



Arab American National Museum

Arab American Immigration History

Description:

- This unit aims to integrate Arab immigration into the immigration narrative of the US at large. It highlights three waves of Arab migration and offers information that helps students draw connections between the experiences of Arabs and other minority groups in the US. It also gives students time to personalize and connect individually with the Arab American immigration experience. Part one gives students basic knowledge of the Arab American immigration history and can be done in conjunction with other units on immigration in the classroom. It can be done before a visit to the museum. Part two takes place at the museum. Part three is a reflection exercise for after a visit. You may choose to add or drop parts to suit your schedule. You may offer more guidance at the museum visit or during discussion sessions to adapt to the needs of your student group.
- Common Core: RI 1, 2, 4, 10; RH 1, 2, 4, 10.
- GLCEs and HSKEs: 6.1.2, 6.1.4, 8.2.1, K1.5, K1.6, CG1, E3.

Part One

Lesson Objectives:

- Students will learn about three waves of Arab immigration to the US.
- Students will learn some causes of immigration and outcomes of movement.
- Students will learn personal stories of immigrants and practice decision-making skills.

Materials:

- Arab American Immigration History Sheet
- “Emigration” from *Inventing Home* by Akram Fouad Khater (PDF available on AANM website). This article is somewhat challenging and may be best used by high school students. You can drop it from the reading assignment without undermining the questions below, though it will add enrichment for more advanced students.
- Immigration Profiles for distribution to students (attached below).

Procedures:

- Assign students “Emigration” and fact sheet as reading in preparation for lesson.
- Lead discussion of waves of migration using following questions:
 - What major world events did the waves of immigration coincide with?
 - How did these major events affect Arab immigration?
 - What is the Johnson Reed Act? What did it intend?
 - What was the Hart Cellar Act? What did it intend?
 - How might these legislations have affected other minority groups in the US? How were they connected to global relations?
 - What is the “brain drain”? How might it be relevant to other minority groups?
 - What were/are some common reasons for immigration?

- Break students into small groups. Handout Immigration Profiles. Each profile details a case of someone who chose to migrate to the US. Ask the students to familiarize themselves with each immigrant's case. In their small groups ask them to weigh the costs and benefits of migrations, and decide whether, in the position of their immigrant, would they choose to migrate. Ask why. Have them record the following information on one note sheet:
 - Pros of immigration
 - Cons of immigration
 - Decision whether or not to migrate
 - Explanation of decision
 - If yes: where will you go, what will you do, who in your family will travel?
 - If no: what will change about your life at home?
- After group deliberation, ask students to share 1-2 of their decisions discuss with the class.

Part Two

Description:

- Part two introduces more narrative detail to the story of Arab Americans with the help of museum exhibits. You may allow your students to take a guided tour with one of our docents, or you might help guide the students through the exhibits independently.

Lesson Objectives:

- Add personal narrative component to historical migration trends.
- Allow students to make personal connection to Arab American history.
- Learn interesting useful and interesting information about immigration to the US during the last 100 years.

Materials:

- Immigration Fact Finding Sheet (Attached)
- Coming to America AANM Gallery (2nd Floor)

Procedure:

- If students are with an AANM docent, they will likely hear all the points in the fact finder list. Ask your docent to allow 10-15 minutes at end for open exploration, questions, and for students to investigate individual stories and reflect on their experience.
- If students are touring independently, they can use their fact-finding sheet to guide their experience.
- If you would like to lead a semi-structured tour independently of our docents, consider the following activities:
 - Act as an immigration officer at the Ellis Island Station. Ask students questions that will prompt their empathy with immigrants who traveled to the US. You might suggest they change their names (in this case, reverse the usual order and take "American" names and make them "foreign") or deny them entrance based on native language or occupation.

- At the concentration of Arabs in the US map, pause and ask students where in the US they would move to if given the choice. Ask why. Extol the virtues and drawbacks of certain climates and locations for work and living.
- At the “Women: Independent and Strong” ask students if they know why so many women emigrated from Arab countries on their own. This should recall their pre-lesson on mass immigration and the role of gender in the Lebanese textile industry. Point out that contrary to many stereotypes about their oppression, Arab women were coming to the US independently to pursue lives and support families.
- Highlight the experience of Arab Americans on the Titanic (154 on the trip, 29 survivors, survivor Anna Yousef’s grandson wrote a book about her experience called *Grandma Survived the Titanic*).

Part Three

Description:

- This lesson is designed as a follow-up to an AANM visit.

Materials:

- Completed Fact Finder Sheet (in Part Two Immigration Unit).
- Completed Essay Prompt (below).

Procedure:

- Use the Fact Finder questions to prompt reflection and conversation about their Museum visit and unit on immigration.
- Ask students to share portions of their descriptive essay. This can be formal or informal reading.

Essay Prompt (approximately 500 words):

- Imagine you have to move to a new country. Based on the experiences of Arab Americans and other immigrant groups you know about, describe some challenges you might face in your new country. How will you survive there? What will you do in this new place? What will you bring with you? Will you travel alone or with family? What will you miss about the United States?



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Arab American Immigration History Fact Sheet

Phase One: Mass Immigration (1880-1924)

- Approximately 95,000 immigrants from Greater Syria (present-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine). By 1924 about 200,000 people from Greater Syria were living in the United States.
- Dominantly Christian, working class.
- Factors affecting decisions to migrate: Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, increased taxation and drafting of Christians and Muslims to military, fallout of WWI, collapse of industry in Arab world.
- Worked in textiles, the automotive industry, and as peddlers.
- Migration stops in 1924 with Johnson Reed Act.

Phase Two: Exiles and Refugees (1950s-1960s)

- The Johnson Reed Act is still in place, but allowances are made for refugees of war and displacement, particularly Palestinians in 1953 (Refugee Relief Act) and 1958-1993.
- Included both Christian and Muslims of middle class and educated backgrounds.
- “Brain Drain” Phenomenon: The US recruited highly educated individuals from around the world to enhance its reputation as a technological superpower.
- In conjunction with Civil Rights Movement in the US, Arab Americans that immigrated during this time as well as earlier immigrants experienced a politicization of and recommitment to their ethnic identity.

Phase Three: 1970s-Present

- The quotas of the Johnson Reed Act were not lifted until 1965 with the Hart Cellar Act, at which point regular migration to the US resumed in earnest.
- Various factors have contributed to Arab migration to the US, including, but not limited to, war and political conflict in South West Asia and North Africa:
 - 1970s: Lebanese Civil War and Occupation
 - 1970s/1980s: Palestinian/Israeli wars
 - 1980: Iran/Iraq War
 - 1991: Gulf War
 - 2003: US/Iraq War
- Immigrants are diverse economically, religiously, and nationally.

Vocabulary:

- Johnson Reed Act (1924): US Federal Law that limited the annual number of immigrants who could be admitted from any country to 2% of the number of people from that country who were already living in the United States. So, if there were 100 Syrians in the US, after 1924, the US would admit 2 more Syrians a year.
- Hart Cellar Act (1965): US Federal Law that abolished the Johnson Reed system, replacing it with a preference system that focused on immigrants' skills and family relationships with citizens or US residents.



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What Would You Do?

Name: Saleemie

Year of Immigration: 1902

Country of Origin: Beirut, Lebanon

US Location: Massachusetts

Skills/Education/Occupation at time of immigration: English Teacher

Other pertinent information: Has multiple daughters. Immigrated with one. Inspired to leave after a fire killed her husband's horses. Her husband was denied entry to the US due to an eye ailment and died returning home.

Name: Ahmad

Year of Immigration: 1953

Country of Origin: Jismu, Palestine

US Location: Brooklyn, NY

Skills/Education/Occupation at time of immigration: Farmer

Other pertinent information: Relocated within Palestine multiple times before the Refugee Relief Act allowed him to immigrate to America, leaving his family behind. They would not be reunited until 1966.

Name: Mahfoud

Year of Immigration: 1967

Country of Origin: Algeria

US Location: Ann Arbor, MI

Skills/Education/Occupation at time of immigration: No high school diploma

Other pertinent information: Served in Algerian Army of National Liberation. Was captured and served as a prisoner of war for five years. Lost hearing in one ear as result of being tortured.

Name: Linda

Year of Immigration: 1979

Country of Origin: Lebanon

Skills/Education/Occupation: High School Diploma

US location: Dearborn, MI

Other pertinent information: Her home in Lebanon was occupied in the Lebanese civil war in 1975, forcing her and her family to relocate to their Southern home, until that village was also bombed, two years later. They found shelter elsewhere for two more years.