

Shifting the Narrative:  
Arab Americans, the Arab  
World, and Teaching for  
Understanding

**Presented By: Rania  
Hammoud**

Plymouth-Canton Community Schools

مرحبا



# Introduction

*Rania Hammoud*

- Assistant Principal - Discovery Middle School
- Former P-CCS K-12 Curriculum Coordinator of Social Studies, World Language, & School Climate
- Former 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Studies Teacher  
Discovery Middle School

# Today's Objectives

- Explore Arab heritage
- Address common stereotypes
- Examine how to support and acknowledge Arab American students
- Teach conflicts with sensitivity
- Access resources to support teaching & learning



# Acknowledgements

- Thank you to the Arab American National Museum
- April is National Arab American Heritage Month



# Where Do You Stand? Reflecting on Our Readiness and Practice

Join at [menti.com](https://menti.com) | use code 5532 3673

Mentimeter

Ask your question here...

I feel confident in my ability to teach about Arab heritage and culture in a culturally responsive way



I have the tools and background knowledge needed to teach about conflicts in the Middle East with balance and empathy.

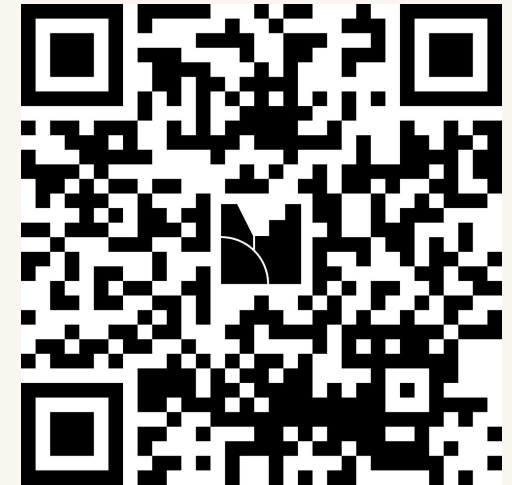


My current curriculum includes accurate and diverse perspectives on the Arab world



Strongly disagree

Strongly agree





# The Arab World & Arab Heritage

- How many Arab countries are there?
- Can you name any Arab countries?



# The Arab World

The Arab world refers to the 22 Arab countries (10 in Africa and 12 in Asia) expanding from the African shores of the Atlantic Ocean to the Arab/Persian Gulf in Asia.

As of 2023, the combined population of all the Arab states was around 473 million people.



# Countries in the Arab World

Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

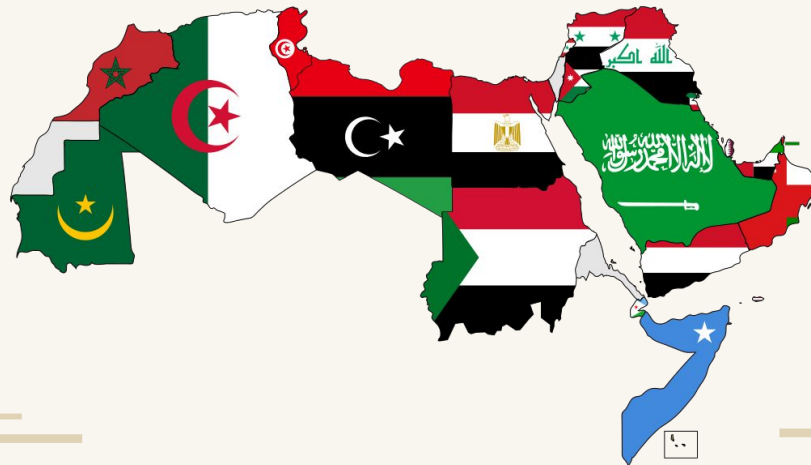
**Note: Iran and Turkey are not Arab countries.**



# Arab World: Unifying Factors

## What makes a country “Arab?”

- Official Language: Arabic
- Shared **culture**, traditions, and history
- Member of the Arab League
  - Established in 1945
  - Cultural, economic, and political support
  - Modeled after the United Nations



# What's the Difference Between the Arab World and the Middle East?

## The Middle East:

- A **geographic region**, not a cultural or linguistic one
- Includes countries primarily in Southwest Asia and parts of North Africa (Egypt)
- May include non-Arab countries like Iran, Turkey, and Israel

## The Arab World:

- A **cultural-linguistic region** where Arabic is the dominant language
- Made up of 22 countries in the Arab League

## Why this Matters for Teaching:

- Avoid treating the two as interchangeable
- Many Middle Eastern countries are not Arab, and many Arab countries are outside the Middle East (Algeria, Morocco, Libya, Tunisia)

# Arab Americans in Michigan & Metro Detroit

- Michigan has the second largest Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) population in the U.S. after California
  - Estimated to be close to 400,000 Michigan residents
  - Metro Detroit's Arab-American community is the largest in the nation
- Arab Americans are heavily involved in the state's economy as entrepreneurs, professionals, politicians, and community leaders



# Arab Americans in Michigan & Metro Detroit

- The only Arab-majority city in the United States is Dearborn where 54.5% MENA ancestry
- The city of Dearborn is the center of the Arab-American community
  - Home to the largest mosque in North America, as well as the Arab American National Museum



## TOP 12 STATES BY ARAB AMERICAN POPULATION SIZE

1. CALIFORNIA 533,307	5. FLORIDA 206,181	9. MINNESOTA 161,941
2. MICHIGAN 392,733	6. ILLINOIS 181,139	10. VIRGINIA 134,322
3. NEW YORK 300,653	7. NEW JERSEY 179,449	11. MASSACHUSETTS 128,628
4. TEXAS 245,420	8. OHIO 168,623	12. PENNSYLVANIA 126,553

SOURCE: AAI tabulations of the 2020 U.S. Census, U.S. Census Bureau adjusted for undercount. 

## TOP 12 STATES BY ARAB AMERICAN POPULATION SIZE AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE STATE'S POPULATION

1. MICHIGAN	5. VIRGINIA	9. ILLINOIS
2. MINNESOTA	6. DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	10. CALIFORNIA
3. NEW JERSEY	7. NEW YORK	11. RHODE ISLAND
4. MASSACHUSETTS	8. OHIO	12. NEBRASKA

SOURCE: AAI tabulations of the 2020 U.S. Census, U.S. Census Bureau adjusted for undercount. 

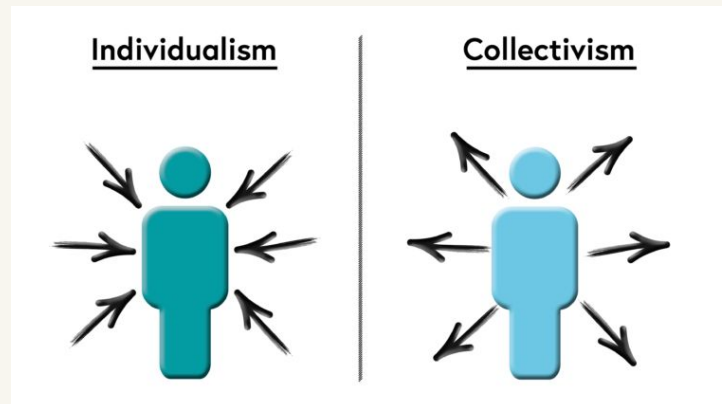
# Common Arab American Cultural Characteristics

- Generosity
  - The more generous you are, the better
- Hospitality
  - Persistent
  - Food is an important part of culture
  - Coffee has social importance
- Politeness
  - Respect for elders



# More Common Arab American Cultural Characteristics

- Collectivism
  - Family
  - Close-knit communities
  - One is a reflection of their family
- Extended family important
  - Tend to have broader concept of family





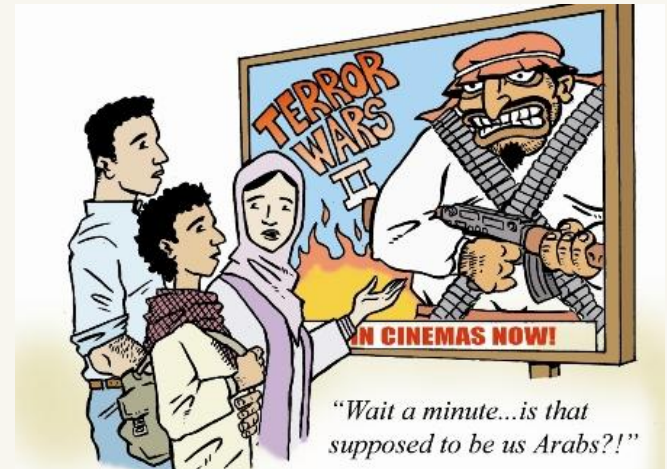
# Dispelling Common Stereotypes





# Negative Effects of Stereotyping

- Discussion:
  - What are the negative effects of stereotyping?
    - What are some stereotypes you've overheard from students?
- Stereotyping can lead people to live lives driven by hate and can cause the victims of those stereotypes to be driven by fear



# Common Stereotypes About Arabs/Arab World

- All Arab countries are run by dictators
  - Various types of political systems in the Arab world
- Arabs are Terrorists
  - Overwhelming majority are law abiding citizens with families and a wide variety of occupations
- All Arab women are oppressed by men
  - Women have the same education and work opportunities as men in many Arab countries
- Arab women have to be veiled (wear a “hijab”)
  - According to Islam women should dress modestly. The veil is not imposed upon them and women are free to choose whether to wear veils

# Did You Know?

- Not all Arabs are Muslims
  - Arabs can be Christian, Jewish, or Muslim.
  - 63% of **Arab Americans** are Christian.
- Not all Muslims are Arabs
  - Only 20% of the world's Muslims are Arabs.
  - The top five countries with the largest Muslim population are non-Arab speaking countries.
    - Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nigeria



# Discussion

- How did this video clip make you feel? What stood out to you?
- What would you do if you witness something like this happening in your:
  - School's cafeteria?
  - Classroom?



# Supporting and Acknowledging Arab American Students

- Represent the Middle East, Arabs, and Muslims accurately, completely, and fairly in the curriculum and school activities
- Ensure that Arab American students are treated equitably and without prejudice by teachers and peers
  - Educators should respond to incidents of racism and discrimination strongly and quickly, with attention to both the perpetrators and the victims
- Respect the customs of the native culture and religion of Arab students (ex. Ramadan, females wearing the hijab)
- Additional thoughts/suggestions?



# Teaching About Conflicts in the Middle East

# Current Conflicts in the Middle East (Teacher Overview)

## 1 Israel–Palestine (Gaza & West Bank)

- A longstanding conflict over land, identity, and self-determination.
- Rooted in 1948 creation of Israel and late Ottoman period.
- **Current violence:** ongoing military operations and attacks affecting Israelis and Palestinians.
- **Gaza Humanitarian Crisis:** severe crisis, tens of thousands of Palestinians killed (incl. women & children), widespread destruction of homes, schools, hospitals, limited food/water/electricity access, majority of population displaced, urgent international concerns about access/protection.

## 3 Lebanon (Israel–Hezbollah Conflict)

- Ongoing tensions along southern border.
- Recent escalation: Israeli operations in southern Lebanon and cross-border attacks.
- Thousands of civilians displaced, particularly in south.
- Growing humanitarian concerns and risk of wider war.

## 7 Sudan (Regional Context – MENA Connection)

- Conflict since 2023 between rival military factions.
- Massive displacement and humanitarian crisis.
- Regional spillover effects, including refugee movement into neighboring countries.

## 2 Iran–Israel / U.S.–Iran Conflict (2026 Escalation)

- Long-term rivalry intensified recently.
- Recent direct strikes and retaliatory missile/drone attacks across region.
- Involves proxy groups and impacts multiple countries.
- Global implications, incl. energy security (e.g., Strait of Hormuz).

## 4 Syria (Transitional Government & Reconstruction)

- **New Leadership:** President Ahmed al-Sharaa assumed office 29 January 2025 (Transitional).
- **Government Focus:** National reconciliation, building state institutions, and developing the economy.
- **Ongoing Challenges:** Continued efforts toward the integration of armed groups and managing tensions with Kurdish forces (SDF) in the northeast.
- **Reconstruction:** Beginning to address massive war damage and the largest global refugee crisis, with ongoing instability and the need for transitional justice.
- **Sanctions Removed:** Post-Assad government re-connected to the international community, leading to the removal of major sanctions.

## 6 Iraq (Ongoing Instability)

- Long-term effects of 2003 U.S. invasion and rise of ISIS.
- Continued **political instability** and security challenges.
- Efforts toward rebuilding alongside persistent tensions.



1. How do you ensure your lessons on global conflicts include multiple perspectives?
2. In what ways do you prepare students for emotionally sensitive or politically complex discussions?
3. What challenges have you faced when teaching about Middle Eastern conflicts (or other world conflicts), and how have you addressed them?



# Teaching About Conflicts in the Middle East

- **Honor Diverse Perspectives**

Create a space where all student identities and experiences are acknowledged, especially for those with personal ties to the region.

- **Avoid Bias & Stereotypes**

Use balanced, human-centered resources that present multiple narratives and focus on historical accuracy and empathy.

Refer to the [Ad Fontes Media Bias Chart](#)

- **Foster Inclusive Dialogue**

Establish norms for respectful discussion; encourage listening, understanding, and thoughtful participation.



# Teaching About Conflicts in the Middle East

- **Teach Historical Context**

Present key events, timelines, and the roles of various stakeholders without bias. Avoid polarization: “Teach the conflict, not a side”

- **Center Human Stories**

Share real-life experiences from both sides to foster empathy and understanding (letters, oral histories, refugee narratives). Avoid simulation activities or role-playing traumatic events

- **Global Connections**

Frame conflicts within broader human rights, refugee, and peace-building efforts.

- **Instructional Suggestions:**

- a. Use inclusive timelines (e.g., Nakba, Oslo Accords)
- b. Include maps, demographics, and humanitarian impacts
- c. Highlight international diplomacy (UN, Camp David, etc.)

# Teaching About Conflicts in the Middle East

## Classroom Discussion Tips

- **Encourage Open Dialogue:**
  - Allow students to express their views and share personal stories but maintain a neutral position as a facilitator (guide on the side).
  - Encourage students to ask questions and listen to one another.
  - Refer to the [Learning for Justice Let's Talk Toolkit](#)
- **Prepare for Emotional Responses:**
  - Be prepared for strong emotions given the personal connections some students may have.
  - Approach the topic with empathy, and offer support for students who may need it.

## Assignment Ideas

- **Research Projects:**
  - Assign students to research specific events (e.g., 1948 Arab-Israeli War, Six-Day War, Oslo Accords) from multiple perspectives.
- **Peacebuilding Scenarios:**
  - Engage students in creating peace proposals based on their understanding of a conflict, taking into account the needs of all groups involved.

# Culturally Sensitive Teaching Resources

- **United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA):** Provides reports and educational resources on the conditions of Palestinian refugees.
  - [UNRWA Resource Library](#)
- **BBC News – Guide to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict:** Offers a balanced overview of the conflict, including key facts, history, and different perspectives.
  - [BBC Israeli-Palestinian Conflict](#)
- **The Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) – Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Resource:** Explores the roots of the conflict and offers articles and teaching materials.
  - [CFR Global Conflict Tracker](#)
- **iCivics – Teaching Complex International Issues:** Offers lesson plans that help students understand global conflicts and develop their own critical viewpoints, rooted in peacebuilding and diplomacy.
  - [iCivics Resources](#)
- **Learning for Justice – Lessons on Global Conflict:** While not specifically focused on a specific conflict Learning for Justice offers frameworks for teaching global conflicts in a way that fosters cultural respect and understanding.
  - [Learning for Justice- Global Issues](#)

# Arab American National Museum Resources

[List of lessons](#)

[Lessons in Google Drive](#)

[Core Galleries in the Museum](#)

[Trainings & Presentations](#)



# Questions?



# Thank you and Let's Keep in Touch!



<https://bit.ly/ArabAmericanNCHE>



[rania.hammoud@pccsk12.com](mailto:rania.hammoud@pccsk12.com)

