



The History of Head Covering and Polygamy Practice in Islam

Curriculum Unit 11.02.03
by Fatima Nouchkioui

Introduction

I teach Arabic language in a public school at the high school level to all grades. The first day of the school year I asked my students to write a thinking page on what they know about Arabic language and speakers. Most of the answers were similar to "The Arab girls cover their hair. They can't date or shake hands with other men. Men can have more than one wife." Other students used the term "Muslim" instead of "Arab" because they are confused about whether all Arabs are Muslims or all Muslims are Arabs. After all students shared their page, I asked them if they think the same customs existed or exist in other cultures. The answers were negative. Then the questions arose: How come the Arabs / Muslims live this way? Why Arabs / Muslims ...? The groups of students I teach have a wild curiosity about the Muslims' lifestyle and culture, especially knowing that I, their teacher, am a Muslim. So, I decided to write a unit that addresses the major questions that are the most confusing for my students. As a language educator I believe that learning a language helps understand the culture of the target countries and vice versa. I also strongly believe that I can better reach my objectives if I address my students' needs and interests. Through the few years I have been teaching I have learned that in order to make our lessons interesting to our students, the subject has to relate to their lives or at least give the students the opportunity to compare and contrast with their lives. Because the need for this unit was raised by the students themselves, I chose to do it and make it comparative with other cultures that students already know.

Statement of purpose

Through our class discussions about religions I noticed that most students view Islam as completely different from other religions that they are familiar with. They see no similarities with their own religion. Our students are too young to know whether the head covering called "hijab" in Arabic, which also means "veiling" in English, is only practiced by Islam or by other religions as well. My students also see Muslims as the only people who practice polygamy, but what does history say about that? Is polygamy limited to the religion of Islam only?

The purpose of this unit is to guide the students to identify the similarities and differences between the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Students will then discuss common features in the three religions, with particular emphasis on head covering as a way to introduce these. The unit I will design will not only help the students find the answers to their questions and clear up their confusion, but will also stress the importance of respecting differences between cultures. This unit will be taught to students in grades nine through twelve who have no prior knowledge of Islam. The class periods are 85 minutes long and meet every other day.

My students will participate in several kinds of activities including research projects, videos, discussions and speakers' presentations. Additionally, students will be introduced to certain articles, as required by the New Haven public school system in order to increase the students' scores on the Reading for Information section of the CAPT Exam. This test section requires students to answer multiple choice and open ended questions from an article that students have to read. As a language teacher, I have to practice this assignment with my students by using articles that cover the culture of a language target country. In my unit I am planning to have my students read two articles entitled "Social Work and the House of Islam" by David Hodge and "Marriage in the Arab World" by Hoda Rashad.

Student Body

This unit will be taught to freshmen through seniors who are taking Arabic. Metropolitan Business Academy is a magnet school. Currently the school body consists of 300 students with approximately 20% white, 30% Hispanics and 50% African Americans. Most students are Christians, very few of them Jewish and 2% Muslims. I teach my students that in order to be successful in business, they have to be good communicators with people from all over the world. In order to do so, they have to learn about the culture of the people they will be interacting with. I also tell them to be prepared to experience differences in cultures and religions which they will have to learn to respect. Our school has the facilities to invite speakers for our classes. Therefore I am planning to host representatives of Islam, Judaism and Christianity to discuss the differences and similarities between the religions.

Unit context

Judaism, Christianity and Islam are three monotheistic religions with many differences as well as similarities. In this unit the focus will be more on the similarities between the three religions with an emphasis on Islam. Many people don't know how close Islam is to Judaism and Christianity, starting from the greeting form, "shalom" in Hebrew and "Salam" in Arabic, both meaning "peace be upon you" in English. Islam looks at Judaism and Christianity as a single tradition. It is considered a completion of the same message sent by God to the humanity through Judaism and Christianity. The three religions believe that there is only one God, "Allah" in Arabic language and that God is the source of all that exists. They all have a holy book: Judaism has the Torah, received by Moses, Christianity has the New Testament, received by the apostles of Jesus, and Islam has the Quran which was received by Mohammad. Each of these religions has a holy place for worship:

synagogue for Jews, church for Christians, and mosque for Muslims. Jews, Muslims and most Christians pray daily, and they each have a weekly day for public prayer: Friday for Muslims, Saturday for Jews and Sunday for Christians. They all are required to share with others by giving alms to the poor and the homeless. People of these three religions practice fasting at different times and for varying lengths of time. In the early centuries, Wednesdays and Fridays were the days of fasting for Christians who followed the example of Jesus, who is believed to have fasted for 40 days and nights. The Jews fast on their holy day, Yom Kippur, from sundown to sundown and Muslims fast in the holy month of Ramadan from sunrise to sundown. The Quran refers to the Jews and the Christians as the people of the book and recognizes all the Old Testament prophets including Noah, Moses, Joseph, Jacob and David.

One important fact that students will learn is that Muslims have to believe in all prophets of the three religions, and that those who don't are not considered Muslims. Islam considers Jesus to be one of the divinely inspired prophets. His name is mentioned ninety three times in the Quran. The story of his life is told in details in the Quran. Some of it was not mentioned in the Bible, such as his defense of his mother Mary before the people of Nazareth. Allah told Mary not to speak to them and to point to her baby Jesus who would speak and defend her and he did;

'I am a slave of Allah [i.e. created by God and belong to Him], He has given me the Scriptures and made me a Prophet; And He has made me blessed wheresoever I be, and enjoined on me Salat (prayer), and Zakat (giving alms to the poor) as long as I live. And dutiful to my mother (i.e. made me kind and good to my mother) and made me not arrogant, unblest. And peace be upon me the day I was born, and the day I shall be raised alive (i.e. on The Day of Judgment and Resurrection)!' "(Quran 19:29-33)

Like Christians, Muslims also believe that Jesus was born without an earthly father, that he was taken into heaven and he will return. However, Muslims do not believe that Jesus was crucified, but that God saved him and made the people of Nazareth believe that they crucified him. On the other hand, Jews and Muslims differ from Christians in certain customs, such as not eating pork, or drinking alcohol.

Hijab

One custom common to all three religions, I will point out to my students, is head covering, although the reasons for it vary. It has been considered, at one time or another, a sign of class or religious belief, a reflection of traditional dress and fashion, or simply an adaptation to practicality. One way to teach the students about this is to show them a collection of pictures of different women from different cultures wearing different types of head covers for multiple reasons other than religion (see week two lesson plan 4). Students will learn from this activity that although the populations in some Arab countries like Syria, Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, for example, are not 100% Muslims; some middle age Christian women cover their hair in the presence of strange males, just as Muslim women do. Spanish women for example, wear a type of head covering called "Mantillas," for religious reasons, as well as a sign of fashion in the high society. Some Russian women use head scarves to protect them from the wind. In some cultures the head covering is used by women in funerals. However, head coverings are often used for religious reasons. One form of head covering called epanokamelavkion is worn by catholic nuns and monks in Eastern Orthodox churches. Catholic nuns in the Roman churches use veils as another form of head covering. In Judaism and Christianity, it is believed that the use of veils inside the church and the synagogue was frequent until 1960. However, some traditional churches still carry on this tradition. Amish women are also seen with different type of head covering. They wear a veil inside the temple and a regular scarf outside the temple in order not to damage the veil.

In Islam the objective of wearing hijab is to protect the woman from the eyes of the molesters as the Quran says: "O Prophet, tell your wives and daughters and the believing women to draw their outer garments around them (when they go out or are among men). That is better in order that they may be known (to be Muslims) and not annoyed..." (Qur'an 33:59).

There is a variety of head coverings used by Muslim women as a form of respect for their religion. In Islamic tradition, girls begin to cover their hair at the age of puberty using any type of head scarf called "hijab", which covers hair, throat and ears. In the past, hijab was only used by upper class women who were not required to work. On the other hand, many other people from hot climate regions like farm workers in Egypt for example and the Tuareg who are the nomads of North African Sahara covered their hair when outside, not necessarily because they are Muslims but because they had to protect their head from the sun. Today, most women wear hijab as an expression of their religious belief, as well as respect for their body and a way to avoid attracting other men, which is considered a sin in Islam, just as it was in the past in Judaism and Christianity. For some women, wearing hijab often follows marriage, reflecting the concept that a married woman does not seek attention from any other man but her husband. Muslim women do not have to wear the hijab inside their home in the presence of their husband or the males in their direct family. In fact, they can dress like any western woman with modern clothes and even swim in their pool as long as they are not seen by strange men. Also, in Muslim culture and religion, men are not to court or shake the hands of a woman who is wearing hijab. If a man is interested in proposing to a Muslim girl, she has to be approached by the adults of the family. This does not mean that a girl who does not wear hijab is giving the green light to other men to court her.

It is important to know that not all Muslim women wear hijab. Wearing hijab is the woman's choice in most Muslim countries that are not very conservative like Saudi Arabia and Iran, where women's dress code is imposed by the government. Some Muslim women, although they do not use hijab, still stick to their Muslim customs and rules like praying five times a day, fasting, not dating and most importantly not having sexual relationships outside marriage, which is also considered unacceptable by Christianity and Judaism as well.

Polygamy

One of my students' comments about Muslims is that they are known for practicing polygamy, which is against the law in America and considered a violation of women's rights in the opinion of some westerners. However, it is important to know that Muslim women in other cultures do not look at polygamy as a sign of oppression and degradation. Also, polygamy is not practiced only in Islam. It existed and was practiced in many other civilizations and religions before Islam, such as ancient Babylonians, Assyrians, Persians and Hindus. Mormons have also in the past practiced polygamy. According to the Old Testament and the Quran, polygamy was practiced by many prophets in the three monotheistic religions, except for Jesus who was not married. Islam is the only one of these religions that limited the allowed number of wives to four. Later on, polygamy was gradually prohibited by Christianity and Judaism and is no more practiced. Now, the question that arises is: why did Allah allow polygamy?

During Prophet Mohammad's life, Muslims experienced many battles against the pagans of Arabia, Jews, Christians and other tribes. As result, Muslims had a major loss in number of men, which left behind it a number of widows, mothers and orphan females in need of a man to take care of them. To solve the social problems Muslims were facing, to increase Muslims' number and in order to prevent sexual sins and prostitution, Allah revealed the verse 4:3 from the Quran to Mohammad allowing men to marry more than one wife, not exceeding four under some conditions: "**... marry women of your choice, two or three or four,**

but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with them, then only one." (Quran 4:3). This is a clear requirement by Islam to treat all wives equally.

Marriage in Islam is a mutual contract. A woman has the right to express her objection to polygamy in the contract of marriage, which has to be respected by the husband; otherwise he can not keep her as a wife if she asks for divorce. On the other hand, no one can force a woman to marry a married man. Today, in Middle East, any man who decides to marry more than one wife is required by law to have his previous wife's approval for his new marriage. Even if polygamy is allowed, its practice is very rare in the Muslim world because very few men can afford more than one family due to economic issues.

Objectives

The first objective of this unit will be to teach the students to respect their cultural differences, even if they might not agree with each others' ways of doing things. I will lead the students to find and discuss the answers to the following questions:

- What do the three monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam have in common?
- What is "hijab"? What is its significance in the past versus the present?
- Do other religions like Judaism and Christianity adopt similar customs?
- Why was polygamy allowed in Islam? Are there any restrictions?
- Did or do other religions like Judaism and Christianity allow polygamy?

Strategies

At the beginning of each class, before the students are taught anything about the topic of the day, students will be asked to write a thinking page about what they know, hear or predict about the topic of the lesson. By the end of the lesson they will be asked to write a learning page to reflect on what they learned about the topic of the day. The curriculum for World Languages in the New Haven District adheres to the state standards. The following New Haven district standards for World languages will be implemented as required in this unit:

1. Communication

2. Cultures
3. Connections
4. Comparisons among cultures

Classroom activities

Week one/ Lesson one

Materials:

- Handout about the culture topics
- Video
- Computers

Objectives:

- Students will understand the meaning of culture
- Students will become with the three main monotheistic religions

Duration: 85 minutes

Instructional procedure:

Students will have 10-15 minutes to write a thinking page in their notebook to answer the questions: How do you define culture? What topics go in culture? When students are done writing, they will share their writing and the different answers will be put on the board for discussion. After the discussion and agreement on the list of topics that go under culture, students will be given handouts with titles of topics like: music, clothing, food, religion, holidays' celebrations and family. Each student will have to answer the question "what is your culture" in each topic mentioned in the list. Students will have to get into groups of three to compare their individual lists with each others'. Then each group of three will talk to a different group to compare their group lists. After all groups compare their lists, students will share their findings as individuals and as groups. Students will have to share something new they learned about each other and a discussion about culture differences will follow. To close this activity, students will write a learning page in their notebook about what they learned from this activity and then share with the class.

Students will have a short computer research assignment to do in groups about one of the topics from the list about culture: religions. The class will be divided in three groups. Each group will be assigned one of the three religions: Judaism, Christianity or Islam. Each group will be given a handout that shows a table with information to fill out about their assigned religion. The information students will have to gather about the assigned religion is: origination, holy places, holy book, original language, prophets, prayer time, fasting, almsgiving, marriage. The teacher will introduce these titles in Arabic language. After students share their

findings they will write their learning page about what they learned from today's lesson. Students will share their writing.

Closure: Students will watch a 5 minutes video about the similarities and differences between the three main religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam from the perspective of a Rabbi, a priest and an Imam .

Homework : Based on the information presented in the short video, students will have to prepare a minimum of five questions for the presenters coming next class to speak to the students about the similarities and differences between Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Week one/ Lesson 2

Materials:

- Students' questions' lists

Objective:

- Students will be familiar with the differences and similarities between the three religions

Duration: 85 minutes

Procedure: Students will meet in groups by assigned religions to discuss the questions they prepared to give the presenters. They will put the questions in one list per group and each student will choose the question s/he will ask the presenters. The Teacher will go over the questions with the students.

Students will attend a presentation about the differences and similarities between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The presentation will be done by three presenters each from a different faith. Students will have the opportunity to ask questions.

Week one/ Lesson 3

Materials:

- Venn diagrams
- vocabulary quiz

Objective:

- Students will discuss their learning about the similarities and differences between religions

Duration: 85 minutes

Students will meet in groups and share the answers to the questions they asked to the presenters. The teacher will give the students a Venn diagram sheet to use to fill out the similarities and differences between the religions. The teacher will also project the diagrams on the board and have students participate in filling as a class. The teacher will guide the students to use the previously learned Arabic vocabulary when filling the diagrams. A discussion about the topic of the presentation will follow.

Assessment: Students will have a religions vocabulary quiz. The last minutes of class will be used by students to write their learning page about what they learned about the similarities and differences between the three main religions and share their writing in class.

Week two/ lesson 4

Material:

- Transparencies
- Clothing pictures

Objective:

- Students will learn about the next topic under culture: The head cover
- Students will learn not to judge people from their head cover
- Students will be able to identify each others' clothing in Arabic

Duration: 85 minutes

Procedure:

Students will write their thinking page by answering the questions:

- Does the way you dress reflect the person you are?
- Do you judge others by the way they dress?

The teacher will have the students share their answers and will put their answers on the board.

The teacher will use a different transparency with pictures of different clothing to teach the matching vocabulary in Arabic. Students will practice the vocabulary by identifying what their classmate is wearing.

Assessment: The students will show their understanding of the material they were taught today by working in groups of two to perform a scenario. Each group will have a number of pictures of different people dressed in different ways, some with or without head cover. The teacher will give each student one picture that also exists on the desk. Each student will use that picture to describe himself or herself to his or her partner. The partner will have to find the matching picture from the collection of pictures on the desk.

The teacher will use a transparency with photos of women from different cultures and social ranks with different type of head covers (Laila Ali, Diana Spencer, Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto, Mother Teresa, other pictures of women from Spain and Russia as well as pictures of Jewish and Muslim women, some with and some without head cover like an Egyptian woman working in the field and Queen Rania of Jordan).

Students will work in small groups to discuss the following:

- Why the women in the transparency cover their hair?

- What does their head covering symbolize? (job, religion, tradition, style, other?)
- Does the head covering tell you about the origin or belief of the person?

A discussion will follow.

Assessment : Students will write their learning page about today's lesson and share their writing.

Homework : Students will have vocabulary word search of a list of the vocabulary they learned today. The list is in English. Students will have to find the matching Arabic word.

Week 2/ Lesson 5:

Materials:

- Computers
- Article: " Social work and the house of Islam"

Objective:

- Students will be able to identify the different head coverings used in different religions.
- Students will understand the different reasons of the use of the head cover in the different religions

Procedure:

Students will work in groups to do a computer research about the use of head scarves by different religions. Each group will be assigned one of the three religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Students will have 30 minutes to research the following:

- The different reasons for the use of headscarves in the assigned religion (religious and non religious use)
- Pictures and names of the different headscarves used in the assigned religion.

Each group will share their findings and a discussion will follow. The teacher will give the students a Reading for Information Assignment. They will have to read the article "Social work and the house of Islam" in groups, find the answer to 8 multiple choice questions and discuss two open ended questions related to the article. Students will share their answers and discuss as a class.

Homework: Students will have to write their learning page about what they learned from today's class.

Week three/ Lesson 6

Materials:

- Video

Objective:

- Students will learn about the next topic under culture : marriage in Muslim culture

Procedure: Students will write their learning page about what they know about marriage in Muslim culture". After sharing their writing, students will watch a movie made in Morocco in Arabic language with English subtitles. The translation of the movie title is "The search for my wife's husband". The movie is a comedy. It portrays the traditional life of Moroccan families. The story is about a Moroccan man married to three women. It talks about his stressful life due to the fact that he tries to be fair and give equal attention to all of them. After watching the movie students will brainstorm what they learned about marriage culture in Islam. A discussion about the movie will follow.

Homework: Students will write a paragraph about their own marriage culture.

Week three 3/ Lesson 7

Materials:

- Article

Objective:

- Students will compare and contrast marriage culture in the religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam

Procedure:

Students will share their writing about their own marriage culture. The class will discuss the similarities and differences in marriage culture in the three main religions. After the discussion, students will have a discussion about existence or non-existence of polygamy in the three religions.

Students will then read the article "Marriage in the Arab World" and work in groups of two to answer open ended questions about the topic. Students will share their writings and a discussion will follow.

Assessment: Students will write their learning page about what they learned about marriage in different religions.

Appendix: Implementing district standards

8.2.I Investigate and report on cultural traditions and celebrations.

8.2.A Compare and contrast the treatment of current issues across cultures by drawing on authentic texts.

8.4.B Use new information and cultural awareness to recognize the similarities and differences across cultures.

8.5.I Use new information and perspectives to discuss the differences and similarities across cultures and begin to explain the reasons for such behaviors.

8.5.A Use new and evolving information and perspectives to demonstrate understanding of the similarities and differences among

cultures.

Teachers and students' Resources:

Abdullah Yusuf. *The Quran* : Tahrike Tarsile Quran, Inc 2001.

Abdel-Fattah Randa. *Does My Head Look Big In This?:* London: Orchard Books, 2007.

Mernissi, Fatima. *Beyond the Veil* : Male-Female Dynamics in a Modern Muslim Society. Schenkman publishing company, Inc Cambridge, Massachusetts 1975

Articles:

David Hodge. *Social work and the house of Islam, 2000.*

Hoda Rashad, Magued Osmn and Farzaneh Roudi-Fahimi. *Marriage in the Arab World, 2005.*

Websites:

<http://www.islamic.org.uk/l4WM/wherethe.htm>

http://islamicity.com/mosque/Intro_Islam.htm

http://www.islamic-world.net/sister/what_allah_states.htm

<http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/326/>

<http://chinese-school.netfirms.com/Judaism-Christianity-Islam.html>

Videos:

Bachir Skirej, "A la recherche du mari de ma femme". Arts et techniques audiovisuels 1995.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0UQDLFM5B-s&feature=related>

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>