

Lesson Plan 7 -

Challenging Stereotypes of Arab Women



Essential Questions:

- What are your perceptions of the Arab world and how accurate are they?
- What makes one person, especially an artist, famous or successful?
- How can a figure from a different time and place be relevant to our lives today?
- What are major similarities and differences between Arab culture and “western” culture?

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Challenge stereotypes of women in the Arab world
- Explain Umm Kulthum’s role as a businesswoman who took charge of her own career

Standards Alignment:

- Common Core Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies
 - RH 1. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
 - RH 2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
 - RH 8. Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.
- National Standards for Foreign Language Education
 - Standard 4.2: Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own.

Materials:

- “Umm Kulthum’s Business Side” reading handout
- Response Matrix handout
- “Sarah’s Bag Keeps its Social Conscience Alive” reading handout

Procedure (suggested time):

Opening/Hook/Activate Prior Knowledge/Do Now: (7)

As students come in, they should write their answer in a journal or on other paper to the prompt you have written on the board:

What is a stereotype? What are common stereotypes you have heard about different groups of people? (e.g., “Girls can’t throw.” “Young people are rude.”)

After students have written for five minutes, ask volunteers to share. Have one student write a definition of “stereotype” on the board. Once you and the other students have agreed that it is a good definition, have them write it in their notebooks. Then ask students to call out different stereotypes. Explain that in today’s lesson, you all will be discussing and challenging common stereotypes of Arab women.

Brainstorming Activity: (5)

On a new piece of paper, ask students to put the term “Arab women” in the middle of their paper in a circle. In pairs, ask them to create a web that shows different associations with the term. Encourage them to think about common stereotypes of Arab women, including how they dress, their character, their habits, etc. Remind students that writing them down does not mean they believe them – you are just trying to document common beliefs.

Prediction Activity: True or False?: (7)

If students have already learned about Umm Kulthum, ask whether she matches or does not match the stereotypes they have written down. Then explain that students are going to read a series of statements about Umm Kulthum and predict whether they are true or not. Tell the students to decide whether each statement is true or false on her or his own. When the students have finished, have them discuss their answers in pairs or as a group. (See Handout: “Umm Kulthum: Businesswoman”)

Reading Activity: Finding Evidence to Confirm or Deny Predictions: (20)

Give students the reading. Explain that the reading will confirm or deny their predictions. Tell that that as they read, they should complete the chart. (See Reading: “Umm Kulthum’s Business Side”)

Writing to Learn: (10)

In pairs, ask students to write a dialogue between someone who believes many stereotypes about Arab women and someone who shows that they aren’t true, using Umm Kulthum as an example. If you have time, ask some pairs to “perform” their dialogues.

Closing: Discussion or written reflection (10)

Ask students what they learned today that surprised them. Lead them in a discussion about how to fight stereotypes, both of Arab women and of other groups.

Extension: A contemporary Arab woman entrepreneur (10 – 45)

Show students images of bags with Umm Kulthum's face on them. Ask them to describe the bag and say whether they like it. Then introduce Sarah Beydoun, an entrepreneur from Lebanon. Have students read about her and make connections between her life and that of Umm Kulthum. (See Images: "Sarah's Bag Products" and Reading "Sarah's Bag Keeps Its Social Conscience Alive")

Umm Kulthum's Business Side

excerpts from *The Voice of Egypt* and interview with Virginia Danielson

In her book, *The Voice of Egypt*, Virginia Danielson explains that Umm Kulthum's life is very different than what a person with stereotypes about Arab women might expect. In her introduction, she writes, "...the careers of Umm Kulthum and her female contemporaries fly in the face of popular conceptions of Arab women as submissive, sheltered, silent and veiled" (Danielson, 20). In contrast, Danielson shows how Umm Kulthum steered her own course towards fame.

From early on, Umm Kulthum herself took charge of managing her career. Danielson writes, "She started producing her own concerts in the early 1930s without an intermediary agent. She negotiated theater rental and presumably arranged for advertisements as well" (Danielson, 80). In her negotiations, Umm Kulthum typically drove a hard bargain: "Like the most successful of the female entertainers, she was a shrewd business person. She was not merely a pawn of commercial businesses.... Like a number of her colleagues, she obtained large fees for her performances, probably the most money paid to any singer in Egypt. She was demanding in contractual negotiations and financial arrangements. She insisted on receiving higher pay than others and was not afraid of being difficult or saying no" (Danielson, p. 196).

Virginia Danielson, in an **interview** with AfroPop Worldwide, put Umm Kulthum's career in the context of other women entertainers in the Arab world. The following exchange from the interview shows that Umm Kulthum's public role was actually not unusual:

Eyre: One subject we didn't address is the fact of Umm Kulthum being a woman. I think many people in the West are surprised to know that a woman could have such a powerful public role. How do you respond to that?

Danielson: Well, let's talk about the public role of women. Umm Kulthum came into an environment where for thousands of years, women had been accomplished singers, normally in courts. But the histories of the Arab world are full of descriptions of female court entertainers, who are not just good singers, but who are accomplished in languages, who are poetesses, who were considered to be very witty, clever with words, knowledgeable on contemporary subjects, and basically were the wit and wisdom of court, in addition to bring powerful voices to the singing of poetry. So that is a given. The potential for women to be respectable public performers is a given in Arab society, and one sees it for example in Saudi women's parties, for weddings, where accomplished women musicians are the principal entertainment. One also sees it through stories of the historic singers, such as Salama, that were reproduced as films. In the 20th century, the competence of this particular court singer was sort of giving contemporary filmic setting. So that was one part that enabled her presence.

In terms of moving into the public space that was created by casinos, music halls, concert houses of the 20th century, it was here where her choices to emulate models of respectable, elite women came into play. The decision she made for example to stand still separated her from a dancer, who would have been viewed as a much more provocative a figure. Her clothing was modest. She basically observed all the contemporary norms of a covered-ness that would be expected. Her dresses always had sleeves. Her concert dresses were always floor length. They were not entirely loose-fitting, but they certainly were not revealing. Her hairdo. She had long hair, and she put it up in the way that most Egyptian women would. Her jewelry was very rich. She presented herself as a respectable figure, and then, in her speech, she continued that presentation, so that she didn't invite any sort of rowdy, raucous response that might have worked against her image of respectability. Keeping the press away from her personal life was another critical tool in maintaining some distance, appearing as a singer, and only a singer, and not someone who is maybe screaming at her maid, or doing any number of other things that might have been seen as reprehensible in another context, or as simply leading a public, personal life. So she looked more like a respectable woman who was a public figure than she did an entertainer. And these things all helped a great deal in producing a public persona that could occupy public space comfortably.

What was interesting to me when I went to Cairo for the first time in the 1980s is that I noticed there were many, many more female broadcasters of hard news than I had ever seen in other countries. And many of them used the same model, very conservative dress, not a lot of physical motion while speaking. It was an interesting idea that Umm Kulthum and others who have followed her model had created a lot of space that women could occupy respectably, in the media and in other places in the Arab world.

Source: <http://www.afropop.org/multi/interview/ID/73>

DIRECTIONS:

Script Writing Assignment: With a partner, write a dialogue between someone who believes many stereotypes about Arab women and someone who shows that they aren't true, using Umm Kulthum as an example. Each person should write at least ten lines.

Umm Kulthum: Businesswoman Response Matrix

Statement	True or False?: Prediction	True or False?: Answer from Text	Quote that is evidence from the text
Umm Kulthum had an agent who handled most of her business arrangements.			
Umm Kulthum didn't ask for much money for her performances – she did not really care about money and was not at all ambitious.			
Umm Kulthum created a public image for herself as a refined woman – while she was an entertainer, she was also a highly respected public figure.			
Umm Kulthum did not have the freedom to make decisions for herself.			
Umm Kulthum was unique among Arab women – there are not many Arab women in history who have played such a public role.			

Sarah's Bag Keeps Its Social Conscience Alive

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By Alex Taylor

The Daily Star :: Lebanon News :: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb>
<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Culture/Lifestyle/2011/Jun-18/Sarabs-Bag-keeps-its-social-conscience-alive.ashx#ixzz1jY870Cun>

BEIRUT: For eleven years Sarah's Bag has been committed to keeping things local and fashionable. Now a Beirut institution for handbags and accessories sold internationally, Sarah's Bag began as a small operation based on an idea that fashion could blend with helping those in need.

Sarah Beydoun, creative director, founded Sarah's Bag in the year 2000 as an offshoot of the work she had done for her thesis on prostitution and women prisoners in Lebanon. In an effort to help improve their lives, Sarah recruited a handful of women in Baabda prison to employ in manufacturing a handbag line.

"The project just started with a small idea – it crossed my mind to help them. I started with just 12 girls in Baabda prison," said Beydoun.

"When we first started everyone was so curious – what are these young girls doing? The first exhibition we did everyone was curious to see the product and what could [we] do with the women in prison."

As the market for the product expanded, Beydoun, with help from her business partner Sarah Nahouli, found a way to increase the productivity of women she employed and provide them a trade for life after prison. The former prisoners now train and lead groups of women in their villages, each group focusing on a single technique. Along with about 40 women currently in Baabda and Tripoli prisons, these teams still produce the handwork sold by Sarah's Bag.

"Our brand became stronger and we had higher expectations and we had to cater to these expectations," said Beydoun. "So we decided working with the women when they're out of the prison and giving them a small group ... would help us and [them] at the same time."

The mix of social responsibility and business savvy has seen the operation expand from an underground project to an international brand displayed in exhibitions around the Arab world and elite fashion fairs in Paris.

Today, the products are designed and sold out of a traditional home converted to a boutique located in Gemmayzeh.

In the boutique – a space that mixes nostalgia with a modern, light atmosphere, similar to Sarah’s designs – costumers wander through the display of bags, jewelry and other accessories, all handmade in Lebanon. Many buyers come from around the region to purchase items. The bags range in price from \$85 to \$250, with the limited edition priced at \$650.

Over the years the most popular items have been bags embroidered with Arabic script and a line of products featuring prints of Middle Eastern figures including Lebanese singer Sabah and the Egyptian icon, Um Kalthoum.

“There’s a story behind every bag we do. Whether it is a story about a technique or a personal story ... inside the print room you can see that everything in print is related to something nostalgic in our lives,” Beydoun said.

Clutches picturing street signs for Beirut’s various neighborhoods and handbags in the shape of the street snack kaak highlight the local spirit behind the design that continues in Sarah’s new line using orange blossoms.

“It’s typical of the Middle East – orange blossoms – but I like it because I have a small house in the south ... In the spring you always smell orange blossoms. The goldsmiths worked around [that idea] and we started producing it on the clasp of the bag. But then we thought it was really good so we turned it into a bracelet, a necklace and we developed the idea.”

With success has come pressure to expand and change the way the line is produced. “I have a lot of people coming telling me, ‘your product is amazing why don’t you produce it at a lower cost and globalize it?’ I say no no no, I want to work with these women and everything should be produced in Lebanon. This is one of the backbones of our concept, to work with these women.”

Sarah admits the path has been difficult but that she would not change a thing about the work, especially when she thinks about “how much it changes the lives” of her employees.

However, she adds, “although we work with these women we are not an association. We are a business that has a social conscience.”

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Sarah's Bag Products

