



Los Angeles County

Commission on Human Relations

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**Salaam Means Peace: Some Questions about Arab Americans
A Classroom Activity
Guidelines, Suggestions, Resources,
and Answer Key (with discussion points and questions)
To accompany Salaam Means Peace: An Introduction to Arab Americans**

Guidelines for the teacher

This activity is not meant to be a stand-alone lesson, but rather to be used in the context of a unit or larger discussion about Arab culture and Arab Americans.

This exercise could be appropriate for middle school or high school students.

- *Salaam Means Peace: An Introduction to Arab Americans* can be assigned as a reading.
- Distribute the handout *Salaam Means Peace: How much do you know about Arab Americans?* Give students approximately 35 minutes to complete the handout.
- You can then ask the questions out loud to the class as a whole, and ask people to volunteer their responses. [You may want students to exchange their papers so that someone else is checking their work. You may (or may not) want to frame the exercise as a game, with the person getting the most answers right winning.] The responses can lead to discussion. (Suggested directions for discussion are listed after each response, and additional discussion questions are listed at the end of the answer key.)

Answer Key

1. **Arabs are a race: true or false**

False (p. 3).

Arabs are not a single race, but rather united by their language and culture (p. 3).

2. **One famous Arab American is:**

Jamie Farr, actor in *M*A*S*H*
Darryl Issa, U.S. Congressman from San Diego
Casey Kasem, star of American Top 40
(all photos on the front cover and within the book)

Q: *Who are some other famous Arab Americans?*

Paula Abdul – Singer/dancer
Spencer Abraham – U.S. Secretary of Energy
Elias Corey – 1960 Nobel Prize Winner
Shannon Elizabeth – Actress in “American Pie”
Doug Flutie – 1984 Heisman Trophy Winner
Jeff George – Football player
Dr. Michael De Bakey – Pioneer heart surgeon

George Mitchell – Former Senate Majority Leader
 Danny & Marlo Thomas – Actors
 John Sununu – Former White House Chief of Staff
 Helen Thomas – Former Dean of White House Press Corps
 Bobby Rahal – Indy 500 Race Car Champion
 Current Congressmen – Darrell Issa and Nick Rahall
 Lucie Salhany – First woman to head a TV Network (FOX)
 Kathy Najimy – Award winning actress
 Ralph Nader – Consumer advocate
 Christa McAuliffe – Teacher & space shuttle astronaut
 Joseph Abboud – Designer
 F. Murray Abraham – Oscar Winning Actor
 Michael Nouri – Actor in Flashdance
 (from www.adc.org)

3. Three predominantly Arab countries are:

Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Syria in Southwest Asia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen in the Arabian peninsula,
 Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan, and Tunisia in Northern Africa
 (p. 2)

Afghanistan and Iran are NOT Arab countries (p. 5-6).

4. Two predominantly Muslim countries are:

Afghanistan
 Iran
 (p. 6)

Countries that are more than 85% Muslim

Afghanistan
 Algeria
 Egypt
 Iran
 Jordan
 Kuwait
 Libya
 Mauritania
 Morocco
 Pakistan
 Saudi Arabia
 Somalia
 Syria
 Tajikistan
 Tunisia
 Turkey
 Uzbekistan
 Western Sahara
 Yemen

(from www.theislamproject.org/education/Africa_Mideast_etc.html)

Countries with a Muslim population ranging from 66% to 85%

Albania
 Azerbaijan
 Bangladesh
 Guinea
 Indonesia
 Kyrgyzstan
 Lebanon
 Mali
 Niger
 Senegal
 Sudan
 Turkmenistan

The ten countries with the largest Muslim populations are:

Indonesia (170.3 million)

Pakistan (136 million)

Bangladesh (106 million)

India (103 million)

Turkey (62.4 million)

Iran (60.7 million)

Egypt (53.7 million)

Nigeria (47.7 million)

China (37.1 million)

Of these countries only Egypt is an Arab country.

Most Arabs are Muslims, but most Muslims are not Arabs.

(from www.adc.org)

5. Three words in English that originated in Arabic are:

- chemistry
- coffee
- lemon
- satin
- sherbet
- zenith

(p. 6)

6. The religion of most Arab Americans is:

Christian (77%)

Catholic (42%)

(p. 11)

Q: Did you know this? What religion did you think most Arab Americans were? What does this lead you to think about stereotypes? Does this make you think any differently about Arab Americans?

7. A common stereotype about Arab Americans is:

That they are Muslim.

(p. 11)

(Etc.)

Q: What are some other stereotypes you have or think others have of Arab Americans?

8. Approximately — Arab Americans live in LA County.

200,000.

(p. 4)

Q: Where do you think Arab Americans tend to live in LA?

Newcomers and later-generation Arab Americans live scattered throughout LA County. Some Arab-owned businesses are clustered in Pasadena, Glendale, East Hollywood, and Westwood, but as many or more are located in other areas. Many Arab Americans also live in Orange County, with a large number in Anaheim.

The three metropolitan areas with the largest populations of Arab Americans are Los Angeles, Detroit, and New York City (p.3-4).

9. Afghanistan is an Arab country: true or false

False (p. 5-6).

Afghanistan is Muslim, but not Arab, and Arabic is not an Afghan language (p. 5-6).

10. The percentage of Muslims in the world that are Arab is:

12% (p. 11)

Q: What race/ethnicity/culture are Muslims?

While Islam originated in the Arab world, the religion has spread to many countries in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, including Afghanistan, India, Indonesia, Iran, and Turkey. The former Soviet Union and China also have large Muslim populations.

The vast majority of Muslims are not Arab. Arab countries account for only about half of the more than 40 Islamic countries worldwide (p. 11).

Q: What percentage of Arabs in the world are Christian?

Worldwide, many Arabs are Christian (about 10 %) (p. 11).

11. The Muslim and Arab man's honor is reflected in the ---- of his family.

Women (p. 9).

There is a saying, "Heaven is under the feet of mothers," which honors mothers as the molders of society, the keepers of values, the powerful influencers of lives. In Arab tradition and in the Muslim religion, the most important work that women can do is to see that their children continue Arab tradition and culture. Their highest service to God is to raise children who are wise, kind, and generous.

In their traditions, Arab and Muslim women are to be protected from harsh or potentially hurtful situations. They are taught from pre-adolescence to maintain a distance from boys and men outside the family (p. 9).

Q: What is the role of head coverings for women in Islam?

They are a demonstration of modesty, which is valued in Islam.

12. Arabs may show their hospitality in these ways:

Visitors are treated as special guests, no matter how casual the occasion.

Food and drink are offered, and guests may be pressed to accept.

A recent immigrant to the U.S. may offer a possession admired by a guest.

(p. 10)

13. The word *Allah* means:

God (p. 11)

Allah is simply the word for God in Arabic, and is used by Arab Christians and Muslims alike (p. 11).

14. The holy books in the Muslim religion are:

the Torah, the Bible, and the Quran (p. 11).

Muslims believe that all three are revealed books sent by God to guide us, although the Quran is the final revelation, and supersedes the Torah and the Bible. Muslims use the term "People of the Book" to refer to Jews, Christians, and Muslims (p. 11).

15. The word *Jihad* means:

Striving in the way of God (p. 13).

There are two types of Jihad: striving against oneself and striving against injustice in the world. The greater jihad (against oneself) involves striving for self-purification and working to achieve a higher moral standard. The lesser jihad (against injustice) includes fighting to defend oneself, one's family or country, and Islam. A true jihad cannot involve the harming of civilians, as Islam forbids this (p. 13).

Q: *When and in what context have you heard the term "jihad"? Why do you think that is? What role does the media play in our understanding of Islam?*

16. Sikh Americans are sometimes mistaken for Arabs because:

Sikh men wear turbans as part of their beliefs (p. 5).

Q: *What do you know about Sikhism?*

Sikhs are not Muslim. Sikhism is a religion that originated in India. The vast majority of Sikhs are from there, but Sikhs can be of any race and ethnicity, and most are neither Arab nor from the Middle East (p. 5).

Sikhs are people whose religion is totally different and separate from the Muslim faith. And because it is a religion and not an ethnicity, an ethnically diverse group of people consider themselves Sikhs. Sikhs wear turbans because one of their Gurus wanted to make a bold statement about the identities of Sikhs following years of persecution and the martyrdom of his predecessor. Keeping long hair wrapped in a turban is an outward symbol of a Sikh's submission and devotion to God. The Sikh code of conduct prohibits the removal of the five Sikh articles of faith, including the turban, from one's person. Some Sikhs are more relaxed about these rules than others, but to many Sikhs it is a religious command they absolutely must follow.

(from the LA County Human Relations Sikh fact sheet at http://www.lahumanrelations.org/Our_publications/index.htm)

17. Ramadan is:

A month of fasting from sunrise to sunset (p. 12).

Ramadan is a time when Muslims concentrate on their faith and spend less time on the concerns of everyday life. It is a time of worship and contemplation.

(from <http://www.holidays.net/ramadan/story.htm>)

18. The three states with the largest Arab-American populations are:

California, Michigan, and New York (p. 4).

19. The language that Iranians speak is:

Farsi (p. 5).

The alphabet for Farsi is almost identical to the Arabic alphabet. Although Arabic and Farsi may look and sound similar to us, Farsi has more in common with English, Spanish, and German than with Arabic (p. 5).

20. The main difference between being Arab and being Muslim is:

Arabs are linked by their language and culture, whereas Islam is a religion (p. 3 and 10-11).

Additional Discussion Questions

1. If you were Arab American, what might you be worried about in this time of history?
Discrimination, hate crimes, etc.
2. What do you know about hate crimes against this group?
After September 11th, there was a dramatic upsurge in hate crimes against those perceived to be Arab or Muslim. Many victims were NOT Arab or Muslim, however. Sikhs, mistaken for Arabs or Muslims, have been targeted, as have Latinos.
For more information, see the LA County Human Relations Commission's Hate Crime Reports 2001 and 2002 at
http://www.lahumanrelations.org/Our_publications/index.htm
3. Why do you think Arabs might immigrate to the United States?
Tensions in the Middle East (e.g., the Israeli-Palestinian conflict), and economic hardship and political oppression in countries like Iraq, where sanctions made living conditions very difficult, can lead people to search elsewhere for a better life.
4. What questions do you still have when you think about Arab Americans?
This question can lead to a larger discussion or unit, or act to summarize a unit. There is always more to learn.

Additional Resources

100 Questions and Answers about Arab Americans: A Journalist's Guide

By the Detroit Free Press at

www.freep.com/jobspage/arabs.htm

The Arab American Institute at

www.aaiusa.org

The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee at

www.adc.org

For information on which countries are Muslim, see

[www.theislamproject.org/education/Africa Mideast etc.html](http://www.theislamproject.org/education/Africa_Mideast_etc.html)

For more on Ramadan, see

<http://www.holidays.net/ramadan/story.htm>

For more on Sikhs, see the Los Angeles County's fact sheet at

http://www.lahumanrelations.org/Our_publications/index.htm

For more on hate crimes, see the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission's hate crime reports at

http://www.lahumanrelations.org/Our_publications/index.htm

For more classroom activities, see the Southern Poverty Law Center's Teaching Tolerance at

<http://www.tolerance.org/teach/expand/act/activity.jsp?cid=155>

For an electronic version of this classroom activity, please visit

www.lahumanrelations.org

Salaam Means Peace

How much do you know about Arab Americans?

1. Arabs are a race: true or false	2. One famous Arab-American is:	3. Three predominantly Arab countries are:	4. Two predominantly Muslim countries are:
5. Three words in English that originated from Arabic are:	6. The religion of most Arab Americans is:	7. A common stereotype about Arabs is:	8. Approximately ---- Arab Americans live in LA County.
9. Afghanistan is an Arab country: true or false	10. The percentage of all Muslims that are Arabs is:	11. The Muslim and Arab man's honor is reflected in the --- of his family.	12. Arabs show their hospitality in these ways:
13. The word Allah means:	14. The holy books in the Muslim religion are:	15. The word <i>Jihad</i> means:	16. Sikhs are sometimes mistaken for Arabs because:
17. Ramadan is:	18. The three states with the largest Arab-American populations are:	19. The language that Iranians speak is:	20. The main difference between being Arab and being Muslim is: