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## **Cultural Literacy through Media: Breaking Down Stereotypes by Building Up Knowledge**

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### **Introduction and Rationale**

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Students spend all of middle school with an underlying fear of being different. This fear becomes apparent as they make fun of students around them who are different. In my career as a teacher, I have seen students bullied for being overweight, having very short hair, not wearing jewelry, and wearing the 'wrong' clothes. I find myself wondering where they get their ideas of what is 'right'. The reality is that kids are influenced by everything around them. They look at peers, family members, teachers, celebrities, religious leaders, and musicians—trying to determine acceptable behaviors and appearances. Each of these groups influences everything from the clothes they wear to the food they eat and, most importantly, the way they behave. According to one author, this "sense of individual and cultural identity is integral to how we understand the world we live in and its portrayal in entertainment media."<sup>1</sup> While this identity begins to develop early, middle school children tend to be especially open to the influences of their surroundings as they try to find their places in society.

Students are bombarded with messages from a variety of sources every day. According to one text, the most significant messages come from (1) family (2) religious institutions, (3) peers, (4) school, and (5) the media.<sup>2</sup> Children soak up knowledge like sponges, taking in everything they see and measuring the responses of those around them. Especially in middle school, students are vulnerable to the ideas of their peers as they seek to fit into a social group. The media floods students with messages about appearance, family roles, behaviors, and beliefs, and students often pick up a slanted or biased view of reality based on what they see and hear. Part of the problem is the singularity of students' exposure to popular media. One researcher writes, "Television's messages are homogeneous across the board and create an effect he [Gerbner] calls 'mainstreaming' in which audiences are flooded with the same repetitive messages."<sup>3</sup> When these messages remain homogeneous, students are inadvertently forced (influenced) into a singular belief system that is often based on extremely limited knowledge.

Simply put, children only know what they see and hear. Gaps in knowledge and experience can lead to stereotypes and bias. When students are exposed to many different images and ideals, they are able to select their own beliefs more carefully. It is my goal to use film to correct some these cultural gaps. My first aim is to create awareness of manipulative messages the media already feeds viewers. These include the ideas that

girls must be skinny and submissive while boys must be strong and aggressive. The media sends more messages than students realize. My second goal is to expose students to diverse media in an effort to promote open-mindedness and respect. One way to break down stereotypes is to build up knowledge. This is the premise of this unit of study. By the end of this unit, students will view media more cautiously and be more reluctant to judge people and groups according to public stereotypes.

The first step, of course, is to identify stereotypes that my students are likely to hold. As middle school students, my students are prone to pressure about the ideal image. Middle school girls are especially aware of their 'flaws' in appearance, so I will open the unit with something I am sure they will connect to. We will study the sly ways that media teaches viewers what appearances are 'acceptable'. This will lead into a discussion of students' ideas of acceptable behavior roles by gender, another topic about which students will have strong ideas. As we learn more about how gender roles and 'acceptable' appearances have changed throughout history, we will always reflect on the idea that stereotypes are built around ignorance. We can even build an image of the 'Stereotypical American.' This is never more apparent than in the stereotypes of Middle Easterners. Because of their age, my students tend to be uninterested in international politics and generally uninformed. Their news comes from snippets during television commercial breaks and late-night comedy routines. This gives them an undernourished sense of reality. Since national news currently revolves around the war in Iraq, it is very appropriate to address stereotypes they may have about Middle Easterners. I intend to bring in newsreels, magazine articles, and realistic films so that my students gain a better understanding of the war and the people involved.

I also want to attack some stereotypes that relate more closely to our locale in Jacksonville, Florida. To this end, we will examine Native Americans. Area tribes include the Timicua and the Seminoles. Finally, I want to open the floor to student suggestions. The unit will close with a project based on issues that my students select. For example, the diversity at my school often creates tension. My school is fifty percent Caucasian, forty-five percent African-American, and five percent Hispanic and Bosnian immigrants. This immediately opens the door for racial biases. The homeless population in Jacksonville could also be of interest, and the stigma associated with special needs students could require some exploration. While I intend to begin with some very basic stereotypes, I plan to end with student-selected inquiry projects. Overall, this will be a thorough look at biases and stereotypes prevalent in the lives of my students.

The films I have selected will play essential roles in educating students about new cultures. One researcher writes, "Study of ideology in film provides an insight into the meaning systems of the culture and into the ways in which such systems are inscribed into all kinds of social practice."<sup>4</sup> By using an analytical eye, students will learn to use films as entry points into new cultures. The films will provide visual images of each culture we study. Students, especially reluctant readers, use visual images to help them comprehend what they read, so the films will be an important comprehension aid. Aligning with the original purpose of this unit, students will also search for bias in the films just as they do with the texts.

## Objectives and Standards

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In addition to addressing stereotypes and the influences of media, I also intend to integrate many language arts and reading skills into this unit. In accordance with middle school Performance Standards outlined by the National Center on Education and the Economy and Florida's Sunshine State Standards, this unit will

encompass many objectives.

As students consider the media's influence on gender and appearance, they will read and comprehend a variety of literary texts, participate in group meetings, and, most importantly, make informed decisions about their behaviors given the media's influence on their lives. They will also learn to examine stereotyping as a technique to appeal to audiences. Throughout their study of the Middle East, students will learn how to identify stereotypical characters in fiction and nonfiction and be able to engage in discourse regarding development of these characters.

Particularly during the Native American section of this unit, students will study a variety of fiction and nonfiction texts (including films), responding orally and in writing, individually and in groups. I will provide mini-lessons to help students connect, question, and summarize, three very important reading skills. We will also focus on using evidence from the texts to dispel popular stereotypes and support their ideas. As students watch *Smoke Signals* and read *The Warriors*, they will examine common themes, consider author's purpose, and show evidence of higher level thinking skills.

Of course, one area of focus is always preparation for standardized tests. The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) focuses on writing in response to a variety of literary passages. Therefore, I will provide opportunities for them to practice essential argumentative and summative writing skills throughout this unit. They will utilize the writing process, editing and revising their own work and that of others. Students will also consistently respond in their learning logs with summaries of new material and evidence of newly attained skills. Furthermore, group work and individual assignments will force students to extend material and demonstrate evidence of critical thinking.

Beyond the language arts curriculum, students will improve their geography and will practice map skills as they study world cultures. They will also learn a fair amount of world and American history. Clearly, while teaching important ideas about bias and stereotyping, this unit will envelop students with instruction and practice of many essential reading and writing skills and a plethora of background knowledge.

## Background Information

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In order to break down stereotypes, students must learn to empathize with each group of people. To this end, it is important that they understand a bit of the history and daily life of each of the groups we will study. What follows is a very basic outline of these topics. I would encourage teachers to utilize the research materials listed in the bibliography for a more thorough understanding.

### Iran and Iraq

The term "Middle East" is too often defined by the boundaries of war. In legal terms, the Middle East most commonly refers to the nations of Egypt, Bahrain, Cyprus, Iran, Iraq, Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen, and Syria. Many sources recognize Afghanistan and Pakistan as well<sup>5</sup>. However, I doubt that my students can differentiate between any of the groups. I fear that students have a general stereotype about most Middle Eastern countries based on the news bytes to which they are exposed. Therefore, I will strive to provide some depth of

knowledge about the Middle East with a special focus on Iran and Iraq. Again, the message will be that stereotypes evolve out of ignorance and can be broken down with knowledge.

Iran and Iraq are two very different countries with long and complicated histories. Iran is an Islamic country containing about 68 million people, which averages to 106 people per square mile. Many Iranians are refugees from Iraq and Afghanistan. The Taliban in Afghanistan translates the Koran in very strict terms, severely limiting the rights of women. For this and many other reasons, Muslims seek refuge in Iran. The capital is Tehran, home to more than eleven million people, and the official language is Persian (also known as Farsi). During World War II, Iran was part of the Axis alliance. As the war progressed, the Allied nations engaged them in battle and forced them to change monarchs. The United States and Britain particularly favored the incumbent monarch, Reza Shah, because of his views on oil production and export. However, in 1953, when the oil market in Iran went public, the elected Prime Minister tried to oust the Shah. There was a civil war in Iran, and the Shah fled the country. However, the United States and the UK stepped in to support the Shah, and the Prime Minister was arrested for treason and removed from office. The Shah returned shortly thereafter but became increasingly dictatorial over the years, creating an atmosphere of great oppression.<sup>6</sup>

In 1979, the Iranian Revolution occurred when the people of Iran overthrew their government. This Revolution was brief and successful, and a new government, the Islamic Republic, arose. Still in place today, the Supreme Leader rules the nation. He is appointed for a life term by an elected Assembly of Experts (or until the Assembly ousts him). He is in control of all military forces and is the sole person able to declare and end war. He also oversees the courts system, which is reasonably similar to the United States judicial system. Voting males elect the President every four years from a list of candidates approved by the Supreme Leader, and he is in charge of all executive and legislative responsibilities. However, the President is clearly submissive to the Supreme Leader. There is also a unicameral legislative body similar to our House of Representatives. Each of the thirty provinces in Iraq has local courts and representatives, some of whom are appointed and others elected. Though this sounds semi-democratic, it is actually very top-down. The Assembly of Experts, for example, has never expressed disagreement with any of the Supreme Leader's decisions, implying a sense of his dominance.<sup>7</sup>

Shortly after this government was installed, the Iran-Iraq War began over border disputes. After eight years of battle, Iran successfully deterred its opponent despite the fact that the U.S. supported Iraq with \$200 million in ammunition (It is worth noting that this was only 0.5% of the total ammunition sales for the war). In fact, Western nations like the United States and the United Kingdom have supported Iran and Iraq at intervals (and with varying degrees of control) throughout the 20th century, creating a sense of hostility from both nations.<sup>8</sup>

Most recently, Iran and the United States are at odds because of Iran's nuclear weapons program. Though the government claims their nuclear research would only contribute to the development of nuclear power plants, they do not currently use nuclear energy. There are also rumors that Iran is supporting neighboring countries with missiles.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to Iran, Iraq has not had a significant time of peace in the last hundred years. Iraq is unique in several ways. A large Kurdish populace in the North influences Iraq's population. Because of this, the nation has two official languages, Arabic and Kurdish. Iraq has almost half as many people as Iran, only 28 million, but a much smaller land mass, so they average about 153 people per square mile. Iraq was under British control after World War I and World War II. Like Iran, Iraq was an Axis power during World War II, so the UK invaded the land in 1941 and reclaimed control until they appointed a monarch in 1947. This initiated a very volatile time in Iraqi history. There was a civil war in 1958 to change monarchs followed by another revolution

in 1963 and another in 1968. At this time, the Ba'ath Party took control and appointed Sadaam Hussein vice-president of Iraq. In 1979, shortly before initiating the Iran-Iraq War, Hussein had many of his opponents executed and took over the Presidency. He then turned Iraq into a police state, making abuse and torture standard practices. It is also worth noting that Hussein worked to modernize and develop parts of Iraq, winning him many supporters.<sup>10</sup>

After being defeated in the Iran-Iraq war, Hussein began a war against people of his own country. In 1988, Hussein ordered an attack on the Kurdish population in the north of Iraq, which was essentially ethnic genocide. The Kurds made up fifteen to twenty percent of Iraq's population. For the United States, this would be the equivalent to declaring war against all of New England.<sup>11</sup> However, many democratic nations, including the United States, were hesitant to name Sadaam Hussein a threat because of the economic power of Iraq's oil supply.

In 1990, Hussein decided to attack Kuwait, at which point the United States finally intervened, initiating the Gulf War. In 1991, southern Iraqis began to rebel against Hussein's militant rule, and Iraqi leaders admitted to killing at least 250,000 rebels in its defense. At this point, the democratic world finally admitted that Hussein's Iraq was a threat to surrounding nations, and the UN imposed an embargo prohibiting weapons and other materials from being sold to Iraq. While the theory behind these economic sanctions was good, it quickly repressed civilian Iraqis and drew a lot of criticism worldwide.<sup>12</sup>

Hussein is currently standing trial for his crimes against the public, but life in Iraq is just as intolerable as ever. Militant groups continue to attack civilian areas including banks and mosques. The death toll includes thousands more civilians than soldiers, and there is no end in sight.<sup>13</sup> The capital, Baghdad, is home to the newly elected President and the Prime Minister. However, their new government is far from a democracy, and improvements are slow in coming. Of course, today's Iraq is under the influence of many foreign soldiers. No one can imagine what the future of Iraq will look like.

## **Native Americans**

It is common knowledge that the term "Indian" was a gift from Christopher Columbus, who thought he had arrived in India in 1492. One may then assume that the Indians would prefer a more politically appropriate name like American Indians or Native Americans. However, many people do not know that the Indians took many names from Europeans. The Nez Perce, for example, received their name from the French who noticed their pierced noses. The Spanish named the Seminoles, a name that means "wild men." It is important that my students learn to call them what they want to be called. According to a 1996 survey, most American Indians use the terms Indian, Native American, and American Indian interchangeably.<sup>14</sup> In the realistic film *Smoke Signals*, which I discuss at length in the Unit Breakdown, characters refer to each other as Indians. Based on these two sources, I have chosen to use these terms interchangeably throughout this document.

Christopher Columbus first came upon Indians when he arrived in what are now Haiti, Cuba, and Puerto Rico in 1492. By 1650, after more than 150 years of enslavement and massacre, the Indians on these islands were practically extinct. This was the beginning of a long pattern of violence and injustice against Indian people.

The first documented encounters with Native Americans in America occurred when Hernando de Soto of Spain explored Florida and Georgia beginning in 1539. He then founded the first permanent settlement in St. Augustine, Florida, in 1565. From then on, Europeans began claiming land all along the East coast. Over the years, European settlers had mixed interactions with the Indians, sometimes utilizing them for fair trade and

sometimes fighting them for land or goods. During the Revolutionary War, several Native American tribes supported the British, hoping that a victory might result in the return of their land. However, in 1783, at the end of the War, Britain gave Native American land to the Americans without even informing the Indians. For decades, Indian tribes fought to keep their land, thus accruing the stereotype as vicious warriors.<sup>15</sup>

The situation for Indians got even worse in 1830, during Andrew Jackson's Presidency, with the passage of the Native American Removal Act. Essentially, the United States government decided that life would be easier if Native Americans lived west of the Mississippi River, a yet undeveloped land. Military leaders entered Indian territory and informed tribes that they had been assigned new pieces of land, so they should leave their homes peacefully. This is the equivalent of a government representative telling citizens that they leave their homes in Florida and accept the gracious gift of land in Wisconsin, thousands of miles away. One can imagine the uprising that this would cause.<sup>16</sup>

Many Native Americans left peacefully, and many chose to face the military's forced evacuation. The Cherokee, for example, began this dangerous journey west from New England in 1838, and more than 4,000 Indians died along the way in what they termed the Trail of Tears. This was not only a dangerous trip, filled with disease, hunger, and war, but it was also a very sad journey from their homeland to an unknown area very far away.<sup>17</sup>

Clearly, the United States had a very low opinion of Native American peoples, and they felt a right to Native Americans territory. In fact, once the Indians were moved west, the government periodically forced them to evacuate their new homeland as well. I will provide two of the most famous examples.

First, in 1855, the Nez Perce created a new home on their government-sanctioned reservation in Oregon, but when gold was discovered there in 1860, the U.S. government sent a military force to displace the Indians to Idaho. Several Indian chiefs signed a treaty exchanging one land for the other, perhaps aware that military force would be forthcoming, but Chief Joseph and his band of several hundred Indians refused to move. After seventeen years of discourse and battle, Chief Joseph surrendered with the condition that his people would receive safe passage to the Idaho reservation. However, the government broke this treaty and transported the group to disease-ridden shelters in Kansas and later Oklahoma. In the end, Chief Joseph died on a reservation in Washington, and the U.S. government refused to allow Indians to bury his remains in Oregon, his true home.<sup>18</sup>

Second, in 1876, the U.S. government declared that all Native Americans must live on government-sanctioned reservations, which meant that many tribes would have to leave the land where they had made new homes. Later that year, the Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho tribes united against American militia who came to evacuate them from Montana to a reservation, leading to the Battle of Little Bighorn. In 1890, the Lakota Sioux refused to leave their homes in South Dakota (a relatively unpopulated state), resulting in the massacre of many women and children at the Battle of Wounded Knee.<sup>19</sup> Eventually, the American military forced all Indians onto new reservations.

Because I will teach this unit in Florida, it is important to make special note of Florida's Native American history. Following De Soto's settlement in St. Augustine, Florida, in 1565, the Spanish began relatively pleasant relations with the local Native American tribes. Despite the fact that the Spanish were Catholic and prohibited Indian religious traditions, they lived in relative peace. The land in Florida exchanged between American and Spanish hands several times prior to 1821, when the U.S. government finally obtained it permanently. As previously stated, the Native American Removal Act of 1830 reeked havoc on Indians



nationwide. There are two particularly interesting facts about the Seminoles relevant to this period. First, the Seminoles included a group of African-American slaves who had escaped from plantations in the Southern states. These runaways became part of the tribe and were referred to as the Black Seminoles. Second, the Seminoles are known for never having been defeated or forced to surrender to the U.S. government. In 1832, the U.S. offered the Seminoles, a band of 10,000 people scattered between Florida and Oklahoma, land west of the Mississippi River. When President Andrew Jackson sent upwards of 9,000 troops to remove the Seminoles from their land by force, Chief Osceola simply transported his band of 1,400 people into the Florida Everglades. The troops failed to follow, and the Seminoles pride themselves on never having been defeated by American soldiers.<sup>20</sup>

All of these events are reminiscent of the issues that surrounded African Americans decades later. One must question why Indians were forced to live on reservations while African Americans eventually gained national freedom. In contrast, Indians had self-regulated governments on their reservations while African Americans fought a long Civil Rights movement to gain their rights as Americans. In reality, the U.S. government did not officially grant American citizenship to Indians until after World War I, when several Indians heroically defended this nation in battle. Regardless, in the early 20th century, some African Americans tried to pass themselves as Indians to avoid some racial prejudice.<sup>21</sup> Though several political groups discuss the assimilation of Indians into society, it is often dismissed by concerns that this would end tribal governments and traditions.

There are currently 565 federally recognized tribal governments in the U.S. and many that are unrecognized. These tribes make and enforce their own laws, tax their members, and regulate everyday life. However, like state governments, they cannot declare war, coin their own money, nor have foreign relations. According to 2003 estimates, there are approximately 2.7 million Native Americans in the U.S., though 8 out of 10 of them are of mixed ancestry.<sup>22</sup>

All Indian tribes are unique. Historically, their means of sustaining life depended on natural resources. Those near water fished, while those in the Midwest hunted. Some lived in tepees or longhouses while others dug into the sides of mountains. Most tribes, however, have some form of spirituality and sense of traditions and beliefs. In fact, many types of Indians often come together at powwows to celebrate their heritage in similar ways.

## Unit Breakdown

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I designed this curriculum unit for middle school reading or social studies students, but one could easily adjust it for high school students as well. Some texts would be appropriate for elementary school as well. The unit is divided into three instructional sections and ends in a culminating project. I will introduce the idea of bias and stereotypes with a brief gender study. Then, students will learn more about Iran and Iraq as a way of breaking down stereotypes against Middle Easterners. We will follow this with an extensive study of Native Americans, including a brief history, a novel study, and a look at current life on reservations. Finally, students will work in small groups to demonstrate their new skills as they examine a stereotype of their choosing.

## Part I: Gender and Appearance

My first goal is for students to realize that their beliefs are a culmination of all of their experiences, and a lack of experience or information can lead to stereotypes. In this way, ignorance promotes stereotypes. I will begin the unit with an Anticipation Guide that extrapolates students' opinions about acceptable behaviors for girls and boys. For example, is it okay for boys to play with dolls? As a class, we will then make a list of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors for boys and girls. I anticipate some disagreement, and I will use this to facilitate a discussion about why these behaviors seem so defined. Finally, we will brainstorm where these ideas come from, and I will steer them to include family, school, the law, church, peers, television, movies, and personal experiences. I will then show a few clips from a popular television show so that students can identify the stereotypical characters. "The Simpsons," a long-running cartoon show on Fox, shows very stereotypical images of boys and girls. I will prompt students to identify stereotypical characters and verbalize why television shows use such characters. I will close by challenging students to look for stereotypical behavior on television that evening. They will record their observations on a graphic organizer.

We will begin our second lesson with a discussion of their observations from the night before. It is important that students learn to identify stereotypical characters and verbalize how those characters appeal to audiences. We will explore this idea at length as it pertains to appearance and body image, a priority in the minds of middle school students. First, students will describe their own personal style in their learning logs and brainstorm ways in which peers, adults, and the media influence their appearances. After we discuss their responses, I will show a commercial that I downloaded from the Internet.<sup>23</sup> The commercial challenges students to think about the consequences of allowing others to influence them. The closing line of the commercial is, "When you give up the ability to decide for yourself, you give up what makes you, you".<sup>24</sup> As we view this a few times, I will prompt students to write down their observations. Then, we will discuss the changes that the boy in the commercial undergoes and the changes that they allow themselves to undergo in order to 'fit in'. For homework, students will again turn to the media and record the appearances of the young people that they see on a graphic organizer. This lesson will take two class periods.

The third lesson will include a look at several popular music videos that demonstrate a variety of personal styles. The students will be able to relate to these, and this should spark some conversation about how music videos influence their choices. It will be evident that society expects women to be tall and thin and wear very little clothing. We will then read an article about how appearances have changed over the centuries. We will discuss the ancient Chinese practice of binding women's feet to make them more beautiful.<sup>25</sup> Egypt's Cleopatra had rings of fat around her neck and a prominent nose, but she was considered a beautiful woman in her time. Even in America, women wore bustles and corsets to hide hips and breasts.<sup>26</sup> We will begin to examine the idea that the media influences students' ideas of the ideal image. We will then peruse several popular teen magazines that show fast cars and skinny women. Students will work in groups to find stereotypical images, and we will use those to create a class collage on poster paper. We will close with a discussion of the images' influences on their expectations of themselves. By the end of our discussion, students should be aware of the ways the media permeates the public with ideas regarding appearances that are very restrictive and almost impossible to attain.<sup>27</sup>

During this section of the unit, students will practice expressing their opinions orally and in writing. I will also use higher level questioning techniques to facilitate critical analysis.



## Part II: The Middle East

Once students understand the idea that media can influence their choices and beliefs, we will discuss the fact that the media, especially news media, actually promotes stereotypes. I have chosen to begin with stereotypes about Middle Easterners because I can utilize current news articles that will help me develop the idea of finding the whole story. This will create a perfect transition from parts one into two.

Students will brainstorm their knowledge and beliefs about Middle Easterners and the war in Iraq. It will be important to post these ideas on chart paper so that we can return to them at the end of the week. Then, we will examine media sources as a cause of stereotyping. I intend increase the complexity of the media tool with each example to demonstrate the importance of getting the whole story.

First, I will post an image of an American soldier with a machine gun pointed at his head and I will ask students to verbalize what it tells them about Middle Easterners and the war in Iraq. Possible answers include, "They are violent" and "They take hostages and torture them." Then, I will show a clip from Jay Leno's late-night comedy show relating to the war and ask students the same question. At this point, they may have specific messages based on the tidbit of news included in the act. I will then distribute a short newspaper or magazine article about the same issue; a brief clip from a nightly news program will tell more of the story. Finally, we I will pass around examples of news magazines such as "The New Yorker" and "Atlantic Monthly," which often contain long articles that provide historical and current overviews. Students will see the prominent readership who seeks to learn more than their local newspaper tells them. After each example, I will ask students what the clip tells them about Middle Easterners. The goal will be for them to understand that they cannot rely on part of the story to make judgments about all of the people.

I will supplement this idea the following day with an analysis activity. We will begin by viewing selected scenes from the documentary *Inside Iraq*. In 2004, an American civilian decided to enter Iraq under the guise of a journalist. He hired a private, Iraqi guide to take him around Baghdad. He spent time with Iraqi and American military and tries very hard to present an unbiased picture of the country. However, the director has clearly rehearsed several scenes, and others are reflections of his opinions. After each brief scene, I will prompt students to (a) summarize what they learned and (b) consider what parts of the story they are not seeing. At this point, we will study the term 'bias.' This will lead well into a small-group activity, which asks students to analyze the reliability of several news sources. I will provide each group with an envelope containing six short newspaper and magazine articles about Iraq. The length of the articles will determine the length of the activity and should reflect the reading levels of students. After reading an article together, they will each write a one-sentence response or summary on their paper. They will continue this process until they have read each article and then share their responses. The goal will be to identify the most reliable and unreliable articles. They will have to discuss this as a group and decide together. This will lead into a discussion about how to determine the reliability of different sources. We will also refer to a world map to begin learning the geography of this unit.

By the end of this lesson, students will have a sense of how to identify bias in articles that only tell part of the story. They will also recognize that stereotypes are built from a lack of knowledge. To make this idea clear, I anticipate having to type a few articles of my own for the packets. I may also need to give direct instruction regarding how to write one-sentence summaries. This lesson may take several days.

The next lesson will center on the idea that knowledge breaks down stereotypes, so students will work in small groups to increase their knowledge of the Middle East. I will provide each group with a set of prepared sentence strips and a variety of news articles from the Internet. They will use the articles to place each strip

under the appropriate title on a chart—Iran or Iraq. This lesson is described in detail in the Appendix. At this point, it will be important to emphasize to the class that people can break down stereotypes by building up knowledge. During this lesson, students will practice skimming and scanning techniques as they race to solve the puzzle.

The third lesson will focus on comparing and contrasting daily life in Iran and Iraq. After reviewing the charts from the previous day, we will practice note-taking techniques as we learn about Iraqi history and culture. Then we will return to *Inside Iraq* to gain an idea of the current situation in this war-ravaged nation. Some sections are too graphic for sixth graders, but I will be able to use several chapters to illustrate current conditions in Iraq. Though it is important to understand Iraq's current state, we will also pay specific attention to evidence of life in Iraq during times of peace. These will include the elaborate road system and the development of business. For further reading, we will read excerpts from *Thura's Diary: My Life in Wartime Iraq*, a young Iraqi woman's personal account of life during the current war.

After gaining a clear idea of life in Iraq, we will focus on the history and culture of Iran. First, we will watch scenes from *The Mirror*, a recent film created by Abbas Kiarostami, a well-known Iranian filmmaker. It focuses on the plight of a young girl trying to find her way home from school. As she searches, the film reveals the daily life of the people of Tehran, demonstrating a very modern and realistic example of city life in Iran. This film will provide students with a realistic image of city life in Iran. We will then watch *Bashu*, another modern Iranian film, in its entirety. Bashu is the name of the main character, a boy who runs away from home after a bomb destroys it during the Iran-Iraq War, killing his family. He climbs into the back of a truck, which takes him to a faraway, unknown destination. When he arrives, a family in a small town begins to care for him. However, the townspeople speak a different dialect than Bashu, so they do not understand one another. This film contains wonderful scenes that prompt joy and sadness as Bashu and these characters becomes increasingly attached. I am confident that my students will connect to it and accept its portrayal of life in Iran's countryside. These films will provide students with a chance to compare city life and rural life in Iran. Throughout the films, we will also discuss characterization and film strategy. This lesson will take several days to complete. If time allows, I have also located a wonderful set of Iranian poetry that students can read and discuss.<sup>28</sup>

On the final day of our Middle Eastern study, I intend to review our new knowledge and reopen a discussion about our initial stereotypes. Together we will use our new knowledge to prove that one of our initial ideas is false. I will model an expository paragraph for them on the overhead. Then, students will write their own paragraphs disproving another stereotype from the chart. I will differentiate by providing some students with a graphic organizer for their paragraph. They will finalize this writing and turn it in the following day.

By the end of this study, students will be able to identify stereotypical characters on television with relative ease. They will be able to argue that articles with little information must be held suspect, for one needs more information to understand a situation. Finally, they will be able to express their new knowledge about the Middle East orally and in writing.

### **Part III: Native Americans**

Students will invariably express stereotypical ideas of Native Americans as a violent culture that has rain dances, parades in headdresses, and scalps soldiers. As with the Middle East, their lack of knowledge will feed their stereotypes. We will brainstorm possible stereotypes and create a chart. The film *Back to the Future* includes a short scene during which the main character travels back to the 1800's, showing a very

stereotypical view of bloodthirsty Indians on the warpath. If my students require further examples of stereotypical characters in the media, any John Wayne film will suffice. Using film clips, news articles, and a short novel, we will replace these ideas with a real understanding of Indian culture. The Native American presence in St. Augustine, Florida, invites us to consider a guest speaker or field trip. Because this section will include additional elements, I intend to spend ten to fifteen class periods on it.

I have selected a novel by a Native American, Joseph Bruchac, entitled *The Warriors*. Rather than use a variety of texts to reach readers of varying skill levels, I intend to scaffold questions as students read the same text in tiered groups. *The Warriors* is a fictional text about Jake, a twelve-year-old boy who must leave his reservation in upstate New York to live near his mother and attend a boarding school near Washington, D.C. Having never left the reservation before, Jake faces many new ideas including those surrounding his favorite sport, lacrosse. This book facilitates a wonderful discussion of Indian stereotypes while capturing students with a sport and a main character near their age. An old Indian offers advice in the form of legends, and a history teacher challenges Jake to stand up for his beliefs. I will introduce this novel by showing a portion of a lacrosse game. We will discuss students' experiences with the game and use the video to learn the basic rules of the game. I have included a complete breakdown of my plans for teaching this novel in the Strategies section of this document.

I will supplement the novel with several other sources. Penguin Classics has published a collection of work by Zitkala-Sa entitled *American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings*. It includes a brief memoir of the author's life on a reservation and many short Native American legends that would be perfect for read-alouds and further study. For additional reading, I will include information about Navaho Code Talkers and a collection of news articles debating the Seminole's use of a Native American mascot for their football team. The intent is not only to provide a thorough understanding of life as a Native American but also to utilize a variety of fiction and non-fiction texts. I also intend to show *Smoke Signals*, a film scripted by Sherman Alexie based on parts of his fictional novel, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. *Smoke Signals* tells the story of two high school boys, Thomas and Victor, who leave the reservation to collect the remains of Victor's father in Arizona. Throughout the story, the boys deal with many issues including alcoholism, poverty, and racism. Though I will have to obtain parental permission, I intend to show this film in its entirety. I plan to begin it just as we wrap up the novel because students will need prior knowledge of Indian history and culture in order to understand the film. Since it was released in 1999, it shows a very recent view of life on a reservation. My students will easily relate to the characters, who grew up without fathers, face lies about their past, deal with peer pressure, and take care of their family members. Students will respond to the film orally and in writing several times throughout the viewing. They will use double-entry journals, the 3-minute pause, and Think-Pair-Share, three strategies to help them analyze and evaluate what they view. Overall, this film will make it clear that the lives of Indians are not that different from the lives of my students.

By the end of this section, students will have a strong grasp of the idea that stereotypes form due to a lack of information. As with the close of the Middle Eastern study, students will take one of their initial stereotypes and disprove its validity using their new knowledge. Students will also work in groups to create visual aids that present a well-rounded picture of Indian life.

#### **Part IV: The Final Project**

As a culminating project, students will analyze other stereotypes relevant to their lives. First, we will brainstorm common stereotypes relating to groups that they encounter. Possibilities include the handicapped, the obese, homosexuals, Hispanics, African-Americans, those in special education, and the homeless. Each

student will then select a topic for further exploration, and I will create groups accordingly. This exploration and presentation will lead to a group presentation and an independent assignment.

Each group will explore its topic using materials that I will provide. Each day will begin with a mini-lesson about taking notes, which students will practice as they read and view new resources. After spending several days collecting information, they will use graphic organizers to plan a presentation. Groups may create a visual aid in the form of a poster, pamphlet, bulletin board, or PowerPoint slideshow and give a brief presentation to the class. I will, of course, formulate a list of requirements and a grading rubric for this group assignment. The goal of this project will be to learn more about members of a group so that students can come to an understanding of what life is like for different kinds of people. As a teacher, I hope that their new knowledge will lead to increased empathy for that group of people. For example, the students studying stereotypes about the disabled may study the lives of several handicapped individuals in order to understand, and perhaps empathize with, the strength required to live with a handicap.

I have collected a few resources that may be helpful with this project. Jacksonville has a disproportionate number of homeless people, so for students interested in studying this topic I will provide a documentary called *Homeless in America* and information from [endhomelessness.org](http://endhomelessness.org) and [pbs.org](http://pbs.org). I have also located a wonderful African film *The Girl Who Sold the Sun* about a handicapped girl who chooses to sell the newspaper to earn money to help her grandmother. Some boys pick on this girl several times throughout the film, eventually tripping her and stealing one of her crutches. Depending on what students prefer to study, I will choose appropriate resources from a variety of sources so that each group can gain a well-rounded view of each issue and practice their new comprehension and evaluation skills.

In addition to the group work, students will use their notes to extend the argumentative writing they will have practiced throughout this unit. I will vary the requirements and accommodations for students of different abilities, but overall students will write an essay explaining and dispelling common stereotypes using their new knowledge.

## Sample Lesson Plans

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### Middle East Knowledge Search

Standards: E1c, skimming and scanning for information; E3b, group participation; E3d, analyzing how media influences viewers;

Objective: Students will be able to explain the differences between reliable and unreliable news sources and identify news stories that only tell part of the story.

Materials: Full-page text from the Internet, on overhead and for students

Sentence strips with facts about Iran and Iraq

One poster for each group—divided in half for Iran and Iraq

Internet articles containing all the facts for the poster

One poster with the correct facts divided in half for Iran and Iraq

Opener: Think back to the articles that we read yesterday and our other class activities. Write down at least seven things you have learned so far about the Middle East.

Mini-lesson:

- (1) Distribute a full-page text from the Internet and place a copy on the overhead.
- (2) Challenge the students to answer a Think-and-Search question (ex: how old is the main character?). Students should rush to find this answer.
- (3) Repeat the process several times with different questions.
- (4) Ask—how did you find the answers so quickly? The response should include scanning for a particular number, word, or phrase. Prompt students to use their fingers to skim/scan the document.
- (5) Ask a few more questions for practice. Define this as the "Skimming and Scanning" technique. Students should add this term to their notebooks.

Activity:

- (1) Explain the group activity. Students should race to complete it. They should use the articles provided to divide their facts into two categories—Iran or Iraq.
- (2) Outline the process for getting you to check their answers against a list.
- (3) Distribute sentence strips and posterboard. Tell students to begin pasting the sentence strips in the correct column on the poster board.
- (4) If one group finishes very quickly, they should copy their answers into their learning logs.
- (5) After about twenty minutes, call groups together to discuss the correct answers and place them on the teacher model.

Closing: As a class, we will reflect on the differences between the two countries. Students should copy the information into their notebooks. Advanced students should write their reactions to the new information.

## **The Warriors Lessons**

I have included here one of the mini-lessons for chapter one of this novel and listed other mini-lesson topics by chapter. These will follow the same format as the first lesson.

Standard: Using italics;

Objective: Students will be able to identify the use of italics in texts and explain the purpose of their use.

Materials: An overhead containing excerpts from appropriate texts according to the lesson plan below;

Student notebooks;

Students worksheet with more examples of sentences that use italics;

Students copies of *The Warriors*;

Opener: Post the following sentence on the board: 'I do not want to walk to the mall.' Begin a dialogue with students about how the meaning changes when different words are emphasized. Do not mention the use of

italics during this conversation.

- 'I do not *want* to walk to the mall.'
- 'I do not want to *walk* to the mall.'
- 'I do not want to walk to the *mall*.'
- To close this discussion, tell students that you are tired and do not want to *walk* to the mall. Does anyone know how you would clarify this sentence? It is likely that someone will know how to use italics. Regardless, use this opportunity to introduce the lesson.

Mini-lesson:

- (1) Place the first three examples on the overhead and ask students to read them silently. These examples should use italics to emphasize. Prompt students to read these aloud, emphasizing the italics appropriately. Ask students to create their own sentences with emphasis on a word, and let other students explain which word should be in italics.
- (2) Students should copy one example into their notebooks and write down the first use of italics—to emphasize a word or phrase.
- (3) Place the next three examples on the overhead and ask students to read them silently. These examples should use italics to show titles of books and movies.
- (4) Repeat the process as before. Students should also copy an example and write down the second use of italics—to show the title of a book or movie.
- (5) Place the next three examples on the overhead. These examples should use italics to show what a character is thinking.
- (6) Repeat the process as before. Ask students to think of times they have seen this used in a text.
- (7) To check for understanding, show a list of examples that use italics for all three reasons. After reading them aloud, students should use scratch paper to identify the purpose of italics in each example. Discuss the answers together.
- (8) Point out that we use italics for many reasons, but these are the most frequent uses in fiction.

Activity: As students continue reading chapter one, they should use two-column notes to identify the word or phrase in italics and the purpose of the italics.

Closing: As a class, discuss the chapter briefly and share students' discoveries. Then, students should write about today's lesson in their learning logs.

Pre-reading: video of lacrosse game; relevant vocabulary; QAR strategies;

Chapter 1: similes; uses of italics;

Chapter 2: specific verbs; capitalization (specifically 'aunt' and 'uncle')

Chapter 3: importance of the heart (symbol);

Chapter 4: visualization; use of flashback;

Chapter 5: making predictions;

Chapter 6: use of story in a story; contrasting Indian ways and White ways;



Chapter 7: making predictions;

Chapter 8: making connections;

Chapter 9: secrets as a theme;

Chapter 12: role of legends;

Chapter 13: use of story in a story

Chapters 14-15: use of flashback;

Post-reading: how Jake changes; themes of home and stereotypes;

## Florida State Standards

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E1b: Students read and comprehend several books about one issue or theme.

E1c: Students read and comprehend informational material and make connections, inferences, summaries, and extensions of material.

E2b: Students produce a response to literature that supports a judgment through references to the text/media.

E3b: Students participate in group meetings and offer support, opinions, comments, and questions.

E3d: Students make informed decisions about media productions based on personal evaluation of the role of the media, the use of media as entertainment and information, and the extent to which the media influences viewers.

E4a: Students proofread their own writing and that of their peers.

E4b: Students revise their own writing and that of their peers.

E5a: Students respond to a variety of texts using interpretive, critical and evaluative processes. This includes examining themes, literary elements, point of view, characters' motivations, and literary devices. It also includes identifying stereotypical characters in contrast to fully developed characters.

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