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Understanding Somali Culture

Final Project for EDU T&L 727O28 Somali History, Language & Culture
Taught by Dr. Leslie C. Moore
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Grades: 9-12

Subjects: Geography, Language Arts, And Social Studies

This lesson is based on a lesson plan created by Deborah Lerman of The New York Times Learning Network & Javaid Khan of The Bank Street College of Education in New York City for the New York Times Learning Network. To see that lesson plan and the academic content standards it and this lesson are designed to address, go to http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/lessons/20021016wednesday.html?searchpv=learning_lessons%23standards%23standards

Overview of Lesson Plan: In this lesson, students learn about a Columbus, Ohio community in which a sudden influx of Somali immigrants has resulted in tension between the Somalis and the local residents. Students then create a handbook explaining aspects of the Somali culture to an American audience to increase understanding between the two groups.

Suggested Time Allowance: 45 minutes - 1 hour

Objectives:

Students will:

1. Reflect on the 'melting pot' metaphor that has often been used to describe the United States.
2. Learn about the tensions that exist between Somali immigrants and local residents.
3. Research elements of Somali culture.
4. Create a handbook about Somali culture to promote understanding and harmony between a Somali community and an American community.

Resources / Materials:

-student journals
-pens/pencils
-paper
-classroom blackboard
-copies of " The Somali Diaspora" (one per student)
-five slips of paper or index cards, each containing the name of an aspect of Somali culture (religion; food; dress; language; holidays, particularly Ramadan) -resources for researching Somali culture (global history textbooks, library references, computers with Internet access)

Activities / Procedures:

1. WARM-UP/DO-NOW: Students respond to the following prompt in their journals,

written on the board prior to class: "The United States has often been described as a 'melting pot.' What does this term mean? What are the advantages of living in a country that is a 'melting pot'? What are the disadvantages?" After a few minutes, ask students to share their responses. Write some of the responses on the board, listing the advantages and disadvantages students identified. If students have listed "conflict" or "prejudice" as a potential disadvantage, follow up with a brief discussion about these issues. How can diversity sometimes lead to prejudice, especially in small communities? How can misunderstanding contribute to prejudice and discrimination?

2. As a class, read and discuss the book "The Somali Diaspora," focusing on the following questions:
 - a. What event inspired rumors in Columbus, Ohio?
 - b. How did the local residents of Columbus feel about the sudden influx of Somalis to their town?
 - c. According to city officials in Columbus, what social services are strained by the Somali immigrant population?
 - f. What reasons have local residents given for not wanting to accept the Somalis into their community?
 - h. Why have many Somali refugees chosen to move to Columbus?
 - j. How would you describe the relationship between Columbus's local residents and the Somali immigrants now?

Explain to students that today they will be creating an informational brochure or handbook for Americans that will explain important aspects of the Somali culture, since the cultural differences between the Somalis and the local Columbus residents may contribute to the mistrust and tension that exist between the two groups. Divide students into five groups, and have each group select a slip of paper or index card containing the name of an aspect of Somali culture (religion; food; dress; language; holidays, particularly Ramadan). Using all available resources, students should answer the following questions regarding their assigned topics (written on the board for easier student access):

- What is important to know about this cultural element, as it is applied to Somali culture?
- How is this cultural element different in Somali culture than it is in small town American culture?
- What could local American government institutions, schools, and residents do to make accommodations for and be sensitive toward these differences?

Before students leave class, students should decide which group members will be responsible for creating each of the subtopic pages to be completed for homework.

4. WRAP-UP/HOMEWORK: Each student creates an illustrated page to be included in the class handbook or brochure on Somali culture. The text of the page should provide information about Somali culture for Americans, based on the group's research conducted

in class. In a future class, each group's contribution to the handbook should be presented and displayed.

Further Questions for Discussion:

- How and why might the rumors about the Somali immigrants have been started?
- In what ways can the addition of an immigrant community enrich an American city or town?
- How do different generations of immigrants adjust differently to American customs and lifestyles?
- Why do you think immigrants might choose to settle in smaller American communities?

Evaluation / Assessment:

Students will be evaluated based on initial journal entries, participation in class and group discussions, thoughtful participation in group research, and individual contributions to the handbook on Somali culture.

Vocabulary:

subsidized, proportionately, strained, culminated, valiantly, bigotry, agitate, incite, refugee, obscured, placate, conceded, potential, sentiments, adherents, circulating, petition, scrawled, smarting, undermine, administrator, earmarked, influx, stoked

Extension Activities:

1. Draw a map of Africa that includes Somalia. Color-code the map to show the religious demographics of the continent.
2. Make a calendar that highlights Muslim holidays. Include illustrations that depict specific Muslim celebrations and traditions.
3. Call local government offices in towns with a large immigrant population and ask what services they offer to support the special needs of this population. Write a letter to Mayor of Columbus OH, describing what other towns have done to accommodate their immigrant communities.
4. Write a poem from the perspective of an immigrant Somali woman, expressing her feelings about a woman's role in her native country versus her role in America.

Interdisciplinary Connections:

American History- The United States has a history of racial tension and prejudice. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke out against this during the Civil Rights Movement. Read his famous "I Have a Dream" speech and write an essay about whether or not you believe King's dream has come true. If not, what steps can be taken to move closer to making that dream a reality?

Civics- Create an American Immigration Glossary. Include the definitions of important terms, such as asylum, refugee, border, green card, emigrate, and immigrant. Also include a timeline of important immigration legislation that has been passed in the United States.

Fine Arts- One popular form of art within the Somali community is red henna body art. Study traditional Somali designs and use them to inspire your own red henna body art or drawings.

Global History- Write an entry for a global history textbook, detailing the political events in Somalia that have caused many Somalis to flee their country as refugees.

Mathematics- Use the Internet to find statistics on the changing ethnic make-up of the population of the United States since it was formed in 1776. Create a series of pie graphs to display this data.

Media Studies- View and discuss the film "Black Hawk Down." Write an essay about how the events depicted in this film may have shaped the experience of the Somali refugees in the United States.

Other Information on the Web

The United States Immigration and Naturalization Service Web site can be accessed at <http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/>.

National Immigration Forum (NIF) (<http://www.immigrationforum.org/>) defends legal immigration, fights anti-immigrant prejudice, and seeks to preserve the American tradition of diversity.