The Middle East Conflict

Lesson Video: Grades 6-8

Overview

Teacher: **Justin Zimmerman**

Grade: **6**

School: **Magnolia Middle School**

Location: **Joppa, Maryland**

NCSS Standards-Based Themes: Culture; People, Places, and Environments; Global Connections

Content Standards: Geography, History

Video Summary

How do you introduce to sixth-graders a topic as complex and controversial as the Middle East? Justin Zimmerman starts by asking guided questions to assess his students' background knowledge of the region, then has them practice their negotiating and conflict resolution skills. (Note: This lesson was taught prior to September 11, 2001.)

First, Mr. Zimmerman asks his students to define the region geographically and to identify the major religions of the Middle East: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Then, to engage students and help them understand how complex the problems in the region are, he has them wrestle with two hypothetical situations analogous to those faced by the people living in the Middle East: Students must choose which of three academic subjects is most important to their education, and defend their choice; then they must choose which one of three siblings is entitled to their parents' house.

Next, the class is divided into three groups, each representing a major religion of the Middle East. Students use primary source material to document their group's right to lands claimed by all three. Mr. Zimmerman asks students to think about possible solutions to this conflict, reach consensus as a group, and present their resolution to the class.

As the lesson concludes, Mr. Zimmerman urges students to read newspapers and news magazines, watch news accounts and documentaries on television, and search out Web sites about the Middle East to stay informed about this volatile region of the world.

Standards

Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies defines what students should know and be able to do in social studies at each educational level. This lesson correlates to the following standards for middle school students:

I. Culture

Explain how information and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference; explain and give examples of how language, literature, the arts, architecture, other artifacts, traditions, beliefs, values, and behaviors contribute to the development and transmission of culture; explain why individuals and groups respond differently to their physical and social environments and/or changes to them on the basis of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs; articulate the implications of cultural diversity, as well as cohesion, within and across groups.

III. People, Places, and Environments

Examine, interpret, and analyze physical and cultural patterns and their interactions, such as land use, settlement patterns, cultural transmission of customs and ideas, and ecosystem changes; describe ways that historical events have been influenced by, and have influenced, physical and human geographic factors in local, regional, national, and global settings.

IX. Global Connections

Describe instances in which language, art, music, belief systems, and other cultural elements can facilitate global understanding or cause misunderstanding; analyze examples of conflict, cooperation, and interdependence among groups, societies, and nations; describe and explain the relationships and tensions between national sovereignty and global interests in such matters as territory, natural resources, trade, use of technology, and welfare of people; demonstrate understanding of concerns, standards, issues, and conflicts related to universal human rights.

Content Standards: Geography, History

About the Class

Classroom Profile

> "We focus on global issues. I think it's extremely important for students to be able to understand what's going on in the world, because they will be members of our global world one day, and they will be making the decisions. If they don't understand what's going on, they're not going to make decisions properly. Social studies plays a very important role." —Justin Zimmerman

Justin Zimmerman teaches sixth-grade social studies at Magnolia Middle School in Joppa, Maryland. Located in a rural community 20 miles north of Baltimore, Magnolia Middle School draws from the broad socioeconomic diversity of the surrounding Chesapeake Bay

Year at a Glance
Conflict Resolution
Five Themes of Geography
The Americas
Brazil
Japan
The Middle East
Africa
Europe

About the Class, cont'd.

area. The community supports two military installations, local agriculture, and a range of professions. The school also reflects the community's ethnic diversity: Approximately 60 percent of the students are Caucasian, 30 percent are African American, and 10 percent are Hispanic.

Mr. Zimmerman began the year with a unit on conflict resolution. This unit was designed to teach students how to acknowledge and deal with controversial issues that may surface in a class discussion, and to help students understand the complexity of conflict resolution at the national and international levels. In the next unit—on the five themes of geography—students identified geographic regions and developed their mapping skills.

In the units that followed, students examined six different world regions, with an emphasis throughout the year on global connections. For example, in the unit on the Americas, students examined the global impact of Latin American migration. In the unit on Brazil, students learned about the importance of the Brazilian Rain Forest and the reasons for and worldwide consequences of its destruction. The unit on Japan focused on the global impact of trade balances and trade agreements, war, and education. By this time, Mr. Zimmerman expected his students to be able to work together in small groups, to consider opposing points of view, and to acknowledge the impact that one country's actions can have on other countries.

Mr. Zimmerman launched a unit on the Middle East with the lesson shown in "The Middle East Conflict." This lesson was designed to "set the stage" and to gauge what students might already know about the region from following current events. The class began by studying the geography of the region, its most valuable natural resource (oil), and its significance as the birthplace of three of the world's major religions. These three issues—geography, oil, and religion—are key to understanding the tempestuous history of the Middle East, including the Arab-Israeli conflict. This lesson was followed by lessons on the Persian Gulf War, U.S. interests in the region, and prospects for peace.

Lesson Background

Read this information to better understand the lesson shown in the video.

Content: The Middle East

Geography and History: The Middle East is the region where the continents of Africa, Asia, and Europe come together. The term *Middle East* was first widely used by the British after World War I to refer to Turkey and the Arab portions of the region formerly known as the Near East. Today the Middle East consists of Turkey, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Israel, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, Yemen, the United Arab Emirates, and North Africa (Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco).

The Middle East is actually a Western construct based on colonial influence during the twentieth century. Many countries in the Middle East did not exist as states before they were carved out by Western imperialism in the twentieth century. Most of the Arab world was part of the Ottoman Empire.

After World War I, many Arabs hoped that the areas in which they lived would become independent states. Instead, the region was carved into areas controlled by the British and French. The French were given control of Lebanon and Syria, and the British controlled Iraq, Egypt, Transjordan (later Jordan), and Palestine.

Palestine became a British mandate (similar to a colony), with Jews and Arabs living side by side. British authorities tried to balance Jewish immigration to the region (considered by Jews to be their historic homeland) with the interests of the indigenous Palestinian population. But as more and more Jews moved there, particularly during and after the Nazi Holocaust in Europe, opposition among Arabs grew.

In 1948, the United Nations supported a British plan for the partition of Palestine west of the Jordan River into separate areas occupied by the Arabs and the Jews. As soon as British troops left Palestine, the state of Israel was declared. In response, neighboring Arab states sent troops to crush Israel. During the ensuing war, about 650,000 Palestinians were displaced and moved to refugee camps in Gaza, the West Bank, and neighboring Arab states. Political tensions over Palestine have continued in the region, including the Six Day War in 1967, the Yom Kippur War in 1973, and two *intifadas* (uprisings) by Palestinians.

About the Class, cont'd.

About two-thirds of the world's known reserves of oil are located in the Middle East. This geological discovery became a vital economic and political asset to countries in the region only after World War II, when the consumption of petroleum in the U.S. and Europe increased dramatically. In short, rival claims to disputed territory, religious and ethnic differences, and competition over petroleum, water, and other resources continue to fuel conflict in the Middle East.

Major Religions of the Middle East: The Middle East is the birthplace of three major religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, all of which have ties to the city of Jerusalem. The following is a brief description of each religion, in chronological order.

Judaism is the faith of the ancient Hebrews and their descendants, the Jews. The Hebrews were a nomadic Semite people; that is, Hebrew is a member of the Semitic language family, which also includes Arabic and Aramaic. Judaism was the first major religion to teach monotheism, the belief that there is only one God. The story of the Hebrews is written in the first five books of the Bible, called the Torah. According to the Torah, Abraham and his sons Isaac and Jacob received a revelation of the one true God. Also found in the Torah is the account of God's promise to Abraham that if the Hebrews worshipped and obeyed God, they and their descendants would always live in Canaan (part of Syria and Palestine)..

However, between 70 C.E. and the foundation of Israel in 1948, most Jews lived in Diaspora (meaning "scattering"). The Hebrews had lived in Palestine since about 1250 C.E., even creating a short-lived independent state; but around 70 C.E., the Roman rulers of Palestine began to force them to leave. The Jews who left created new communities in Europe, Asia, and Africa.

Zionism is the Jewish nationalist movement that began in Europe as a reaction to European anti-Semitism. The goal of Zionism was the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. Persecution of Jews in Europe—from the medieval period through nineteenth-century pogroms, from the Holocaust (which claimed the lives of six million Jews during World War II) to Soviet oppression—led many Jews to emigrate to Palestine from the late nineteenth century on. Many Jews also came from non-European lands, including Iraq, Egypt, Morocco, Yemen, Ethiopia, and other countries. Some radical Zionists also believe that the West Bank (the land between Israel and Jordan and occupied by Israel during the 1967 war) is part of the land promised by God to the Jews.

Christianity is the monotheistic religion of the followers of Jesus Christ and began as an offshoot of Judaism in the first century C.E. Christians believe that Jesus is the messiah that has been promised to them in the Old Testament. The teachings of Christianity are found in the New Testament of the Bible. The Middle East is significant for Christians not only because of its Jewish heritage, but also because Jesus was born in Palestine and preached throughout the region.

The Bible includes an account of the visit of Jesus and his disciples to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, the holiday associated with the exodus of the Jews from Egypt. The account details Jesus' arrest and execution in Jerusalem. After Jesus' death, his followers formed the first Christian community in Jerusalem. Christianity spread in the first century from Palestine into countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea and is now practiced by peoples throughout the world.

Islam continues the monotheistic tradition of Judaism and Christianity. The revelation of the Koran (Quran) by God (Allah) to the prophet Muhammad in the seventh century confirmed the monotheistic message of earlier prophets, including Abraham, Moses, Solomon, David, and Jesus. A poor member of a powerful tribe, Muhammad was a merchant who traveled from Mecca to Syria on caravans. He married his employer, a widow named Khadija, and began to receive revelations in 610 A.D. However, the ruling elite felt threatened by his reformist, monotheistic message, and Muhammad and his followers were forced to move to Yathrib, later called Medina.

Jerusalem is sacred to Muslims (followers of Islam) because, according to Islamic tradition, that was the last place on earth Muhammad touched on his mysterious night journey into heaven.. Muhammad was able to unite the tribes of Arabia under the banner of Islam before his death, and the new Islamic state expanded very rapidly in the century after his death, reaching all the way from Spain to Central Asia. Rich, multi-cultural, classic Islamic civilization made contributions in science, mathematics, medicine, philosophy, literature, art, and architecture.

About the Class, cont'd.

Teaching Strategy: Using Hypothetical Situations and Analogies

Political and religious conflicts can be difficult concepts for middle school students to grasp. One way to help them understand complex subjects is to use hypothetical situations and analogies that they can relate to. For example, asking students to explain why one academic subject is more important than another, or why one sibling should receive a larger inheritance than another, gives them insight into the problems facing the people living in the Middle East, namely, which religion is the "right" one and who deserves to live in and control Palestine.

Hypothetical situations and analogies are not meant to be used as a direct representation or an oversimplification of a larger, more complex issue. Rather, they are a way to get students to identify competing claims, consider the validity of different points of view, and practice the fine art of conflict resolution.

Watching the Video

As you reflect on these questions, write down your responses or discuss them as a group.

Before You Watch

Respond to the following questions:

- What are some issues to consider in teaching about the Middle East? What issues do you consider when preparing your lessons? How do you prepare your students?
- How would you introduce a unit on the Middle East? Where would you begin?
- What do you consider to be the major elements of the Middle East conflict? In what order would you introduce them? (For example, Mr. Zimmerman begins his unit with religion.)
- How do you guard against bias when guiding students through highly controversial topics like the Middle East conflict?
- How do you create a safe environment in which to explore a controversial topic with students, some of whom may have a strong emotional connection to the topic?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of using hypothetical situations and analogies to examine complex or controversial issues?

Watch the Video

As you watch "The Middle East Conflict," take notes on Mr. Zimmerman's instructional strategies, particularly the way he encourages students to consider an issue from multiple points of view. Write down what you find interesting, surprising, or especially important about the teaching and learning in this lesson.

Watching the Video, cont'd.

Reflecting on the Video

Review your notes, then respond to the following questions:

- What struck you about the classroom climate, background, preparation, strategies, and materials used in this lesson?
- How does Mr. Zimmerman keep students engaged and motivated?
- How does Mr. Zimmerman prevent students from comparing the right of each religion to the land in dispute? Why do you think he does this?
- What aspect of the Middle East conflict do you think Mr. Zimmerman focuses on in the next lesson?
- How does this class differ from yours? How would you introduce your students to the conflict?

Looking Closer

Here's an opportunity to take a closer look at interesting aspects of Mr. Zimmerman's lesson.

Learning From Hypothetical Situations: Video Segment

Go to this segment in the video by matching the image (to the left) on your TV screen. You'll find this segment approximately seven minutes into the video. Watch for about five minutes.

After students define the geography of the region and the major religions practiced there, Mr. Zimmerman proposes two hypothetical situations to underscore how conflict arises from competing viewpoints.

- How do the hypothetical situations help students understand the tensions among the various groups in the Middle East?
- What do the students' answers reveal about their understanding of the broader issues?

Discussing Possible Resolutions and Seeking Additional Information: Video Segment

Go to this segment in the video by matching the image (to the left) on your TV screen. You'll find this segment approximately 20 minutes into the video. Watch for about eight minutes.

After discussing the basic tenets of the major religions and each religion's claim to the land, students begin to propose possible solutions. To broaden their understanding of the issue, Mr. Zimmerman invites students to do additional research on the Middle East before the next class.

- Why do you think Mr. Zimmerman wants students to consult additional resources?
- What clues do students give that indicate their need for more information?
- What additional resources does Mr. Zimmerman suggest? What resources might you suggest?
- What element of the conflict might students focus on next?

Connecting to Your Teaching

Reflecting on Your Practice

As you reflect on these questions, write down your responses or discuss them as a group.

- How do you assess students' background knowledge of a particular topic? What are the benefits of having students review what they know or think? How does such a discussion help both students and teachers?
- How does the conflict in the Middle East connect to topics in your curriculum? How might you reference this and other conflicts?
- How do you incorporate geography skills into lessons on the different world regions?
- What are some other hypothetical situations or analogies you might use to introduce the conflict in the Middle East?
- As you teach about controversial issues, what are the most important things you want students to take away from the lesson?
- How do you help students understand religious history and differences in belief systems? How do you assess their understanding?

Taking It Back to Your Classroom

- Have students write news stories about the Middle East. They might compile the stories into a newspaper to distribute to other students, or post their articles on an Internet site that features the work of student journalists.
- Select a complex or controversial issue in your curriculum. Ask students to research and write two reports about the issue, each from a different point of view.
- Ask students to identify what they believe are the five most significant topics in a unit they've already covered and to highlight and place them on a timeline or in a visual presentation they create. Deciding which information is most important in a unit teaches students that not all information is created equal: Some is background, some is key, and some extends what students know or have just learned.

Resources

Print Resources for Students

Cohn-Sherbok, Dan, and Dawoud El-Alami. *The Palestine-Israeli Conflict: A Beginner's Guide*. Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications, 2001.

McAleavy, Tony. *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*. Cambridge History Program. Chatsworth, Calif.: SIGS Books & Multimedia, 1998.

Sabini, John. *Islam: A Primer*. 6th ed. Washington, D.C.: AMIDEAST Publications, 2001.

Waldman, Neil. *The Promised Land: The Birth of the Jewish People*. Honesdale, Pa.: Boyds Mills Press, 2002.

Print Resources for Teachers

Lewis, Bernard. *The Muslim Discovery of Europe*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001.

Lewis, Bernard, ed. *A Middle East Mosaic: Fragments of Life, Letters, and History*. Modern Library Classics. New York: Princeton Review, 2001.

Halliday, Fred. *Nation and Religion in the Middle East*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000.

Web Resources for Students

Center for Middle Eastern Studies: http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~mideast/

The CMES site offers links to maps, history, and other resource material, as well as firsthand information on current issues in the Middle East.

Historical Maps Online: http://www.ukans.edu/cwis/units/kulib/docs/test.html

This collection includes maps of Israel and the Middle East before and after the United Nations Resolution 181.

The Middle East Network Information Center: http://www.menic.utexas.edu/menic.html

MENIC provides information on the history, culture, and religion of individual countries in the Middle East.

The Middle East Policy Council: http://www.mepc.org

The MEPC hosts an online forum for discussion and analysis on political, social, and economic issues in the Middle East.

Web Resources for Teachers

Council on Islamic Education: http://www.cie.org

This site offers resource material for K–12 educators and features articles on teaching Middle Eastern studies in public schools.

History/Social Studies for K-12 Teachers: http://www.execpc.com/~dboals/boals.html

This site provides general historical and political information on non-Western cultures.

Notes