

Lesson Plan: Exploring the Diversity of Middle Eastern and North African Cultures Through Children's Literature

Grade Level: 3–5 (Elementary)

Subject Areas: Social Studies / English Language Arts (ELA)

Duration: 60–75 minutes

Lesson Type: Cultural Literacy & Text Analysis

Lesson Overview

Students will explore the rich diversity of Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) cultures through children's literature. Using stories from Iranian, Parsi, Kurdish, Iraqi, Jewish refugee communities, and more, they will examine cultural traditions, family life, migration experiences, and identity. This lesson enhances reading comprehension, cultural awareness, and social studies inquiry, aligned with Common Core standards.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify and describe diverse cultural practices and traditions from MENA regions.
- Analyze narrative texts for cultural, historical, and social context.
- Compare and contrast experiences across different MENA communities, including refugee migration.
- Connect literature to contemporary discussions about diversity, migration, and identity.

Materials

Children's Books or Excerpts:

- Norooz with My Family
- My Mother Used To Say
- The Bicycle: How an Act of Kindness Changed a Young Refugee's Life
- My First Stories in Kurdish
- Nashville the Little Kurdistan
- Shoham's Bangle
- On The Wings of Eagles

Additional Materials:

- Whiteboard or chart paper
- Student notebooks or devices for journaling and responses
- Excerpts of books printed or projected for small-group reading

Standards Alignment

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3-5.1:** Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3-5.2:** Determine the main idea of a text; recount the key details and explain how they support the main idea.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3-5.1:** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3-5.2:** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

Lesson Procedure

1. Introduction (10 minutes)

- Begin with a mini-lecture or slideshow on cultural diversity in MENA regions, including Iran, Iraq, Kurdish areas, and Parsi heritage.
- Highlight traditions, family practices, migration, and refugee experiences.
- Explain how children's literature serves as windows into cultural identities and historical experiences.

2. Read-Aloud / Book Exploration (15–20 minutes)

- Split students into small groups; assign each group one of the books or excerpts.
- Ask students to read and annotate (or take notes) on:
 - Cultural practices (holidays, food, family traditions)
 - Language, symbolism, intergenerational relationships
 - Themes of migration, exile, belonging

Book Focus Examples:

- *Norooz with My Family* — Iranian New Year customs
- *My Mother Used To Say* — Parsi proverbs and heritage
- *The Bicycle* — Kurdish refugee journey
- *My First Stories in Kurdish* — Kurdish storytelling & language
- *Nashville the Little Kurdistan* — Kurdish diaspora in the U.S.
- *Shoham's Bangle* — Iraqi Jewish refugee story
- *On The Wings of Eagles* — Yemenite Jewish airlift and migration

3. Group Discussion (15 minutes)

- Each group presents key insights. Use prompts like:
 - What cultural traditions are depicted in your book?
 - How do the characters' family relationships reflect their heritage?
 - What does migration mean for the characters, and how do they carry their heritage with them?
 - In *Shoham's Bangle* and *On The Wings of Eagles*, how do objects serve as symbols of memory or identity?

4. Cultural Analysis Activity (15 minutes)

- Provide students with a chart to fill out (printed or on whiteboard):

Book	Cultural Practices	Family & Community	Migration / Refugee Experience	Symbolism / Objects

- Students cite specific passages or moments in the text to support their observations.

5. Writing Assignment / Exit Ticket (10 minutes)

- Prompt: “Using one or more of the books, write a paragraph explaining how literature helps us understand the diversity of MENA cultures and the experiences of families who migrate or rebuild their lives. Use at least one piece of textual evidence.”

Assessment

- Participation in group discussion
- Completed cultural analysis chart
- Written paragraph that uses textual evidence and reflects understanding

Extension / Homework

- **Research Project:** Students pick a cultural tradition from one of the books (e.g., Norooz, Iraqi-Jewish food, Kurdish storytelling) and prepare a short presentation or digital poster.
- **Contemporary Connection:** Compare the historical refugee experiences in the books with a modern refugee crisis; write a comparative essay or journal entry.

Modifications / Accommodations

- Provide guiding reading questions for students who need additional support.
- Offer choice in how to respond (written, oral, visual) for the exit ticket or extension.
- Use audiobooks or read-alouds for students with reading barriers.