Welcome To My World: Letter from Syria

Students learn important lessons about cultural differences by reading a fictitious letter from a Syrian girl then writing about it.

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Grade Level
6-8
Duration
1-2 class periods

National Geography Standards
ELEMENT TWO: PLACES AND REGIONS
6. How culture and experience influence people's perceptions of places and regions.

Arizona Social Studies Standard
Grade 6
Strand 4 Geography
Concept 2 Places and Regions
PO 3 Describe the interactions of people in different places and regions.
PO 5 Describe the physical and human characteristics of places and regions of a Middle Eastern country.

Concept 4 Human Systems
PO 5 Identify cultural norms that influence different social, political and economic activities of men and women.

Grade 7
Strand 4 Geography
Concept 2 Places and Regions
PO 1 Describe the human and physical characteristics of places and regions.
PO 3 Compare the historical and contemporary interactions among people in different places and regions.

Concept 4 Human Systems
PO 1 Discuss the implications of the demographic structure of places and regions.
PO 6 Describe the

Arizona Language Arts Standards
READING STANDARD
Grades 6, 7, and 8
Strand 2: Comprehending Literary Text
Concept 2: Historical and Cultural Aspects of Literature
PO 1. Describe the historical and cultural aspects found in cross-cultural works of literature.

WRITING STANDARDS
Grades 6, 7, and 8
Strand 1: Writing Process
Concept 1: Prewriting
PO 1. Generate ideas through a variety of activities (e.g., prior knowledge, discussion with others, printed material or other sources).
PO 3. Determine the intended audience of a writing piece.

Concept 2: Drafting
PO 2. Organize writing into a logical sequence that is clear to the audience.

Strand 2: Writing Components
Concept 1: Ideas and Content
PO 1. Use clear, focused ideas and details to support the topic.
PO 2. Provide content and selected details that are well suited to audience and purpose.
PO 3. Develop a sufficient explanation or exploration of the topic.

Concept 2: Organization
PO 1. Use a structure that fits the type of writing (e.g., letter format, narrative, play, essay).

Concept 3: Voice
PO 2. Convey a sense of identity through originality, sincerity, liveliness, or humor appropriate to the topic and type of writing.
PO 4. Choose appropriate voice (e.g., formal, informal) for the audience and purpose.

Strand 3: Writing Applications
Concept 3: Functional
PO 3. Write a friendly letter that includes a: heading, salutation, body, closing, signature.
### Welcome to My World: Letter from Syria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>distributions and patterns of cultural characteristics (e.g., religions, language, standard of living) over time.</th>
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| **Grade 8**  
**Strand 4 Geography**  
**Concept 2 Places and Regions**  
PO 1 Identify common characteristics of contemporary and historical regions on the basis of climate, landforms, ecosystems, and culture.  
**Concept 4 Human Systems**  
PO 3 Describe the characteristics and locations of various cultures throughout the world.  
PO 6 Describe the aspects of culture (e.g., literacy, occupations, clothing, property rights) related to beliefs and understandings that influence the economic, social, and political activities of men and women. |

### Overview

In many countries of the world today, a person's role and status is determined by culture and gender. Because American students live in an open society that stresses civil rights and equal opportunities for all its citizens, they may not realize that for people in some countries the situation is very different.

### Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is to help students understand that some countries and governments offer quite different opportunities, and in some cultures a person's gender often influences his or her future role in society.

### Materials

- Letter from Syria (a fictitious pen pal letter written by a twelve-year-old Syrian girl who lives in Damascus with her extended family).

### Objectives

The student will be able to:

- determine the factors that may lead to economic and lifestyle choices in various parts of the world.
- explain how culture and gender could influence a person's role in society.

### Procedures

**SESSION ONE**

1. Have students locate Syria on a world map or in an atlas. Discuss some generalities about what life might be like in Syria.

The letter describes her culture and daily activities.

- Zayna Letter Worksheet  
- Writing paper  
- Writing Prompt
Welcome to My World: Letter from Syria

2. Students should read the letter from the Syrian girl describing her daily activities and how her culture plays a part in her life.

3. As they are reading, students should record any similarities or differences between their lives and hers on the worksheet. Students could highlight those parts of the letter that describe the girl's culture that may be different from theirs.

SESSION TWO
Students are to write a response to the Syrian girl in the form of a friendly letter. Their responses will describe their lives and the part culture plays in it.

Assessment

The teacher will use the Six-Trait writing rubric to assess the students' friendly letters, specifically ideas, organization, and conventions. Mastery will be considered 4 out of 6 on the rubric.

Extensions

Students may research other countries to determine the cultural influences on men and women.

Students could include a picture they have drawn or duplicated from a book or off the internet to show the Syrian girl a favorite sight of theirs in America.

Teachers could show students an overhead of prints made of the photographs of Syria and ask students what they think is going on, or what the building might be, or why something is happening. Then, give students the actual background or information.

In addition, teachers could use the pictures to compare and contrast cultures. If students had access to cameras, they could "re-create" the scenes using local people and places. For example, students could photograph an American girl in school uniform on an outing, a local vendor in a small business, a church, synagogue, or an old mission. Then, the photographs could be displayed side-by-side along with a comparison/contrast essay.

Sources


Tucker, Judith. "The Arab World In The Classroom," Center for Contemporary Arab Studies/Georgetown University, 1991