

Veiled Voices

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A Companion Curriculum for the
University Classroom

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<http://www.veiledvoices.com/>

Veiled Voices and the companion curriculum are an excellent resource for a range of university classrooms. These materials will engage students in an Islam 101 class, a Religion Studies class, a Gender Studies class, a Feminist Studies class, a Middle East politics class, or a variety of Media Studies classes.

The activities in this study guide are organized around the five E's of constructivist education philosophy: engage, explore, explain, elaborate, and evaluate. *Veiled Voices* can be treated as the keystone of a long or a short unit focusing on Muslims. A long unit may incorporate most or all of the listed activities, while it is recommended that a short unit include at least one activity embodying each of the five E's. If you must pick and choose between activities, note that there is a * placed next to the activities that come with the highest recommendation.

Many of the activities involve the topic of misconceptions and negative stereotypes about Muslims; while it is generally assumed that college students are able to discuss sensitive topics in a mature way, it is always important to set appropriate ground rules for discussion, as well as model and encourage pro-social behavior. Please refer to the following ten steps to ensure civility in the classroom, and implement them in your own class:

Top Ten Tips for Addressing Sensitive Topics and Maintaining Civility in the Classroom
<http://ctfd.sfsu.edu/feature/top-ten-tips-for-addressing-sensitive-topics-and-maintaining-civility-in-the-classroom.htm>

Note: There are also excellent links to other resources on related topics at the bottom of this webpage.

The activities in this curriculum encourage discussion and interaction among class members. You may choose to use written assignments as a place for students to do more private reflection to be read only by the professor, or you may choose set up a class blog which will allow students to access one another's written work.

Engage

*Activity #1

The following graph documents the positive and negative biases Americans hold towards different religious groups. While 5% of survey participants have a favorable impression of Muslims, 32% have an unfavorable impression of the religion. Display this graph on an overhead, a digital presentation, or with a handout. Discuss the graph with your class.

Link: <http://www.patheos.com/Library/Lenses/Snapshots/Public-Image.html>

Discussion points:

1. What are some of the assumptions and ideas about Muslims, good and bad?
2. Why do you think Americans, on average, have such an unfavorable impression of Muslims?

3. How did 9/11 impact the way Americans think about Muslims?
4. Do you think the unfavorable impression of Muslims is based mostly on fact or fiction? How do you think media portrayals of Muslims have influenced negative misconceptions about Muslims? How has political rhetoric played into these misconceptions?
5. How have biases against Muslims affected your life?

Activity #2

The negative portrayal of Arab Muslims has become commonplace in the media, political arena, and everyday conversations since 9/11. Give your students a chance to test their unconscious biases at Project Implicit, an online test developed at Harvard. The following excerpt, which you may choose to share with your students, is taken from their website:

Findings observed in seven years of operation of the Project Implicit web site

- **Implicit biases are pervasive.** They appear as statistically "large" effects that are often shown by majorities of samples of Americans. Over 80% of web respondents show implicit negativity toward the elderly compared to the young; 75-80% of self-identified Whites and Asians show an implicit preference for racial White relative to Black.
- **People are often unaware of their implicit biases.** Ordinary people, including the researchers who direct this project, are found to harbor negative associations in relation to various social groups (i.e., implicit biases) even while honestly (the researchers believe) reporting that they regard themselves as lacking these biases.
- **Implicit biases predict behavior.** From simple acts of friendliness and inclusion to more consequential acts such as the evaluation of work quality, those who are higher in implicit bias have been shown to display greater discrimination. The published scientific evidence is rapidly accumulating. Over 200 published scientific investigations have made use of one or another version of the IAT.
- **People differ in levels of implicit bias.** Implicit biases vary from person to person - for example as a function of the person's group memberships, the dominance of a person's membership group in society, consciously held attitudes, and the level of bias existing in the immediate environment. This last observation makes clear that implicit attitudes are modified by experience.

Link: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/takeatest.html>

Do not require students to turn in their results to you, but ask them to write a written reflection following this exercise. You may choose to lead a class discussion following the written exercise during which volunteers may feel comfortable sharing their thoughts. Some possible reflection or discussion questions include:

1. What surprised you about this test?
2. What is the relationship between media depictions of Arab Muslims and the unconscious biases people hold against them?
3. Why is there a difference between what people believe they feel towards social groups and what their unconscious biases really are?

*Activity #3

Your students will gain more from their viewing of *Veiled Voices* if they are familiar with key vocabulary. Ask your students to define the following vocabulary words through research, by listening to you lecture, or by referencing a religion textbook:

1. Islam
2. Qu'ran
3. Ramadan
4. Islamic Jurisprudence
5. Fatwa
6. Arranged Marriage
7. Muhammad
8. Mufti
9. Five Pillars of Islam
10. Jihad
11. Allah
12. Muslim
13. Hijab
14. Niqab
15. Sunni
16. Shi'ite
17. Shari'a
18. Haraam

There are several ways you might test your students' understanding of these terms after they have defined them. You might ask them to turn in their definitions, you might review their definitions in class, or for a fun and interactive way to review their meanings, lead your students in the "Flyswatter Game" below. This game is very engaging, and will help loosen up the group dynamics. A fun activity such as the "Flyswatter Game" can be a great way to encourage communication before moving into sensitive discussions, for example. Along with reviewing the key terms above, this game incorporates a few questions involving the identification of famous Muslims.

1. Write the following words on the board: Islam, Qu'ran, Ramadan, Islamic Jurisprudence, Fatwa, Arranged Marriage, Muhammad, Mufti, Five Pillars of Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Jihad, Allah, Muslim, Islamics, Selma Hayek, Ralph Nader, Kahlil Gibran, Casey Kasem, Indonesia, Iraq, Iran, Hijab, Niqab, Sunni, Shi'ite, Shari'a, Haraam, True, False
2. Divide the class into two teams, and provide a volunteer from each team with a flyswatter. Whoever is able to hit the correct answer with a flyswatter first wins a point for their team. You may choose to allow or disallow other teammates to help them with an answer.

3. Ask the following questions, bringing up two new participants from each team between questions.
 1. According to Muslim belief, what prophet was the Qu'ran revealed to? (Muhammad)
 2. What is the third largest monotheistic religion in the world? (Islam)
 3. What word means "to strive in the way of God?" (Jihad)
 4. What are the followers of Islam called? (Muslims)
 5. Who is a famous Lebanese-Mexican movie star? (Selma Hayek)
 6. What Arab-American ran for President? (Ralph Nader)
 7. What Arab-American was a DJ who created "America's Top 40"? (Casey Kasem)
 8. Who wrote the famous book of poetry called *The Prophet*? (Kahlil Gibran)
 9. What is the name of Islam's most important text? (Qu'ran)
 10. What country has the largest population of Muslims? (Indonesia)
 11. True or False, all Arabs are Muslims? (False)
 12. What is the name of the head-covering that covers the hair of many Muslim women? (Hijab)
 13. What is the name of a black cloth, often confused with a burqa, that covers the head and face of a woman, only revealing her eyes? (Niqab)
 14. What are the two main sects of Islam called? (Sunni & Shi'ite)
 15. What is the 30-day fasting season in Islam called? (Ramadan)
 16. What is the code of law based on the Qu'ran called? (Shari'a)
 17. What is a Muslim scholar who interprets Shari'a called? (Mufti)
 18. What is a scholarly opinion on a matter of Islamic law called? (Fatwa)
 19. What is a term that means "forbidden" in Arabic? (Haraam)
 20. All Muslims are Arab. (False)

Explore

Activity #4

Give students time to explore the Side by Side Comparison Lens on the Patheos website. You might have students demonstrate their knowledge with a short essay, blog entry, or through a "pair and share":

1. One student uses the website to compare Islam to the two major sects of Islam, Shi'a and Sunni.
2. Another student compares Islam to the two other major monotheistic religions, Christianity and Judaism.
3. These two students share their knowledge with one another.

Link: <http://www.patheos.com/Library/Lenses/Side-By-Side.html?path1=x242&path2=x2101&path3=x2132>

Activity #5

Students explore the Muslim Faith Portal on the Patheos website. This page includes basic information about Islam, blog articles by prominent Muslim thinkers on contemporary issues, and a variety of short video clips about Islam and Muslims living in different parts of the world. Students could demonstrate their knowledge by briefly presenting the information in their article/video back to the class or by writing a summary of the information.

Link: <http://www.patheos.com/Religion-Portals/Muslim.html>

*Activity #6

Students explore Edward Said's concept of "Orientalism." Here is a link to an excellent introduction to the concept of Orientalism and the way that Western paintings, literature, and "science," and rhetoric have reiterated stereotypes about people from the Orient:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwCOSkXR_Cw

There are four parts to this interview with Said on Youtube, which you may choose to show to your class in full. You might also choose to assign your students reading out of Said's book, Orientalism, New York: Vintage, 1979.

This website gives a good general introduction to the topic of Orientalism as well:

<http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Orientalism.html>

Once students are familiar with the concept of Orientalism, ask them to discuss common portrayals in the media of Arab Muslims that they think are Orientalist in nature. As they watch *Veiled Voices*, ask them to think about how the images and story within the film subvert the Orientalist stereotypes about Muslim Arabs, or if they think any of the images or stories confirm these stereotypes. Push your students to look at media with a critical eye, not just assuming that news and documentaries communicate "truth," but looking for the ideology behind different types of portrayals of Arab Muslims. You might assign a short essay or blog post in which students choose one piece of footage from news or entertainment media and explain how it supports Orientalist stereotypes about Arab Muslims.

Explain

*Activity #7

Screen *Veiled Voices* or the Short Films accompanying the feature. You might follow the screening with a discussion or written reflection that could be posted on a class blog. The following questions are written to correspond with *Veiled Voices*, but can be adapted to fit the Short Films as well.

1. What are some of the common stereotypes about Muslims? How did the stories in *Veiled Voices* challenge these stereotypes?
2. Compare and contrast the manner in which the women in *Veiled Voices*, Ghina, Su'ad, and Huda, were married. How did what they shared about their marriages match up against your preconceptions about Muslim marriages? What are some of the similarities and differences you see between their marriages and different types of marriage you see around you in the United States?
3. Compare and contrast the leadership roles that Ghina, Su'ad, and Huda have taken on. How do these roles compare to leadership roles women take on in the United States?
4. What were some of the limiting factors that Ghina, Su'ad, and Huda faced when it came to their leadership roles? What imperiled their roles at some point, or stopped them from taking on greater responsibility? Do you see limits on the leadership roles women in the United States have access to? What are some of the limiting factors in our society?
5. How do Ghina, Su'ad, and Huda feel about the non-Muslim world? What place does it have in their lives? Would you describe them as open or closed to ideas and experiences outside of their personal beliefs or geographical region? How would you compare their level of openness to the level of openness you see among people in the United States to ideas different from their own?
6. Ghina, Su'ad, and Huda all work to help other women. Do you think that women leaders can play a unique role when it comes to helping other women? Why or why not? Do you see women leaders who help women playing important roles in your society?
7. What kind of educational opportunities were open to the Ghina, Su'ad, and Huda, their daughters, and other women in their societies? Does it appear that education is limited for women, or prioritized equally for women and men? How would you rate educational opportunity and gender equality within education in the United States?
8. From the movie, does it appear that all Muslims agree on all aspects of their beliefs? Was there room for debate, discussion, or peaceful disagreement within followers of the same faith? Within your belief system or faith, what are some of the issues around which there is disagreement? Is diversity of opinion accepted, celebrated, or discouraged within your community?

Elaborate

***Activity #8**

Students will research one recent event in history involving Arab Muslim women, and compare and contrast the news coverage of that event on CNN or BBC versus Aljazeera. For example, students might research the French ban on the niqab, specifically how Muslim women who choose to wear the niqab are portrayed in Western media as compared to how they are portrayed

by Aljazeera, a media company based in the Middle East. This type of project would look at how the differing media outlets portray the motivations of these women (gender oppression versus personal conviction, for example). Who is asked to act as an expert on the subject, the Muslim women themselves, or politicians and scholars who “know” the issues? What type of phraseology is noticeably present in one article/video and noticeably absent in the other (for example, the words “racism” or “terrorist threat”)? Students should begin to investigate how misconceptions and negative stereotypes about Arab Muslims are related to media portrayals from outlets such as CNN that our society tends to assume are ideologically neutral.

Links to articles about the French ban on the niqab (burqa):

<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/europe/2010/10/2010108113056514496.html>
http://articles.cnn.com/2010-09-14/world/france.burqa.ban_1_burqa-overt-religious-symbols-ban-last-year?_s=PM:WORLD

Activity #9

Invite a Muslim guest speaker to your classroom to talk about his/her personal experiences with religion, society, or culture clash. You can contact the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee if you would like them to help connect you with someone willing to speak to your class:

ADC Education Department
1732 Wisconsin Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20007
Telephone : (202) 244-2990
E-mail : adc@adc.org
Web Site : www.adc.org

Activity #10

Students write a research paper inspired by an article found on the site Altmuslimah, an online journal about gender issues in the Muslim community. Students should find an article of interest to them, then find at least two other sources on the same topic to use as sources within their own writing. You might then have students present their findings in a class presentation, or alternatively post it on a class blog for other students to read.

Link: <http://www.Altmuslimah.com/>

Evaluate

*Activity #11

Students write a reflection essay on one or more of the following topics:

1. How did your view of Muslims change through your studies during this unit?
2. How did your view of media representations of Arab Muslims change during this unit?
3. What do you think might be some of the challenges an Arab Muslim woman would face while studying in your college? What might your school do to lessen or eliminate these challenges? What might students at your school do to lessen or eliminate these challenges?