



Lesson Plan: Interpreting Diverse Images of Muslim Life in the United States

THE FILM

This lesson plan is designed to be used with the film **New Muslim Cool**, which follows the day-to-day life of a Muslim family living in Pittsburgh, Pa. Classrooms can use this program to help students increase their understanding of Muslim culture in the United States.

***New Muslim Cool* contains some language that may be inappropriate for classroom use. Please be sure to preview the film prior to classroom screening or request the “broadcast version” of the film from the P.O.V. lending library.**

P.O.V. documentaries can be recorded off-the-air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from the initial broadcast. In addition, P.O.V. offers a lending library of DVDs and VHS tapes that you can borrow any time during the school year — FOR FREE! Get started by joining our Community Network:

www.amdoc.org/outreach/events/

Please visit our Film Library at http://www.amdoc.org/outreach_filmlibrary.php to find other films suitable for classroom use.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Keep a journal, or learning log, to document their thinking about Muslim Americans during the course of this activity.
- Use viewing skills to understand and interpret video clips and photography.
- Participate in class, small group and partner discussions.

GRADE LEVELS

6-12

SUBJECT AREAS

Geography, Civics, Current Events, U.S. History, English

MATERIALS

- Method of showing the entire class online video clips and a photo gallery.
- A learning log/journal for each student (sheets of paper stapled together, a spiral notebook or an online blog if sufficient computers are available)

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED

Two 50-minute classes

SUGGESTED CLIPS

Clip 1: “The Courtship of Hamza and Rafiah” (length 1:55)

The clip starts at 14:30 with a shot of some buildings and ends at 16:25 when Hamza is going into a building and Rafiah says, “Then it became March.”

Clip 2: “The Wedding” (length 2:00)

The clip starts at 18:46 with the sound of an Arabic prayer before the wedding begins and ends at 20:46 with Hamza and Rafiah standing together.

Clip 3: “Daily Life” (length: 3:13)

The clip begins at 39:40 with Rafiah asking, “Is this all you had?” and ends at 42:53 with Hamza saying, “. . . the type of man I had to be.”

Clip 4: “Welcome Home” (length: :38)

The clip begins at 47:39 with Hamza entering a recording booth and ends at 48:17 when he raps, “. . . stay on the straight path.”

BACKGROUND

The film **New Muslim Cool** features Hamza (Jason) Perez, a Puerto Rican American who converted to Islam about a dozen years ago. Before his conversion, Hamza was Catholic, and he admits that he dealt drugs and engaged in other street activities during his youth. The film shows Hamza’s spiritual growth over time as he increases his knowledge of Islam, marries Rafiah, serves his community and focuses on building a strong family. In addition, he and his brother Suliman Perez record and perform hip-hop music together as the Mujahideen Team, also known as M-Team.

There are significant numbers of Muslims in every region of the United States. Predictably, many large communities are located in urban centers. There are widely varying estimates of how many Muslims live in the United States. The Institute of Islamic Population and Education says there are approximately 7.5 million Muslims in the United States (about 2.5 percent of the population), while the CIA estimates that there are fewer than 2 million. In 2005, the Association of Religion Data Archives cited the number as nearly 4.8 million.

A Pew Research Center survey found that most American Muslims self-identify as middle class and mainstream. About two-thirds are foreign born. Seventy-seven percent report that they have always been Muslim while 23 percent converted to Islam. Of converts, nine in ten are American-born and 59 percent are African-American.

The racial and ethnic composition of American Muslims is diverse. According to Pew, the breakdown is 37 percent Caucasian, 24 percent African-American, 20 percent Asian, 4 percent Latino, and 15 percent other or multiracial.

ACTIVITY

1. Throughout this activity, members of the class will be recording their thinking in a “learning log.” For their first entry, have students write for a few minutes in response to the prompt: “What do you know about Muslims in America?” (Typically, students will list a mixture of stereotypes and facts, so it will be important for teachers to be able to differentiate between the two.)
2. Ask students to take turns sharing what they have written with a partner. Then invite pairs to share their thoughts with the class. Record a list of these initial ideas on the board while students take notes in their learning logs. Help the class organize its ideas. For example, if students mention different customs in Islam, create a space on the board for “customs.” Discuss how past events like 9/11 or media coverage of the Islamic world have influenced student perceptions.

3. Share with students some of the statistics on Muslim Americans from the Background section. Are students surprised by any of these statistics? Why or why not?

4. Explain that you are going to play three video clips that show the courtship, wedding, and daily life of two Muslim Americans named Hamza and Rafiah. Ask students to note careful observations in their learning logs as they watch. What do they notice about Hamza and Rafiah's relationship? Ask students to be as specific as possible in their notes. Then, show clips 1 through 3.

5. Discuss what students noticed in the clips and ask them how they felt while watching Hamza and Rafiah's story. What was most interesting to students? Why? Would they update any of their original ideas about Muslim Americans based on what they saw in the video? Ask students to explain their answers. Modify the notes on the board based on student responses and have the class do the same in their learning logs.

6. Show the class all or part of the images from the Islamerica photo gallery on the P.O.V. website. Help students think critically about each photo by identifying the objects and people in each image and asking questions like: Where and when might each photograph have been taken? What adjectives describe the people shown in the images? What do you think were the motivations of the photographer? What title would you give each image? How do these images provide additional perspective on the life of Muslims in the United States?

7. Give the class members a few minutes to record their reactions to the video clips and photo gallery in their learning logs. Again, how would they adjust their ideas about Muslim Americans based on what they've seen? Ask students to provide specific examples from the film and photo gallery.

8. Divide the class into heterogeneous groups of four to five students each. Members of each group should then take turns paraphrasing their learning log responses and discussing their reactions to the video and photographs. Did students learn anything new? Why or why not? What do they consider to be some of the most memorable images? Be sure to address any additional comments or questions students might have.

9. Have students write a final learning log entry that summarizes their group's discussion and analyzes their perception of Muslims in the United States.

ASSESSMENT SUGGESTIONS

Students can be assessed on:

- Details, critical thinking and analysis provided in learning log entries.
- Participation in class, small group and partner discussions.

EXTENSIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

- Discover the influence of Islam on hip-hop and American culture. First, show the class P.O.V.'s Islam and Hip Hop Timeline and point out how Islamic terminology, imagery and ideas are found in the lyrics of songs by artists such as Lauryn Hill, Public Enemy and Mos Def, among others. Then, explain that Hamza Perez, featured in **New Muslim Cool**, is part of the hip-hop duo Mujahideen Team, or M-Team. Play Clip 4 from this lesson, which shows Hamza recording the track, "Welcome Home." Tell students that Hamza works in his community as a drug and gang violence prevention counselor and as a spiritual

advisor/educator to prisoners. Hamza sees “Welcome Home” and some of his other music as part of that outreach. Listen to additional M-Team songs and examine some of their lyrics. In what ways does Islam seem to influence M-Team’s music? How might their lyrics inspire listeners to create better communities or work for social justice?

- Extend the main activity of this lesson by showing additional video clips of daily life for Muslim Americans. The P.O.V. website provides video extras from **New Muslim Cool** that depict Muslim children, Halal eating and drinking and more.
- Review vocabulary common among Muslims with a classroom version of the 30-second game. To prepare, write the words from P.O.V.’s Glossary of Muslim Terms on small pieces of paper, fold the pieces of paper in half and put them in a bowl. In addition, have the class study the glossary for homework. To play the game, divide the class into two teams. One team will send a representative to the front of the room, where she will have 30 seconds to describe or explain for her teammates as many of the terms in the bowl as possible without using the actual word or part of the word. The team will earn a point for each term guessed correctly within the 30-second period. Then, the other team will take a turn. Continue the rounds until all the terms in the bowl have been guessed. Be sure to have the losing team say to the winning team, “Mabruk!” (congratulations).
- Expand student understanding of Muslims in the United States by studying the results of a Pew Research Center survey of Muslim Americans (<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/483/muslim-americans>). Have students write short stories about Muslim Americans that reflect the report’s findings.
- Help students recognize and appreciate the diversity in their classroom by creating silhouette collages. Have students work in pairs to trace their silhouettes. Then, have students cover the silhouettes with words or pictures that describe themselves. Display the silhouette collages without names and conduct a gallery walk where students try to match the collages to their classmates. Have students write in their learning logs new things that they discovered about classmates during the activity.
- Read and discuss novels written from an Islamic point of view. Suggestions for students include, *The Treasure at Bayan Bluffs* by Farah Zaman, *A Wicked Wazir* by Juwariah Simpson, *The Jinn in the Clock* by Juwairiah J. Simpson or books from the Rashid series by Hassan Radwan.

RESOURCES

FRONTLINE: Muslims

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/muslims/>

Find portraits of ordinary Muslims, information on Islamic belief and practice and viewpoints on Islam’s worldwide resurgence.

“Muhammad: Legacy of a Prophet”

<http://www.pbs.org/muhammad/>

Learn more about the life of the prophet Muhammad and his teachings. The Learning Tools section provides an excellent collection of essays that offer perspectives on Islam from a number of Muslim Americans.

“Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream”

<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/483/muslim-americans>

The Pew Research Center reports its findings from the first ever nationwide, random sample survey of Muslim Americans.

STANDARDS

These standards are drawn from “Content Knowledge,” a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning) at <http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>.

Civics

Standard 11: Understands the role of diversity in American life and the importance of shared values, political beliefs and civic beliefs in an increasingly diverse American society.

Standard 28: Understands how participation in civic and political life can help citizens attain individual and public goals.

Geography

Standard 10: Understands the nature and complexity of the Earth’s cultural mosaics.

Language Arts

Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.

Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

Standard 10: Understands the characteristics and components of the media.

U.S. History

Standard 31: Understands economic, social and cultural developments in the contemporary United States.

Working with Others

Standard 1: Contributes to the overall effort of a group.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cari Ladd, M.Ed., is an educational writer with a background in secondary education and media development. Previously, she served as PBS Interactive’s Director of Education, overseeing the development of curricular resources tied to PBS programs, the PBS TeacherSource website (now PBS Teachers) and online teacher professional development services. She has also taught in Maryland and Northern Virginia.

Background Sources

“Most Muslim Nations.” Association of Religious Data Archives; http://www.thearda.com/QuickLists/QuickList_47.asp;
“Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream.” The Pew Research Center;
<http://pewresearch.org/assets/pdf/muslim-americans.pdf>; “Muslim Population Statistics.” Institute of Islamic Information and Education;
<http://www.iiie.net/node/65>