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NEH 2002  
The Arab World and the West  
July 2002

***“Billionaires, Bombers, and Belly Dancers”***  
**Teacher In-Service Cultural Sensitivity Training**  
**Stereotyping Arabs**

Arabs have been stereotyped in the United States for a century. We had the silent film image in *The Sheik*, with Rudolph Valentino, and today we have Osama bin Ladin on video, print, and pictures. The events of 9/11 have increased the negative Arab stereotype, and young people have these stereotypes reinforced daily by their peers, magazines, TV, newspapers, and motion pictures. Teachers need to examine their own images of Arabs, and then work within the classroom environment to remove stereotypes, but especially that of Arabs. Arabs are seen today as ‘The Enemy’, ‘Terrorists’, ‘those who hate America’, and who wish to destroy America and the institutions that ‘oppose Islam’. Rhetoric screams about the war between Islam and the West, the Clash of Islamic Fundamentalism, and Islamic Fundamentalists are viewed as the enemy of the West and America. Because we are in a state of war fighting terrorism, we tend to reduce the ‘enemy’ to a hated, mocked figure.

**Grade level:**

Elementary, middle, and secondary school teachers. In my county school district, the number of ESOL students has grown from 707 students in 1995 to 2,704 students in February of 2002. This number does not reflect the actual number of foreign-born students, because many students have graduated from an ESOL program. Since 9/11, our schools are very concerned that no student is the victim of discrimination or stereotyping of any kind. Before student arrive in August, our school holds cultural sensitivity training for all staff, not only teachers.

**Time:**

75 minutes of teacher training time.

**Purpose:**

In order to avoid stereotyping of students, teachers must first examine the prevalent Arab stereotype today, usually a negative image. These negative stereotypes have increased after the events of 9/11.

**Materials:**

Overhead projector  
VCR and large-screen TV  
Tape of movie, "True Lies"  
100 handouts of Arab-American quiz  
100 handouts of websites about Arab-Americans and stereotypes

**Teacher:**

The common stereotype of Arabs as desert people, camel jockeys, oil-rich men with 4 wives, and people who are treacherous and violent is discussed. A prepared overhead transparency with 20 common Arab stereotypes is prepared and ready. After 10-12 teachers have given their one-word association with the word Arab, the overhead transparency is turned on, and I will circle my Arab stereotypes that have been brought up by teachers. This gives us a feeling that these negative images of Arabs are commonly held. Then I pass out a 14-question quiz on Arab-American religion, geography, population, and culture to assess how accurate our ideas about Arabs really are.

**Arab-American Quiz on religion, geography, population, and culture**

Found on the internet at: [www.aaiusa.org/quiz.htm](http://www.aaiusa.org/quiz.htm)

When finished, teachers are called on to give their answers, along with "How many agree with this?". Answers that surprise teachers are little-known facts like 77% of Arab-Americans are Christian! The geographic diversity of Arabs (coming to the US from 22 countries) is also surprising. These answers about the Arab-American culture and population stimulates comment from teachers, who realize that long-held ideas are invalid. Websites with information on the Arab World, Arab-Americans, and stereotypes is handed out for teachers to use in the classroom.

This cultural in-service workshop is held before school begins in August, so that teachers can view foreign students with a new perspective free of negative stereotypes.

This sensitivity training may also be used in the classroom with middle and high school students. The quiz on Arab-Americans can be taken on the computer or on paper in class.