



Middle East Resources

INFORMATION FOR TEACHING ABOUT THE MIDDLE EAST AT THE PRECOLLEGIATE LEVEL

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Voices of Saudi Children



The Teaching Resource Center is part of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University. People from all countries of the Middle East come to the Center during the school year. In 1994 we were visited by Mrs. Sally Alturki from Saudi Arabia. She was very interested in what children in the United States were learning in school about the country in which she lives. We showed her the books and videos, the clothing, games, dolls and musical instruments, that teachers borrow to make their classes about the Middle East interesting for the students. As we talked we thought about how nice it would be if students in a Saudi Arabian school could share their lives with children in our country. Mrs. Alturki spoke to the headmistress at the Dhahran Ahliyya School in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia who liked the idea very much. A few months later we received letters from 80 students in the all girl school. In these letters the girls tell you about their country, their people and the things they like to do. We picked out 12 letters written by students in grades 4 through 7 that we thought would be most interesting to you and would help you to know children your age in a very different country, far away.

Background: Saudi Arabia 1930-1996

Saudi Arabia is a kingdom ruled by the Al-Saud family. Since 1982 King Fahd ibn Abdul Aziz has been the monarch of this country of about 18 million people, all of whom are Muslims. The language of the country is Arabic. Saudi Arabia has changed greatly in the last half of this century with the discovery of large oil fields in the 1930s. Over the next 60 years, oil production grew at a great rate making the country very wealthy. At first American companies owned part of the rights to these oil fields, but by 1980 Saudi Arabia had total ownership of its oil.

Noora: Grade 7

Sixty years ago Saudi Arabia was only a desert. People lived in tents or mud houses. Their life was very hard, because they did not have enough food and water was scarce. The only transportation people had were camels and horses. Eventually oil was discovered and Saudi Arabia became rich. It started to export oil. It exports dates, too. Many factories were built that make all sorts of products. Farms were started. Vegetables and wheat are grown there. Cows were imported and we have large dairy farms, as well. The government of Saudi Arabia built schools and colleges to educate the Saudi people. Hospitals were constructed and doctors and nurses work there to prevent and cure disease. All the cities in Saudi Arabia have become modern and beautiful.

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Nour, Wala, Samar, Nada, Norain, Manar: Grade 5

Hi! Life in Saudi Arabia is nice and interesting. In the past many people lived in tents in the desert. These nomads moved from place to place to find grass or other vegetation to feed their sheep, camels, goats and horses. They hunted rabbits and lizards for food. They cooked over open fires and slept on rugs inside their tents. But now the life has changed. Most people live in the cities. We have cars and houses. On television we watch shows from many nations. Most houses are built of brick or concrete. All this change came about because of the discovery of petroleum in the 1930s. Even though we have changed our lives we have stayed true to our religion, Islam. We still pray five times each day and fast during the holy month of Ramadan. There are many foreigners who live in Saudi Arabia and we do not force our religion upon them. We hope you would like to learn more about Saudi Arabia. If you have any further questions, just write to us and we'll be happy to answer you.

Nadra: Grade 7

The streets and neighborhoods of my city are always clean and the government gives city planning great importance. Saudi Arabia has developed in only a few decades what took other nations hundreds of years. When hearing the name of my country, many people think only about an empty desert with tents. But they should know that only a few people live the nomadic lifestyle these days and that is by choice not necessity. I would like to tell everyone who doesn't know anything about my country that Saudi Arabia is working to provide the necessities of life for its citizens by only depending on itself. The people are highly educated and trying to lead their country to the top while being true to their faith.

Geography: the Land and the Climate

Saudi Arabia is about one-third the size of the continental United States. It is bordered on the north by Jordan and Iraq. It stretches from the Gulf of Aqaba and the Red Sea in the west to the Persian Gulf in the east. Along its eastern and southern borders lie Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman and Yemen. Geographically it is divided into regions with distinctive terrain: coasts and deserts, plateaus, escarpments and mountains. It is one of the driest lands on earth with no permanent rivers or bodies of water, very little rainfall and heat in the summer that can reach 120 degrees Fahrenheit.

Saarah: Grade 5

There are many types of plants and flowers that grow in Saudi Arabia. This is because the weather and soil are different in some areas of the country. The desert of Saudi Arabia is known for its many types of cactus. It does rain from time to time in the desert. When it rains in the desert many flowers can start to bloom in a matter of hours and the desert will look very pretty. The palm tree is the most important tree in Saudi Arabia. The stems and leaves were used for building traditional structures. The palm gives people and animals shade. The dates that grow on the trees were the most important part of the Bedouin's diet. There used to be 172 different kinds of dates grown in Saudi Arabia. Our country produces one-tenth of the world's dates.

Grade 4

Hi! We come from Saudi Arabia and want to tell you about our country. Saudi Arabia is a Kingdom. Most people think the country is all desert, but especially in the cities one can see a lot of plants and trees. Due to the hot weather here most of the greenery has to be irrigated. However it does get quite cold in some areas. Even in the hot summer, it is cool at night. The capital city of Saudi Arabia is Riyadh. There are other nice cities like Taif, Jeddah, Makkah and Madinah. Most people live in the cities. But a few nomads still live in tents in the desert. They move from one place to another with their animals.

Hanan: Grade 6

I am from Saudi Arabia. I live in the Eastern Province. It has a long beach on the Arabian Gulf. Saudi Arabia has many different regions and the climate is different in each one. For example in Abha in the south the weather is cool and rainy, even in the summer. Whereas here in the Eastern Province the weather is already quite hot and humid and will get even hotter as the summer months come.

Daily Life

People share many things no matter what part of the world they live in. We all want to be loved, we want to be happy, we feel pain when we are treated badly. We are sometimes very nice and sometimes not. A ten year old boy in Saudi Arabia may have very similar feelings to an American ten year old but, because customs and traditions vary between countries, the way he lives day by day, the food he eats, the clothes he wears the holidays he celebrates may be very different. Children in Saudi Arabia often know a great deal about America from television and movies but they know that Americans are not as familiar with their ways. In these letters the students tell us about their daily life.

Khulood Mulla - Grade 5

Hi! I live in Saudi Arabia. I'm a Muslim. Little girls in Saudi Arabia don't wear *abayas* but women do. The *abaya* is a kind of cloak that protects a woman's dignity. Men wear *thobes*, *ghutras* (head scarves), and shoes. We pray five times a day and fast in the holy month of Ramadan. We have modern houses. As you can see, since the discovery of petroleum life has become very nice. Without oil life would be much more difficult.

Oh! I forgot. We have kept some of our old traditions. Many women still use henna to colour and decorate their hands, feet and hair. Even foreign women think this custom is beautiful. We still have some Bedouins that live the nomadic life. They move from one place to another and take care of their animals like camels, sheep, and goats. But they are in the minority of our population. I hope you are now convinced that Saudi Arabia is a nice place to visit and live.

Grade 4

Saudi women wear a black cloak which completely covers their bodies. This is called an *abaya*. They also wear a headscarf. Some women cover their faces and some do not. Men wear *thobes*, *ghutras*, and sandals or shoes. Saudis are Muslims. We believe in one God. We pray five times a day. All shops and businesses close at prayer time so it is easy for people to go to the mosque to pray. We follow a lunar calendar.

Traditional Saudi diets centered around coffee, dates, bread, meat and rice. We even have a type of traditional chewing gum. You have to have strong teeth and jaws to chew it. Some people eat fast food like hamburgers, pizza, french fries, and donuts. We have restaurants like McDonald's, Hardees, Pizza Hut, Wendy's, Taco Bell and many more.

Most of us speak both Arabic and English. Women don't drive in Saudi Arabia. Our money is called the Riyal. The Kingdom earns most of its money by selling oil to other countries. Our king is King Fahad.

Saudi Arabia is a beautiful country. Thank you for taking an interest in it.

Aicha Yamani - Grade 4

I want everyone to know more about Saudi Arabia. I know that in America there is Disneyland. I know a lot about life in countries outside the Kingdom. But unfortunately many people don't know much about Saudi Arabia. The capital of Saudi Arabia is Riyadh. It is hot in my nation because much of it is desert land. Most people in Saudi Arabia are Muslims, but there are non-Muslims, too. Muslims pray five times each day. The traditional diet of Saudi Arabia centres around dates, yogurt, meat and rice. But now, we have fast foods like hamburgers too.

Laila Al Shaikh - Grade 4

I want to tell you something about Saudi Arabia. Let me start with what we wear. The women wear black abayas, headscarves, and some cover their faces and some don't. Men wear thobes, ghutras, and shoes or sandals. We are Muslims. We pray five times a day and fast during the month of Ramadan. We also give alms to the poor.

The weather is both hot and cold. We have tiny villages but also big cities like Jeddah, Makkah, Madinah, and Taif. The capital city is Riyadh. We have paved roads and cars. Our lives are modern now but we still keep some of our traditional ways. For example, traditional foods like dates and coffee are still very popular, but so are fast foods like hamburgers and fried chicken. Most people live in cities but we also have nomads. Bedouins are very good people. They take care of their animals and move from place to place looking for water and food. I love Saudi Arabia!

Nadra Al-Gnowainim

Saudi Arabia is a very peaceful country compared to others. Because of our religion, Islam, people interact with each other through good habits, such as respect, cooperation, mercy and care. Therefore, the whole society lives in harmony. Alcohol and drugs are forbidden in Saudi Arabia because of our religion. Because these bad things are not allowed we have a low crime rate.

Hanan Al-Zuhair: Grade 6

The religion in Saudi Arabia is Islam. We fast for a month called Ramadan. During Ramadan, we go to the mosque to spend part of the night praying. In this month all the businesses are open quite late in the night and closed in the morning hours. At the end of Ramadan we have a celebration called Eid Al Fitr. This is a declaration of the end of the fasting month and a time for the community to come together and rejoice. We wear new clothes, cook special foods, and visit our relatives and friends

I love my country very much. I am glad I was born and raised here. I hope Allah will bless our nation and bring it even more progress and prosperity.

Glossary

Abaya	A black cloak worn by Saudi Arabiab women that covers most of the body. It is usually made of wool.
Allah	The Arabic word for God.
Bedouins	<i>See</i> Nomads
Eid Al Adha	The Feast of the Sacrifice, a holiday celebrated during the <i>Hajj</i> , an annual pilgrimage to Mecca.
Eid Al Fitr	The feast of fast breaking marking the end of Ramadan.
Escarpment	A long cliff or steep slope separating two comparatively level surfaces.
Ghutras	The long head covering of the Saudi man.
Henna	A reddish-orange cosmetic made from the henna plant which women use to decorate their hands and feet on special occasions.
Irrigate	To bring water to the land by artificial means.
Islam	A religion founded on the Arabian Peninsula in the 17th century following revelations to the Prophet Muhammad from <i>Allah</i> (the Arabic meaning God).
Lunar calendar	A calendar used in Islamic countries which bases its months on the 28 day cycle of the moon.
Mosque	An Islamic place of public religious worship.
Muslim	A person who follows the Islamic religion.
Nomads	The Arab Bedouins of Saudi Arabia are nomads, people who live in the desert and do not have a fixed home but will move around the country in search of good grazing land for their flocks.
Petroleum	Oil found underground. There are large deposits in Saudi Arabia.
Ramadan	The Islamic month in which Muslim adults eat and drink nothing during daylight hours.
Riyal	The money used in Saudi Arabia.
Thobe	The long garment that Saudi men wear.
Traditional	One meaning is to describe something that has been a custom in a particular place or to a particular people for many years.
Urdu	One of the languages of Pakistan and India.

Students' Pages

Think about it ...

1. What do the students tell us is responsible for changing the lives of the people in Saudi Arabia and why?
2. What are some of the differences between Saudi Arabia 50 years ago and today?
3. Try to imagine that you lived through these changes, do you think they would have made you happier? Why or why not? Be specific about your reasons.
4. Think of one big discovery or invention in the United States between your parent's childhood and yours. What effect has it had on your life or the life of other children in America? How do your parents or older friends feel about these changes.
5. One student writes that "Saudi Arabia has developed in only a few decades what took other nations hundreds of years". What do you think she means? Why was this possible?
6. Saudi Arabian women and older girls, by tradition, must wear the *abaya* when they go out in public. Men usually wear *ghutras*. Find a photograph showing these garments. Why are they worn? Discuss the clothes you wear at different times and what influences you to wear them. Some public school systems in the United States have decided their students should wear uniforms. Do you think this is a good idea? Why or why not?
7. One of the students describes the holiday called *Eid Al-Fitr*. What does it celebrate and how? Find out what different holidays are celebrated by your classmates and ask the students to tell about their experiences of these holidays.
See below for activity.

Suggestions for activities...

1. Imagine that the town or city you live in has just received a bequest of an enormous sum of money from the estate of a very rich man who was born there. It is enough to give each man, woman and child in your town \$25,000. Write a paper giving five suggestions for spending this money. You must give your reasons for each suggestion and tell how you think it would change the life of the people in the town.
2. Read these papers aloud to the class, make a list of each different suggestion (some of you may have the same ideas). Discuss the good and bad points of these ideas, then take a class vote on which 3 ideas would best serve the community.
3. As a class write a letter to Grade 5 at the Dhahran Ahliyya School and tell about some of the changes in America over the past 50 years. Tell how you and/or your parents feel about these changes. Send your letter to the Teaching Resource Center and we will forward it to the school in Saudi Arabia.

4. From the descriptions in the letters, and by referring to pictures in books, draw 2 pictures illustrating Saudi Arabia life before and after the discovery of oil.
5. Write a brief report on Islam, the religion of Muslims. Be sure to include in your report information on the following: Muhammad, the Quran (sometimes spelled Koran), the Pillars of the Faith, the "Golden Age" of Islam, and in what countries there is a large population of Muslims. If you have a friend or relative, or know someone in your community, who is a Muslim, ask them if you can interview them about what it is like being a Muslim in America today.
6. Design a calendar in which all the holidays you have talked about in class are illustrated on the appropriate day for 1996. You can include each student's birthday with an appropriate illustration.

Map exercises...

Using an atlas, draw a large outline map of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

1. Find the cities named in the students' letters and mark them on the map. Read about these cities in a book about Saudi Arabia (a travel guide is good for this) and choose a symbol to represent something distinct about each city. Draw it next to the name of the city on the map.
3. Identify the countries and bodies of water surrounding Saudi Arabia and mark them on the map.
4. Refer to the atlas and lightly color your map according to the terrain of the country, for example, mountains, deserts, fertile lands would be indicated by a particular color of your choice. On the map tell what the colors stand for.
5. Look up the different plants and flowers that grow in Saudi Arabia. Use illustrations of them to decorate the border of your map.



Drawing by Lamees Aziz Nada

Pen Pals

Dear Students,

After you have read these letters from Saudi Arabian children of your age, you might like to learn more about them and become pen pals. However, because Saudi Arabia is a very traditional country they do not believe that boys and girls should play together unless they are very young or are related. This means that letters to girls from boys in America would not be allowed. But you will see from the letters below that some children come from other countries, and live in Saudi Arabia because their fathers work there. Though many of them are Muslims, their traditions allow them to correspond with boys and girls. So only girls should write to Farah or the Grade 5 class. Boys and girls may write to Zubair or Shagufta.

Hi there pen pals!

My name is Farah Javed Taji. I'm an 8 1/2 year old girl. My hobbies are cycling, playing the piano, playing video games, skating, drawing, collecting stickers, coins and stamps, reading story books, watching English movies, and playing with my Barbies. I love to watch cartoons, especially Walt Disney cartoons. My favourite subjects at school are English, science, math, work experience, and drawing. My favourite actress is Julia Roberts. Girls only, of any age or nationality can write to me in English or Urdu at:

Farah Javed Taji
Hatim Travel Agency, P. O. Box #419
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

I am Zubair M. Shaikh. I am fond of playing basketball and cricket. I also like to collect stamps. I am 14 years old. My father works in Saudi Arabia. I will respond to all letters I receive. So hurry, pick up your pens and write to me at:

Zubair M. Shaikh
Post Karla Ratnagiri, PIN: 415612
Maharashtra, India

Hi pen pals!

I wish you all a happy Eid Al Adha. My name is Shagufta Gaffar. I read in Class V in Viqarunnisa Noon School in Dhaka. I am 10 1/2 years old. My hobbies are stamp collecting and drawing. I come to Saudi Arabia during my vacations. I would like girls and boys to write to me at:

Shagufta Gaffar c/o Dr. Abdul Gaffar
53/3 Naya Palton, Ayesha Monzil,
D.I.T. Ext. Road, Dhaka 1000
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Hi!

We hope you would like to learn more about Saudi Arabia. If you have any further questions, just write to us and we'll be happy to answer you.

Nour, Wala, Samar, Nada, Norain and Manar: Grade 5
Dahran Ahliyya School
Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia

To the teachers from the editor...

A Multicultural Experiment



"What I'm seeing is an awful lot of multiculturalism."

'Multiculturalism' has become such an overworked term that, to many people, it has only the vaguest of meanings and multicultural programs are often subjected to negative criticism. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, multicultural means "of, relating to, reflecting, or adapting to diverse cultures". Our own society has always reflected the diversity of ethnic, racial and religious cultures in the world, and our attempts to adapt to this diversity make up an important part of the social history of the United States. The Teaching Resource Center provides books, audiovisual materials, workshops, study groups and this publication, *Middle East Resources*, for educators interested in helping students relate the culture and customs of people in Middle Eastern countries to their own lives.

Over the past five years, the TRC has been fortunate in being able to work with the Abington, Massachusetts public school system on an innovative course designed to introduce students to the culture and language of the Arab World. The idea for this cooperative program grew out of a week-long conference of educators at Hampshire college in 1990

sponsored by the Critical Language and Area Studies Consortium (CLAASC). The conference theme was how to introduce students to the less familiar regions of the modern world; the (then) Soviet Union, China and Japan, Africa and the Middle East. With the support of the Abington School Board, the coordinator of the TRC and Robert Louis, chairman of the Foreign Language Department at Abington High School, designed a year long course which focused on the people of the Arab world, their history, literature, culture and language. Mr. Louis has been successfully teaching this popular course as an elective for five years. Though he teaches it at the high school level, the content and structure could easily be adapted for middle schools.

If you would be interested in a workshop at the TRC on designing and implementing such a program for your school, please let me know. If there is enough interest we will offer one in the spring of 1997.

In the spring of 1995, the opportunity arose for Mr. Louis' Arabic Studies class to exchange letters with girls from the Dhahran Ahliyya School in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, and to have a classroom visit from Mrs. Sally Alturki who, with her connections to the school in Saudi Arabia, was able to make the venture possible. From these letters I have selected ones written by middle school age children for this issue of *Middle East Resources*. The teaching suggestions are designed to encourage students to think about the differences and similarities between their lives and the very conservative lives of girl students in Saudi Arabia. The letters were written in English which they study in school.

Carol Johnson Shedd
Editor and Outreach Coordinator