask the participants to give their answers**
- **Correct the activity sheets (as each country is correctly identified)**

16 Countries make up the Middle East: Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Participant Packet

Countries of the Middle East

Egypt: Egypt, at the northeast corner of Africa on the Mediterranean Sea, is bordered on the west by Libya, on the south by the Sudan, and on the east by the Red Sea and Israel. Nearly one and one-half times the size of Texas, it is divided into two unequal, extremely arid regions by the Nile River.

Egyptian history dates back to about 4000 B.C., when the kingdoms of upper and lower Egypt, already highly sophisticated, were united. It has been invaded by Persia, Alexander the Great, and then the dynasty of the Ptolemies. In 30 B.C., when Cleopatra committed suicide, Egypt became a Roman, then a Byzantine province. Next came the Arabs and then the Turks; Napoleon's armies had their

turn at occupancy, as did Albanian soldiers. After the completion of the Suez Canal, France and Britain took interest in Egypt, and British resident agents administered the government until 1922, when Egypt became an independent sovereign government.

Cyprus: As the third-largest island in the Mediterranean Gulf, Cyprus is about one and one-half the size of Delaware. It lies off the southern coast of Turkey and the western shore of Syria.

Area: 3,571 sq. mi. **Population:** 1,102,677 **Capital and largest city:** Lefkosia

Cyprus was the site of early Phoenician and Greek colonies. For centuries its rule passed through many hands: the Turks and Britain among the most prominent. There has been guerrilla war against the British, civil war between the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, and invasions by Turkey. This has been a country of on-going warfare.

Bahrain: Bahrain, which means "two seas," is an archipelago in the Persian Gulf off the coast of Saudi Arabia. The islands for the most part are level expanses of sand and rock. A causeway connects Bahrain to Saudi Arabia.

Area: 257 sq mi total area. **Population:** (2010 est.): 738,004 **Capital and largest city:** A-Manamah

Bahrain was known in ancient times as Dilmuin. An important center of trade by the 3rd millennium B.C., it has been ruled by the Persians, the Arabs, and the Portuguese. Bahrain has been led by the ruling family of the al-Khalifahs since 1783, first under the Persians, then as a British protectorate, and since 1970 as an independent nation.

Oil was discovered in Bahrain in the 1930's, but the amount was minute when compared to the other Gulf States. Economic diversity has occurred, and Bahrain is currently a major financial center. The country provides its people with free medical care, education, and old-age pensions.

Iran: A Middle Eastern country south of the Caspian Sea and north of the Persian Gulf, Iran is three times the size of Arizona. It shares borders with: Iraq, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Armenia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

Area: 636,293 sq. mi. Population: 67,037,517 Capital and largest city: Tehran

The region now known as Iran was once occupied by the Medes and the Persians. It has been under the rule of Alexander the Great, the Seleucids, the Greek-speaking Parthians, the Sasanians, and the Arab Muslims. By the mid-800's it had become an international scientific and cultural center. Shiite Islam became the dominant religion under the Safavid dynasty (1501-1722). Later the Russians and the British fought for economic control of the area. In 1925 a coup brought a new shah to power, and the country began to modernize and abolished all foreign extraterritorial rights

Israel: Israel is slightly larger than Massachusetts and lies at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. It is bordered by Egypt on the west, Syria and Jordan on the east, and Lebanon on the north. The maritime plain is extremely fertile. Almost half of the total area is largely a desert.

Area: 8,019 sq. mi. Population: 7,353,985 Capital and largest city: Jerusalem

Palestine is considered to be a holy land by Jews, Muslims, and Christians. It is also homeland of the modern state of Israel, and was known as Canaan to the ancient Hebrews. Palestine's name derives from the Phillistines, a people who occupied the southern coastal part of the country in the 12th century B.C. A Hebrew kingdom established in 1000 B.C. was later split into the kingdoms of Judah and Israel; they were subsequently invaded by Assyrians, Babylonians, Egyptians, Persians, Romans, and Alexander the Great of Macedonia. By A.S. 135, few Jews were left in Palestine; most lived in the scattered and tenacious communities of the Diaspora, communities formed outside Palestine after the Babylonian exile. Palestine became a center of Christian pilgrimage after the emperor Constantine converted to that faith. The Arabs took Palestine from the Byzantine empire in 634-640. Interrupted only by Christian Crusaders, Muslims ruled Palestine until the 20th century. During World War I, British forces defeated the Turks in Palestine and governed the area under a League of Nations mandate.

Israel proclaimed Jerusalem as its capital in 1950, but the U.S., like nearly all other countries maintains its embassy in Tel Aviv.

Iraq: Iraq, a triangle of mountains, desert, and fertile river valley, is bounded on the east by Iran, on the north by Turkey, on the west by Syria and Jordan, and on the south by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. It is twice the size of Idaho.

Area: 167,556 sq mi **Population:** 29,671,605 **Capital and largest city:** Baghdad

From earliest times Iraq was known as Mesopotamia—the land between the rivers—for it embraces a large part of the alluvial plains of the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers. An advanced civilization existed in this area. By 4000 B. C., the land became the center of the ancient Babylonian and Assyrian empires. Mesopotamia was conquered by Cyrus the Great of Persia in 538 B.C. and by Alexander in 331 B.C. After an Arab conquest in 637-640, Baghdad became the capital of the ruling caliphate. The country has been pillaged by several groups, including the Mongols, and the Turks, and Persians. The dictatorship of Saddam Hussein collapsed on April 9, 2003, after U.S. and British forces invaded the country. Sovereignty was returned to Iraq on June 28, 2004.

Jordan: The Middle East Kingdom is bordered on the west by Israel and the Dead Sea, on the north by Syria, on the east by Iraq, and on the south by Saudi Arabia. It is comparable in size to Indiana. Arid hills and mountains make up most of the country.

Area: 35,637 sq mi **Population** 6,407,085 **Capital and largest city:** Amman

In biblical times, the country that is now Jordan contained the lands of Edom, Moab, Ammon, and Bashan. Jordan passed in turn to the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, and the Seleucids. Conflict between the Seleucids and the Ptolemies enabled the Arabic-speaking Nabataeans to create a kingdom in southeast Jordan, which became a part of the Roman province of Arabia. Later conquered by the Arabs, Jordan submitted to Ottoman Turkish rule and was administered from Damascus. Taken from the Turks by the British in World War I, Jordan (then known as Transjordan) was separated from the Palestine mandate. In 1923 Britain recognized Jordan's independence, and today it is a constitutional hereditary monarchy.

Kuwait: This country is situated northeast of Saudi Arabia at the northern end of the Persian Gulf, south of Iraq. It is slightly larger than Hawaii, and is low-lying desert land which is mainly sandy and barren.

Area: 6,880 sq mi **Population:** 2,789,132 **Capital:** Kuwait

Kuwait is believed to have been part of an early civilization in the 3rd millennium B.C. and to have traded with Mesopotamian cities. At the beginning of the 18th century, the 'Anizah tribe of Central Arabia founded Kuwait City, which became an

autonomous sheikdom. Descendents of Kuwait's first sheik still rule Kuwait today, although the British made it a protectorate in 1897, when the sheik feared that the Turks would expand their hold over the area. In 1961, Britain granted Kuwait independence, but agreed to give military aid on request.

Oman: Oman is a 1,000-mile-long coastal plain at the southeast tip of the Arabian Peninsula. Lying on the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Oman, it is bordered by the United Arab Emirates—Saudi Arabia and Yemen. The country is the size of Kansas.

Area: 82,031 sq mi

Population: 2,967,717

Capital: Muscat

Arabs migrated to Oman from the 9th century B.C. onward, and conversion to Islam occurred in the 7th century. Muscat, the capital of the geographical area known as Oman, was occupied by the Portuguese from 1508 to 1648. Then it fell to Ottoman Turks, but in 1741, Ahmad iban Sa'id forced them out, and the descendants of Sultan Ahmad rule Oman today. Oil makes this isolated state a prime target for civil disruptions and outside interference. Oman is a member of the Arab League and of the United Nations.

Qatar: Qutar (pronounced KAH-ter) occupies a small peninsula that extends into the Persian Gulf from the east side of the Arabian Peninsula. Saudi Arabia is to the west and the United Arab Emirates to the south. The country is mainly barren.

Area: 4,416 sq mi

Population: 840,926

Capital: Doha

Qatar was once controlled by the sheikhs of Bahrain, but when war broke out between the people and their absentee rulers, the British installed a leader from a local Qatari family. In 1916, the emir agreed to allow Qatar to become a British protectorate. Oil was discovered in the 1940's, bringing wealth to Qatar. About 85% of its income from exports comes from oil. Its people have one of the highest per capita incomes in the world. In 1971, Qatar became an independent nation and introduced its first constitution in 2005. It guarantees freedom of expression, assembly and religion and calls for a 45-seat parliament. Thirty of the seats are filled in democratic elections; the emir appoints the remaining seats.

Saudi Arabia: Most of the Arabian Peninsula is occupied by Saudi Arabia. It is bordered by the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba to the west and Persian Gulf to the east. Neighboring countries are Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, the Sultanate of Oman, Yemen, and Bahrain, connected to the Saudi Mainland by a causeway. Saudi Arabia contains the world's largest continuous sand desert, the Rub Al-Khali, or Empty Quarter.

Area: 829,995 sq mi

Population: 29,207,277

Capital and largest city: Riyadh

Saudi Arabia was an absolute monarchy until 1992, at which time the Saud royal family introduced the country's first constitution. Its legal system is based on the sharia (Islamic law). Saudi Arabia is not only the homeland of the Arab peoples—it is thought that the first Arabs originated on the Arabian Peninsula—but also the home of Islam. Muhammad founded Islam there, and it is the location of the two holy pilgrimage cities Mecca and Medina. A succession of invaders attempted to control the peninsula, but by 1517 the Ottoman Empire dominated. Factional groups of Muslims began calling for the purification and reform of Islam, and a holy war ensued. For a time the various forms of Islam on the peninsula were united under the Wahhabis sect. The Ottomans and their Egyptian allies ousted the Wahhabis and their influence over the Islamic religion has lessened. The absolute monarchy has given way to a constitutional monarchy.

Syria: Slightly larger than North Dakota, Syria lies at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. It is bordered by Lebanon and Israel on the west, Turkey on the north, Iraq on the east, and Jordan on the south. Syria's land mass is comprised of mostly mountains, deserts, an inland steppe area, and a narrow plain.

Area: 71,498 sq mi **Population:** 22,198,110 **Capital City:** Damascus

Syria has seen a series of conquering armies since 1500 B.C.: Egypt, Hebrews, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Persians, Alexander the Great of Macedonia, Arabs, Mongols, and the Ottoman Turks have taken their turn ruling this war-besieged nation. Broken promises by the French, who were given a mandate over Syria by the League of Nations, and ill-advised alliances with Egypt and Lebanon have led to loss of their constitution and loss of life in the struggles against their Jewish and Christian neighbors. Today Syria is a republic under a military regime.

Turkey: Turkey is a republic at the northeast end of the Mediterranean Sea in southeast Europe and southwest Asia. To the north is the Black Sea and to the west is the Aegean Sea. Its neighbors are Greece and Bulgaria to the west, Russia, Ukraine, and Romania to the north and northwest, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Iran to the east, and Syria and Iraq to the south. Turkey in Europe comprises an area about the size of Massachusetts and in Asia it is about the size of Texas.

Area: 780,580 sq km **Population:** 71,892,808 **Capital City:** Ankara

Anatolia, the portion of Turkey located in Asia, was occupied by several ethnic groups, the Indo-European Hitites, Phrygians, Lydians, The Persian Empire, the Roman Empire, The Byzantine Empire, and The Ottoman Turks. The Ottoman Empire generated a great cultural outpouring of Islamic art, architecture, and literature. As the Ottoman Empire began to decline Russia tried to establish itself as the protector of Christians in Turkey's Balkan territories. Russia was checked by Britain and France in the Crimean War, and later a revolt by the Young Turks forced the ruling sultan to grant a constitution and install a liberal government.

Turkey's evolvement continued during the war with Italy, the Balkan Wars, and the two World Wars. More deadly clashes occurred, resulting in the oppression of the Kurds, attacks by terrorists, invasion by Russian forces, attempts to improve the government, and a secular movement fight to improve civil rights. Today Turkey is a Republican parliamentary democracy. Although Turkey is 99% Muslim, minorities enjoy equal legal rights under the constitution, which describes Turkey as a secular state and guarantees "freedom of conscience, religious faith, and opinion" to all citizens, each of whom is legally a Turkish Citizen.

United Arab Emirates: This country, in the eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula, extends along part of the Gulf of Oman and the southern coast of the Persian Gulf. The nation is the size of Maine. Seven emirates make up this area, which has a federal president and a prime minister, plus an emirate for each area, which oversees the local government.

Area: 32,278 sq mi **Population:** 4,975,593 **Capital City:** Abu Dhabi

Originally this area was inhabited by a seafaring people who were converted to Islam in the 7th Century. Later, a dissident sect, the Carmathians, established a powerful sheikdom, and its army conquered Mecca. After the sheikdom disintegrated, its people became pirates. The actions of the pirates brought Britain into the fray. Following a period as a British colony the seven states joined a federation and eventually became the United Arab Emirates. After the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the U.S., the UAE was identified as a major financial center used by al-Qaeda in transferring money to the hijackers (two of the hijackers were UAE citizens) The nation immediately cooperated with the U.S., freezing accounts tied to suspected terrorists and strongly clamping down on money laundering.

Yemen: Formerly divided into two nations, the Peoples's Democratic Republic of Yemen and the Yemen Arab Republic, this nation occupies the southwest tip of the Arabian Peninsula on the Red Sea opposite Ethiopia and extends along the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula on the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. Saudi Arabia is to the north and Oman is to the east. The country is about the size of France.

Area: 203,849 sq mi **Population:** 23,495,361 **Capital and largest city:** Aanaa

The history of Yemen dates back to the Minaean and Sabaeen kingdoms. Ancient Yemen (centered around the port of Aden) engaged in the lucrative myrrh and frankincense trade. It was invaded by the Romans as well as the Ethiopians and Persians. In A.D. 628 Yemen converted to Islam and in the 10th century came under the control of the Rassite dynasty of the Zaidi sect, which remained involved in North Yemeni politics until 1962. The northern portion of Yemeni was ruled by imans until a pro-Egyptian military coup. The southern port of Aden, strategically

located at the opening of the Red Sea, was colonized by Britain, became a protectorate state, revolted and became the People's Republic of Southern Yemen, and later the only Marxist state in the Arab world under strong Soviet influence. In 1920 pro-Western Yemen and Marxist Yemen merged and the nation became a parliamentary republic.

Lebanon: Lebanon lies at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, north of Israel and west of Syria. It is four-fifths the size of Connecticut. The Lebanon Mountains cover most of the country, and the Bekaa Valley is the principal agricultural area.

Area: 4,015 sq mi **Population:** 4,125,247 **Capital and largest city:** Beirut

After World War I, France was given a League of Nations mandate over Lebanon and its neighbor Syria, which together had previously been a single political unit in the Ottoman Empire. In 1920 France divided the two countries into separate colonial administrations, drawing a border that separated mostly Muslim Syria from the kaleidoscope of religious communities in Lebanon, where Maronite Christians were then dominant. After 20 years of French rule Lebanon was given independence in 1941. It took almost three years for France to transfer to powers of government to the Lebanese people, however. A civil war followed, when Muslim factions revolted against the Lebanese government headed by a Maronite Christian. At the Lebanese President's request, President Eisenhower of the United States sent troupes to reestablish the government's authority. Warring factions in Lebanon continue to make peace impossible in this region.

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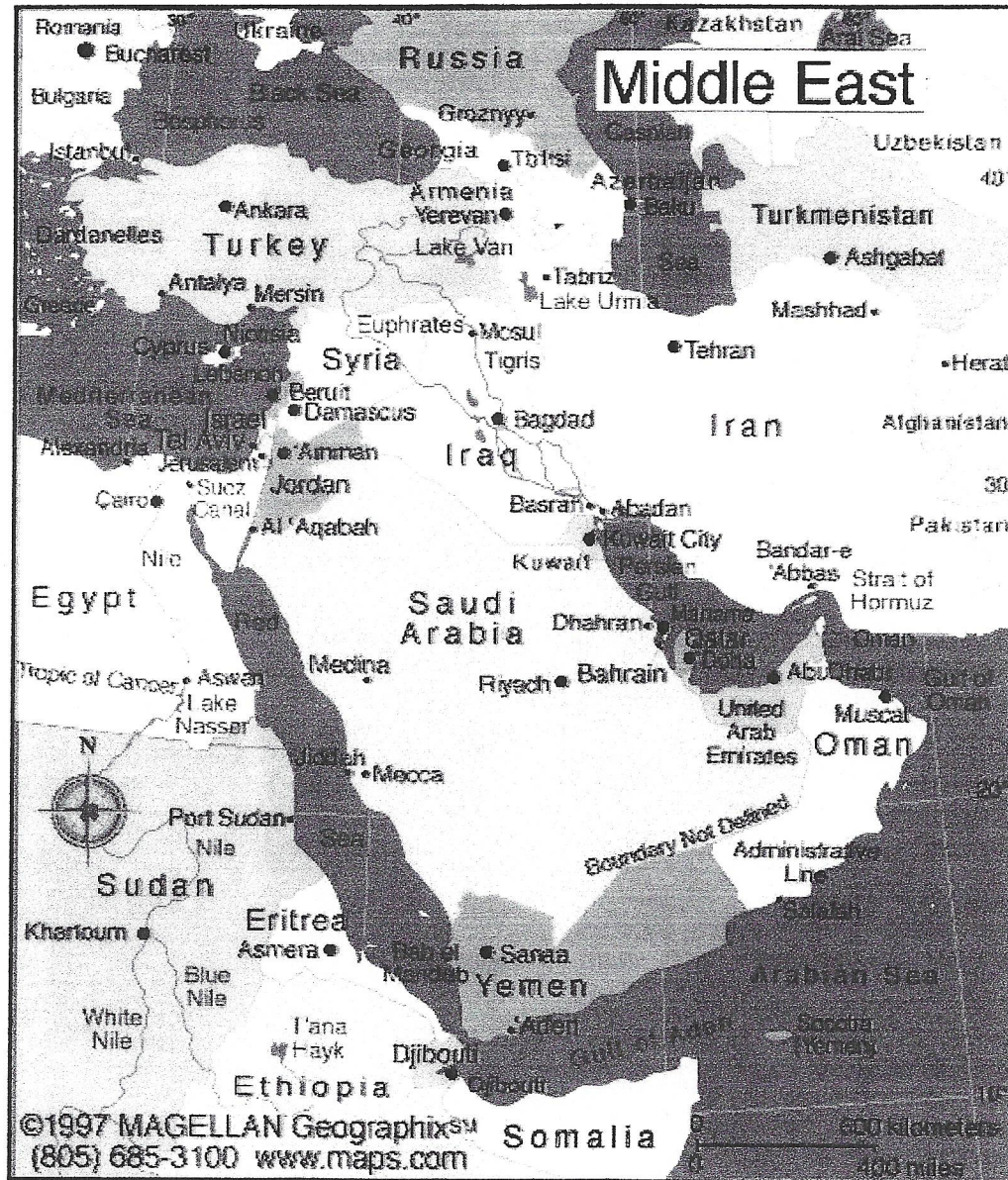
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THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Participant Packet

Map: Middle East



Look at the information given on the various countries; match the country with the identifying information.

You will be working in groups of 2 – 4; You will have 5 minutes for this activity;

Your group may want to divide the countries among you, so that you will get to all of the countries.

When “time” is called, be prepared to share your answers with the remainder of the group.

Hint: you may use the map included with this packet.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Participant Activity Packet

The Middle East is a loosely defined geographic region. Most of the Middle East countries are part of Asia, with the exception of Egypt, which is part of Africa, and the northwestern part of Turkey, which is part of the European landmass.

Not all experts agree on the countries that make up this region, but the latest Middle East Atlas lists the following 16 countries:

- **Bahrain**
- **Cyprus**
- **Egypt**
- **Iran**
- **Iraq**
- **Israel**
- **Jordan**
- **Kuwait**
- **Lebanon**
- **Oman**
- **Qatar**
- **Saudi Arabia**
- **Syria**
- **Turkey**
- **United Arab Emirates**
- **Yemen**

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Activity 1

Countries of the Middle East

_____ at the northeast corner of Africa on the Mediterranean Sea, is bordered on the west by Libya, on the south by the Sudan, and on the east by the Red Sea and Israel. Nearly one and one-half times the size of Texas, it is divided into two unequal, extremely arid regions by the Nile River.

_____’s history dates back to about 4000 B.C., when the kingdoms of upper and lower _____, already highly sophisticated, were united. It has been invaded by Persia, Alexander the Great, and then the dynasty of the Ptolemies. In 30 B.C., when Cleopatra committed suicide, _____ became a Roman, then a Byzantine province. Next came the Arabs and then the Turks; Napoleon’s armies had their turn at occupancy, as did Albanian soldiers. After the completion of the Suez Canal, France and Britain took interest in _____, and British resident agents administered the government until 1922, when _____ became an independent sovereign government.

As the third-largest island in the Mediterranean Gulf, _____ is about one and one-half the size of Delaware. It lies off the southern coast of Turkey and the western shore of Syria.

Area: 3,571 sq. mi. Population: 1,102,677 Capital and largest city: Lefkosia

_____ was the site of early Phoenician and Greek colonies. For centuries its rule passed through many hands: the Turks and Britain among the most prominent. There has been guerrilla war against the British, civil war between the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, and invasions by Turkey. This has been a country of on-going warfare.

_____, which means “two seas,” is an archipelago in the Persian Gulf off the coast of Saudi Arabia. The islands for the most part are level expanses of sand and rock. A causeway connects _____ to Saudi Arabia.

Area: 257 sq mi total area. Population: (2010 est.): 738,004 Capital and largest city: A-Manamah

_____ was known in ancient times as Dilmuin. An important center of trade by the 3rd millennium B.C., it has been ruled by the Persians, the Arabs, and the Portuguese. It has been led by the ruling family of the al-Khalifahs since 1783, first under the Persians, then as a British protectorate, and since 1970 as an independent nation.

Oil was discovered in _____ in the 1930's, but the amount was minute when compared to the other Gulf States. Economic diversity has occurred, and _____ is currently a major financial center. The country provides its people with free medical care, education, and old-age pensions.

A Middle Eastern country south of the Caspian Sea and north of the Persian Gulf, _____ is three times the size of Arizona. It shares borders with: Iraq, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Armenia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

Area: 636,293 sq. mi. Population: 67,037,517 Capital and largest city: Tehran

The region now known as _____ was once occupied by the Medes and the Persians. It has been under the rule of Alexander the Great, the Seleucids, the Greek-speaking Parthians, the Sasanians, and the Arab Muslims. By the mid-800's it had become an international scientific and cultural center. Shiite Islam became the dominant religion under the Safavid dynasty (1501-1722). Later the Russians and the British fought for economic control of the area. In 1925 a coup brought a new shah to power, and the country began to modernize and abolished all foreign extraterritorial rights

_____ is slightly larger than Massachusetts and lies at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. It is bordered by Egypt on the west, Syria and Jordan on the east, and Lebanon on the north. The maritime plain is extremely fertile. Almost half of the total area is largely a desert.

Area: 8,019 sq. mi. Population: 7,353,985 Capital and largest city: Jerusalem

Palestine is considered to be a holy land by Jews, Muslims, and Christians. It is also homeland of the modern state of _____, and was known as Canaan to the ancient Hebrews. Palestine's name derives from the Phillistines, a people who occupied the southern coastal part of the country in the 12th century B.C. A Hebrew kingdom established in 1000 B.C. was later split into the kingdoms of Judah and Israel; they were subsequently invaded by Assyrians, Babylonians, Egyptians, Persians, Romans, and Alexander the Great of Macedonia. By A.S. 135, few Jews were left in Palestine; most lived in the scattered and tenacious communities of the Diaspora, communities formed outside after the Babylonian exile. Palestine became a center of Christian pilgrimage after the emperor Constantine converted to that faith. The Arabs took Palestine from the Byzantine empire in 634-640. Interrupted only by Christian Crusaders, Muslims ruled Palestine until the 20th century. During World War I, British forces defeated the Turks in Palestine and governed the area under a League of Nations mandate.

_____ proclaimed Jerusalem as its capital in 1950, but the U.S., like nearly all other countries maintains its embassy in Tel Aviv.

_____, a triangle of mountains, desert, and fertile river valley, is bounded on the east by Iran, on the north by Turkey, on the west by Syria and Jordan, and on the south by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. It is twice the size of Idaho.

Area: 167,556 sq mi Population: 29,671,605 Capital and largest city: Baghdad

From earliest times _____ was known as Mesopotamia—the land between the rivers—for it embraces a large part of the alluvial plains of the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers. An advanced civilization existed in this area. By 4000 B. C., the land became the center of the ancient Babylonian and Assyrian empires.

Mesopotamia was conquered by Cyrus the Great of Persia in 538 B.C. and by Alexander in 331 B.C. After an Arab conquest in 637-640, Baghdad became the capital of the ruling caliphate. The country has been pillaged by several groups, including the Mongols, and the Turks, and Persians. The dictatorship of Saddam Hussein collapsed on April 9, 2003, after U.S. and British forces invaded the country. Sovereignty was returned to _____ on June 28, 2004.

The Middle East Kingdom of _____ is bordered on the west by Israel and the Dead Sea, on the north by Syria, on the east by Iraq, and on the south by Saudi Arabia. It is comparable in size to Indiana. Arid hills and mountains make up most of the country.

Area: 35,637 sq mi Population 6,407,085 Capital and largest city: Amman

In biblical times, the country that is now _____ contained the lands of Edom, Moab, Ammon, and Bashan. _____ passed in turn to the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, and the Seleucids. Conflict between the Seleucids and the Ptolemies enabled the Arabic-speaking Nabataeans to create a kingdom in southeast _____, which became a part of the Roman province of Arabia.

Later conquered by the Arabs, _____ submitted to Ottoman Turkish rule and was administered from Damascus. Taken from the Turks by the British in World War I, _____ (then known as Transjordan) was separated from the Palestine mandate.

In 1923 Britain recognized _____ independence, and today it is a constitutional hereditary monarchy.

_____ is situated northeast of Saudi Arabia at the northern end of the Persian Gulf, south of Iraq. It is slightly larger than Hawaii, and is low-lying desert land which is mainly sandy and barren.

Area: 6,880 sq mi Population: 2,789,132 Capital: Kuwait

_____ is believed to have been part of an early civilization in the 3rd millennium B.C. and to have traded with Mesopotamian cities. At the beginning of the 18th century, the 'Anizah tribe of Central Arabia founded Kuwait City, which

became an autonomous sheikdom. Descendents of _____'s first sheik still rule _____ today, although the British made it a protectorate in 1897, when the sheik feared that the Turks would expand their hold over the area. In 1961, Britain granted _____ independence, but agreed to give military aid on request.

_____ is a 1,000-mile-long coastal plain at the southeast tip of the Arabian Peninsula. Lying on the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Oman, it is bordered by the United Arab Emirates—Saudi Arabia and Yemen. The country is the size of Kansas.

Area: 82,031 sq mi

Population: 2,967,717

Capital: Muscat

Arabs migrated to _____ from the 9th century B.C. onward, and conversion to Islam occurred in the 7th century. Muscat, the capital of the geographical area known as _____, was occupied by the Portuguese from 1508 to 1648. Then it fell to Ottoman Turks, but in 1741, Ahmad iban Sa'id forced The Turks out, and the descendants of Sultan Ahmad rule _____ today. Oil makes this isolated state a prime target for civil disruptions and outside interference. _____ is a member of the Arab League and of the United Nations.

_____ (pronounced KAH-ter) occupies a small peninsula that extends into the Persian Gulf from the east side of the Arabian Peninsula. Saudi Arabia is to the west and the United Arab Emirates to the south. The country is mainly barren.

Area: 4,416 sq mi

Population: 840,926

Capital: Doha

_____ was once controlled by the sheikhs of Bahrain, but when war broke out between the people and their absentee rulers, the British installed a leader from a local family. In 1916, the emir agreed to allow _____ to become a British protectorate. Oil was discovered in the 1940's, bringing wealth to this nation. About 85% of its income from exports comes from oil. Its people have one of the highest per capita incomes in the world. In 1971, _____ became an independent nation and introduced its first constitution in 2005. It guarantees freedom of expression, assembly and religion and calls for a 45-seat parliament. Thirty of the seats are filled in democratic elections; the emir appoints the remaining seats.

Most of the Arabian Peninsula is occupied by _____. It is bordered by the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba to the west and Persian Gulf to the east. Neighboring countries are Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, the Sultanate of Oman, Yemen, and Bahrain, connected to the Saudi Mainland by a causeway. _____ contains the world's largest continuous sand desert, the Rub Al-Khali, or Empty Quarter.

Area: 829,995 sq mi Population: 29,207,277 Capital and largest city: Riyadh

_____ was an absolute monarchy until 1992, at which time the Saud royal family introduced the country's first constitution. Its legal system is based on the sharia (Islamic law). _____-is not only the homeland of the Arab peoples—it is thought that the first Arabs originated on the Arabian Peninsula—but also the home of Islam. Muhammad founded Islam there, and it is the location of the two holy pilgrimage cities Mecca and Medina. A succession of invaders attempted to control the peninsula, but by 1517 the Ottoman Empire dominated. Factional groups of Muslims began calling for the purification and reform of Islam, and a holy war ensued. For a time the various forms of Islam on the peninsula were united under the Wahhabis sect. The Ottomans and their Egyptian allies ousted the Wahhabis and their influence over the Islamic religion has lessened. The absolute monarchy has given way to a constitutional monarchy.

Slightly larger than North Dakota, _____ lies at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. It is bordered by Lebanon and Israel on the west, Turkey on the north, Iraq on the east, and Jordan on the south. _____'s land mass is comprised of mostly mountains, deserts, an inland steppe area, and a narrow plain.

Area: 71,498 sq mi Population: 22,198,110 Capital City: Damascus

_____ has seen a series of conquering armies since 1500 B.C.: Egypt, Hebrews, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Persians, Alexander the Great of Macedonia, Arabs, Mongols, and the Ottoman Turks have taken their turn ruling this war-besieged nation. Broken promises by the French, who were given a mandate over _____ by the League of Nations, and ill-advised alliances with Egypt and Lebanon have led to loss of their constitution and loss of life in the struggles against their Jewish and Christian neighbors. Today _____ is a republic under a military regime.

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not touched the hearts of that judge and the lawyers with whom he put her in touch. Eventually her story reached the attention of the national media and soon very influential human rights organizations began demonstrations on Nujood's behalf, around the world.

When Nujood won her divorce (over two years after the filing) she was awarded a sum of 150,000 rials (\$750), which she promptly used, along with donations sent by various NGO's (Non-Governmental Organizations) to open a school for girls in her village. Through her efforts, and courageous actions, many Muslim girls are learning about how education can free women to determine their own destinies. They are learning also that without knowledge of other cultures, there can be no hope for peace, no matter what the country.

Infidel

By Ayaan Hirsi Ali

Ayaan Ali was born in Somalia, into a traditional tribal Muslim family, where the word of male clan members was law, and women held no value, except as chattel. She suffered through relocation to Saudi Arabia, and Kenya when civil war threatened her father because of his political activism; she survived female mutilation and brutal beatings at the hands of her female relatives; when she was forced into marriage with a man she had never met, she ran away and sought asylum in the Netherlands. There she earned a degree in political science, fought for the rights of Muslim women immigrants, and was elected to the Parliament.

Sounds like a happy ending to a sad story, right? Ayaan's "happy-ever-after" ending turned tragic when she and a colleague made a movie about atrocities against women, titled *Submission*. The colleague, Theo van Gogh, was murdered by an Islamic extremist, Ayaan's Netherlands' citizenship was revoked, and she was ousted from Parliament. Forced to flee the country because of death threats, Ayaan sought refuge in the United States, where she currently resides. Despite the fatwa (death sentence) imposed on her life, she continues to speak out against extremism and advocates for women's rights at every opportunity.

The Caged Virgin

By Ayaan Hirsi Ali

The Caged Virgin is an emancipation proclamation for women. In this story, Ali gives "a crisp, very clear indictment of Islamic misogyny..." says The Philadelphia Inquirer. The Los Angeles Times declares it to be "a call for women to awaken to the brutal religious and cultural oppression of Islam and for Muslim women to free themselves from its outdated cult of virginity...." This book is a defiant argument for clear thinking and for an Islamic Enlightenment, and Salman Rushdie says that it "should be read as widely as possible, because it tells the truth—the unvarnished, uncomfortable truth." I agree, this is a book we all should read and study.

Book Reviews

Reading Lolita in Tehran: a memoir in books

By Azar Nafise

Azar Nafise was a professor of English literature at the University of Tehran when extremist Muslims, under the leadership of the Ayatollah Khomeini, came back into power. Because Nafise refused to cover her hair and face in the traditional Islamic fashion, she was removed from her teaching position.

Recognizing the importance of literature as a conduit for understanding across cultures, Nafise invited seven of her most promising students, some of whom had been imprisoned for “improper display” of their bodies (not wearing the veil) into her home each Thursday, where they secretly read and discussed forbidden works of Western literature.

The shimmering worlds Nafisi created in that “classroom” led her “girls,” as she endearingly called them, to “take off more than their scarves and robes. Gradually each one gained an outline and a shape, becoming her own inimitable self.” Azure’s students learned about such women as Nabakov’s Lolita, who rebelled against the cultural restraints placed on females, and used her feminine wiles to get whatever she wanted from men; thus the symbolic name for this book.

Nafisi’ memoir will take the reader inside a culture and on a journey that will never be forgotten.

I Am Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced

by Nujood Ali; with Delphine Minoui

Although no birth records are kept in Nujood’s village in Yemen, relatives report that Nujood was 10 years old (however, she could just as well have been eight or nine) in 2008 when her Aba (father) arranged for her to be married to a man three times her age. Nujood appealed first to her Aba and her Omma (mother,) then her grandmother, and finally her father’s second wife, Mona. No one could help Nujood change the traditions and culture of her strict Muslim village. So Nujood agreed to the marriage, not realizing what was at stake.

When bartering for Nujood’s hand in marriage, her soon-to-be husband promised that she would remain a virgin until she reached puberty. On her wedding night, she learned how much she could trust the man she had married. She was raped and beaten repeatedly throughout her marriage. Her mother-in-law only berated her for not being faster to please her husband, and celebrated the consummation of the marriage by letting everyone know “that Nujood had bled.” This disclosure added to Nujood’s shame.

Nujood’s story is about what it takes for a woman to obtain a divorce in Yemen. Because of her extreme courage, she managed to escape her captors and travel to the city, where she found the courthouse, walked into the courtroom and announced to the first judge she could find, “I want a divorce.” It seems almost certain that she would never have been freed from this travesty had Nujood’s story

Book Reviews for FCE's Middle Eastern Women

written by Carol Jung,
Lost Creek Study Group, Lane County
FCE District IV, Oregon Chapter

THREE CUPS OF TEA by Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin

This was my first dive into a novel about Pakistan and Afghanistan. I have been more than mildly interested in the complexities of Afghanistan and pondering the wisdom of the involvement of the USA there ever since my daughter's husband was sent on a tour of duty there, flying a medevac black hawk helicopter on dangerous missions. My niece's husband is serving a second tour there now. Most Americans want to believe we are doing the right thing, being there, because our treasures--our children and our taxes are being used there. But, how can we decide for ourselves with the bombardment of media blitz from one politically-motivated party or another competing for our sympathies? I concentrated on accounts written by reporters and pundits who are politically like-minded as I. I was still confused. We watched the film "Charlie Wilson's War", an account of the USA's first involvement there. After viewing it twice, I was even MORE confused. Then, I stumbled upon the name Greg Mortenson, an American mountain climber whose mission is to build schools in the most remote regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan. I trust Bill Moyers. He interviewed Greg Mortenson on OPB on January 16, 2010. Then I knew I was going down the right path to begin understanding Afghanistan. THREE CUPS OF TEA was not easy to start and continue reading because it made me uncomfortable to read about people currently living in such harsh conditions. These accounts depict some of the most remote and extreme living conditions on earth! And, to make it even worse, most women are not treated as well as the herd animals kept by the men. And, when the Taliban was in full force, Muslim law was enforced to the *extreme* regarding women. Moretenson was surprised to discover that most tribal leaders want schools not just for their sons, but also for their daughters.

What we can trust about Greg Mortenson is that he is not political. He avoids being connected in any way to an ideology other than to build schools for the most remote regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan. He learned to work directly with local people for negotiating wherever he goes, learning the language, customs and religious nuances of each region. While he describes these things, a light goes on for the reader--BING! This is why it is so difficult to create peace and a central government in a region that probably was not meant to be organized in this manner in the first place! Those isolated areas are ruled by warlords. You could compare it to America's many tribes of Indians at one time, living independently of each other and not always peacefully. Languages and customs are different. There is competition for resources like water and grazing land. A slight perception of dishonor can trigger a war that lasts generations. Travel to each tribe's location is complicated by needing permission of various war lords, the most difficult terrain on earth, mine fields planted by first the Soviets and then the Taliban and blown up bridges and rarely maintained "roads". At certain times of the year, the drug smugglers are moving their product on mule back and it could mean certain death to be in their way! And, WINTER. In some areas, travel to the outside is limited to a very few weeks of the year. I was stunned, and anxious for more, once completing this book. Not for the first time in my life, I am so grateful to be born in the good old USA! By now, Mortenson's second book had been published, so I jumped right into reading STONES INTO SCHOOLS by Greg Mortenson.

STONES INTO SCHOOLS by Greg Mortenson

This book picks up where *THREE CUPS OF TEA* left off with Mortenson and his Afghan Dirty Dozen spending most of their time in Afghanistan, negotiating for supplies, school sites and the favor of those who might at first be suspicious of their work. To quote Mortenson, "Afghanistan is one of the most ethnically complicated countries on earth, a place where the overlapping cultures, languages, religions, and tribal loyalties have bedeviled historians, anthropologists, and military strategists for centuries." This is sorted-out for the reader, sitting at home, living vicariously through the comings and goings of Mortenson and his manager Sarfraz Khan, working against seemingly impossible odds to construct schools in conditions you cannot even imagine until reading about it here. This is a current, ongoing, true story that should be featured in our news every day. We hear only about the war. Once you have read these books, and hear news being broadcast, you will recognize the areas being mentioned and the names of the leaders. I frankly feel so much better informed about our presence over there. I appreciate having been informed by someone knowledgeable but with no political or religious motivation to win over the reader. When he explains it, we "get it". Mortenson and his people should be deciding the future of that part of the world. But wait, they *are* by building schools for girls and women. Mortenson says, "If you educate a boy, you educate an individual, but if you educate a girl, you educate a community." *"Inshallah"* ("God Willing" in Arabic) I highly recommend this book to any one who is interested in a good, true adventure story, interested in an area of the world where we spend our treasure, interested in historical development in an ancient group of cultures, interested in the future of our fellow women and in the future of our fellow man. It is spellbinding!

A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS by Khaled Hossin

I read this book after the two Mortenson books, so I already understood a lot about Afghanistan while reading the fictional novel. It is an account of the lives of two women growing up in recent times in Afghanistan. Even though the people are fictional, the events and conditions endured are based on fact. The period of time is spanning the early 1960's through 2007 when the book was published. Daily life for children and women in two areas of the country are made very personal for the reader. One lives in a large city and the other in a village. Both are affected by the wars inflicted on their country, first by being bombed, and shelled by the Soviets versus the mujadeen; then by the various factions of the mujadeen; and then a temporary "peace" and the terrible cost of being occupied by the Taliban, with all of the especially unbearable consequences suffered by girls and women during those years. In 2001 the Americans rushed in with war again. Instability has always been a fact for these women, with suffering we cannot even imagine. The author is good at giving us this information without ever being unduly graphic. I really appreciate that! I really like the lesson in history, language and cultural differences of tribes the author imparts with the story. I highly recommend this book to anyone who wants a better understanding of the conditions and the complications faced by peacemakers in Afghanistan. You will thank Heaven that you were born in the USA and you will have new people to add to your prayers.

Recommended Reading List

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