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**Curriculum Development**

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WHY STUDY CULTURES?

For most of us, cultures are misunderstood; they are nebulous, vague, and hidden. Like the famous iceberg analogy, we know that most of what a culture is cannot be seen. But what does that mean? And why, then, should we study cultures if we do not know what we’re studying in the first place?

In the late twentieth century, Brigham Young University did not embrace a new discipline, but rather a new area of study—the study of cultures. Typically, anthropology is the social science that studies cultures. Why should they have all the fun? The study of cultures unites other academic disciplines (as needed), drawing upon literature, political science, sociology, and even the more applied areas of nursing, social work, law, and business. The study of cultures has grown into nothing short of a revolt against disciplines, “a mode of inquiry” that looks at things in new ways.¹

In 1982, the David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies established Intercultural Outreach² as a formal program to help build bridges of intercultural understanding. Since then, more than 10,000 gratis cultural presentations have been given to local area public schools, taking students to new places using language, multimedia, and imagination. CultureGuides derive from the same expertise that has been honed in classrooms—with the exciting exception that these intercultural learning tools are not geographically bound. Thanks to the Internet, accessible multimedia technology, and our trusty eMACs, a limitless audience can learn about different cultures.

Globalization, the driving paradigm of the post-Cold War world, means that now, more than ever, culture matters. Culture is the invisible context that may keep us from understanding important people, places, and ideas; it exists whether or not we think about it. Intercultural education can help us, not only as an intellectual exercise, but also in very practical ways to combat racism, to expand business, and to communicate effectively.

CultureGuides share the same aim as Edward T. Hall, the eminent cultural scholar, to try to “make culture real.” Even though our “student guides” are not present in every classroom, we hope that CultureGuides will make classrooms of the mind and cultural laboratories wherever you may reside.

² The program was originally called International Outreach when it was established in 1982, but it was renamed Intercultural Outreach in 2006 to better reflect its aims.
TRADITIONS

SYRIAN GARDENS

In Syrian cities, there are large, well tended gardens with grass, trees, flowers, and fountains. Although similar gardens and parks are found throughout the world, Syrian gardens are of special significance to the Syrian people, especially to those who practice Islam. The Qur’an [koo-rahn], the holy book of Islam, frequently speaks of gardens when describing paradise or heaven. Gardens offer a peaceful place for friends and family to enjoy time together and to strengthen their relationships.

Starting Points

1. Listen to an Arabic audio clip read from the Qur’an that addresses the purpose of gardens (see Traditions Visual 1). Read the translation of the passage that accompanies the audio. How does this passage make you feel? Why do you think gardens are important to people of the Islamic faith? Gardens are important in Syria because they represent the peace that Muslims seek to obtain in paradise or heaven.

2. Think about different types of parks that are common in the United States, including playgrounds, city gardens, zoos, skate parks, and so forth. What are the main purposes of each of these parks or areas? Similar parks are found in Syria, but in contrast to American parks, Syrian gardens have added meaning that reflects the beliefs of the Syrian people.

3. What is the relationship between the words “paradise” and “peace”? Why do you think these concepts are so important to world religions? Where do different religious groups search for peace? In Syria, where 90 percent of the population is Muslim, the people spend time in gardens and parks in order to obtain a feeling of peace. The Qur’an, which is sacred scripture for Muslims, describes paradise as being a garden with winding rivers and plentiful fruit.

Information

Gardens in Syria

In most Syrian cities, hadiiga [ha-dee-ka], or gardens, are a common sight (see Traditions Visuals 2 and 3). Gardens are enjoyable to visit while touring the different cities of Syria, such as Damascus, Aleppo, Tartus, Deir al Zor, and Palmyra. Although each garden has its own distinct atmosphere, all of the gardens are beautiful and provide a peaceful, enjoyable environment. Peace, or salaam [suh-lahm] in Arabic, is an important concept that is related to these gardens.

The size and the characteristics of these gardens vary greatly. Some gardens are small and serve less-populated, rural areas, while other gardens are large and serve more populated regions. The smallest gardens are the size of a city block, while some
of the larger gardens may span several acres. Many gardens, whether large or small, have shrubbery, benches, and water fountains. Larger gardens are often similar to parks and zoos; they include playground areas and caged animals. In addition, the larger gardens often have large pools of running water; one garden even has an amphitheater for shows.

**Significance of Gardens**

Gardens, though common in many areas of the world, are special in Syria because of the influence of Islam within the country. In fact, gardens are a unifying symbol for Syrians. Although about 90 percent of Syrians practice Islam, they are subdivided into various Islamic sects. Because all the sects see gardens as significant, they serve as common ground for various Islamic beliefs.

For all Islamic sects, gardens are considered to be a type of paradise, or *jenna* [jen-na] in Arabic. Practicing Muslims believe that heaven will be similar to a garden, full of beautiful vegetation—both trees and flowers—as well as running streams. Artistic designs on many buildings, including mosques, depict gardens as described in the Qur’an (see Traditions Visuals 4 and 5).

**Qur’anic Descriptions**

The Qur’an contains a set of revelations that Muhammad, considered the greatest prophet and founder of Islam, received from an angel. These revelations are considered words from the mouth of Allah, or God, and were intended to establish God’s final word for mankind on earth. The Qur’an represents words directly from the mouth of God, and Muslims treat the Qur’an with profound respect.

One passage from the Qur’an, the Cow 2:25, indicates the importance of gardens:

> But give glad tidings to those who believe and work righteousness, that their portion is gardens, beneath which rivers flow. Every time they are fed with fruits therefrom, they say: “Why, this is what we were fed with before,” for they are given things in similitude; and they have therein companions pure [and holy]; and they abide therein [for ever].

This passage explains that the reward for faithfulness and righteousness is to live eternally in a garden paradise with loved ones. Similar passages are found throughout the Qur’an.

This passage clearly indicates that those who are righteous are admitted to the pleasing gardens of heaven. In life, Muslims seek the peace, beauty, and pleasure that comes from their connection to gardens.

**Agricultural Connections**

Gardens are also important because Syria and other Middle Eastern countries depend greatly on agriculture for both food and income. Because much of the land is a semi-arid steppe—dry, prairie-like plains with sparse vegetation—fertile soil is very valuable. About 58 percent of Syria’s geographical area is arid, receiving fewer than 25 cm of annual rainfall, which means that more than half of the country is a
desert. Even so, agriculture remains extremely important. Syria cultivates and exports products such as wheat, cotton, fruits, and vegetables (see Traditions Visuals 6 and 7).

Muslims depend on God to provide fertile soil. As Syrians practice Islam, they exemplify their belief in, and dependence upon, God and his great blessings. Gardens serve as a reminder of humanity’s need to rely on God.

Gardens and Strengthening Human Relationships

Islam also teaches the importance of strengthening human relationships, especially within the family, or aa’ilā [aah-ih-laa] in Arabic. This idea comes from the teachings of Muhammad and the Qur’an. One passage in the Qur’an, the Thunder 13:23, connects the ideas of gardens and families, stating that “gardens of perpetual bliss: they shall enter there, as well as the righteous among their fathers, their spouses, and their offspring.” The passage from the Cow quoted earlier in this section also illustrates the importance of human relationships because it expresses the need for pure companions.

To reach paradise, humans must build and strengthen relationships in this life. Strong relationships between both family and friends are very important. Muslims also have a deep respect for visitors; guests in a Muslim home are treated with great respect and hospitality.

Many of the activities that take place in Syrian gardens show the importance of human relationships. Syrians flock to gardens on Friday, the Islamic holy day. Fridays are used as a time to strengthen relationships with family and friends. This practice is similar to Sunday worship for many Christians.

Families and friends frequently gather together in gardens to take a break from work and discuss important issues, while parents also go to play with their children. These activities allow families and friends to grow closer together (see Traditions Visual 8).

Conclusion

Nearly all people understand the idea of paradise; they often desire to be in “paradise” on vacation, or to live in paradise in the afterlife. Gardens in Syria represent paradise. As people cultivate relationships in these gardens, they can continue to develop a pure love for one another. By doing so, they are able to demonstrate to Allah that they are worthy of the blessings of the true paradise—
Activities

1. In groups of four or five, pick a specific type of park or garden (e.g., a playground, a city garden, a zoo, a skate park, a national park, etc.) in either the United States or Syria. Develop a short skit of a typical scenario that could be seen in your chosen park and present it to the class. What are some differences between the uses of a park in the United States and a Syrian garden? What are some functions that they have in common?

2. Write a journal entry about the different types of parks that you have had experience with. Include your feelings about what they are used for. Compare the ways you use parks and gardens with how Syrians use gardens. What are some similarities and differences?

3. Make a list of ten things (e.g., flowers, trees, statues, ponds, etc.) you would like to have in your own personal garden or park. Why did you decide to include these things in your garden?

4. Speak with your parents about what parks mean to them. Write a short summary of the conversation, and compare your feelings about parks with what parks mean to your parents. What are some similarities and differences between your opinions?

5. Pretend you are assigned the task of developing ideas for a garden in a new city in Syria. What considerations would you make in terms of location, and why would this be so important? How would you design the garden to maximize usefulness? What objects would be essential? Draw a picture of your garden from a bird’s-eye view.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do so many people long for peace? What is the relationship between gardens and peace? Why are gardens such an essential component of communities throughout the world?

2. Other than gardens, what places (or environments) help you feel comfortable and peaceful? Why do you feel at peace in these places? How are these environments similar to or different from gardens in Syria?

3. How do gardens fit into the beliefs of Islam? How do gardens help Muslims remember and live the values of Islam? How are gardens a symbol or representation of their beliefs?

4. What places do you know of that provide a chance for families and friends to enjoy time together? How can these environments strengthen relationships? What do these environments have in common? How are they different?

5. Syrians who are not Muslim also frequent public parks and gardens. How do gardens foster connections between people of different beliefs? In what other ways could ties between people of different religious backgrounds be strengthened?

6. What makes a garden or park a place of peace and security? What features
FOLKLORE & LANGUAGE

HOPE EXPRESSIONS

Hope expressions are common in many languages. For example, “God bless you,” or its shortened form, “bless you,” is a frequently used hope expression in English. It is said after someone sneezes and is supposed to safeguard the sneezer against ill health. Syrians have a multitude of hope expressions which are woven into the fabric of the language and have become an integral part of daily life. Muslim nations like Syria are profoundly influenced by the religious values of Islam. These expressions highlight the value Syrians place on relationships and are a demonstration of imaan [ee-man], or faith.

Starting Points

1. Read aloud some of the hope expressions that will be brought up later in the lesson (see Folklore & Language Visual 1). What do you think when you hear these words being spoken? Syrians use these expressions regularly in conversation to show their hope that God will bless others. These hopes are expressed mutually.
2. How has the expression “bless you” come to have the meaning it does? Why do you think this expression is so widely understood? Does the expression relate to Christianity or another religion? Syrians regularly use hope expressions to show their hope that God will bless those they come in contact with.
3. What connotations are connected with the word “hope”? In what ways do people in the U.S. express hope? How does hope relate to relationships? Syrians frequently express hope for others in everyday conversations by asking Allah to bless the other person. Such expressions show the desire that Syrians have to build meaningful relationships.

Information

Hope Expressions in Arabic

In Arabic, it is common for the speaker to ask Allah to bestow blessings on another person, even in everyday conversations. For example, after getting a haircut, the customer petitions Allah to bless the barber. In response, the barber wishes that Allah likewise bless the customer. In this way, hope expressions are woven into the fabric of the community and become an integral part of daily life. These expressions reveal the importance of faith in Syrian culture, as well as the importance of relationships.

Religious Influence on Expressions

Many Arabic expressions have meanings that relate to Islam. Islam was established in the Middle East, where Arabic is widely spoken. Arabic and Islam have grown
and developed together, so their influence on one another is significant. For example, the Qur’an was originally written in Arabic (see Folklore & Language Visual 2). The Qur’an is sacred because it contains words revealed by Allah, or God. Muslims worldwide believe that Allah specifically chose the Arabic language to reveal his word, so Arabic must be sacred. For this reason, Muslims all over the world study Arabic.

**Purpose of Expressions**

**Cleanliness**

According to Islam, outward cleanliness signifies inward purity. Muslims therefore strive for purity and cleanliness in all they do. By getting a haircut or a shave, one becomes outwardly clean and therefore may be blessed.

After getting a haircut or a shave by a barber, the barber expresses *nayman* [nigh-men], which means “smoothness or softness” (see Folklore & Language Visual 3). The barber is basically saying that the client has become soft and tender on the outside. In return, the client states, “Allah yanam aleek” [ah-lah ya-naam a-lake], which means “may Allah make you smooth and tender.” Anyone receiving a similar outward cleansing, such as a shower or bath, may be addressed in this manner as well.

Cleanliness and purity are also practiced at mosques, the traditional buildings of worship for Muslims. Water is provided outside of mosques so that visitors may wash their hands, feet, and faces. This respect for cleanliness and purity is symbolically represented through the expression of *nayman*, as it demonstrates that a person has done an act to become clean on the outside.

**Faith and Peace**

It is important to frequently seek the favor of Allah by blessing the lives of others. Hope expressions demonstrate the faith that Syrians have in Allah as well the hopes they have for other humans. These idioms show the desire Muslims have to bless the lives of others and to build relationships.

A traditional greeting is *as salaam aleekum* [is-saa-lom a-lay-kuum], which literally means “peace be upon you.” Syrians respond to this expression with a similar expression, *wa aleekum as salaam* [wa a-lay-kuum is-saa-lom], which means “and upon you, be peace.” Greetings are another example of how people reflect their hope for others in their speech.

**Division of Expressions**

Hope expressions may be divided into two distinct categories: social and personal. The social aspect of hope expressions deals with relationships among humans: people mutually desire to bless one another. These blessings are given frequently and express one person’s desire that Allah bless another. The second category deals with the relationship that one has with Allah: people express gratitude and desires that are a type of prayer to Allah.

Social hope expressions are used for the speaker to bless others. Speakers are able to bless others by showing a desire that Allah help a friend or acquaintance. One of the expressions, *yasellemuu eedaik* [ya-sell-im-moo ee-dayk], literally means “may he
[Allah] put peace upon your hands.” This is spoken by a person who is being served by someone else. For example, when a meal is served, the people at the table would wish this blessing on the person serving the food. The server reiterates the blessing, although with fewer words, desiring the same blessing for those at the table. Another blessing, *maa salaama* [maa sa-lom-uh], meaning “go with peace,” is used when Muslims say goodbye.

Even the Arabic word for “congratulations” has a religious tone. In order to congratulate someone, a Syrian would say *mabruuk* [ma bruuk], which literally means “blessed one.” This indicates that Allah has allowed an accomplishment to take place in the person’s life and that person must therefore be blessed. All of these expressions show that Syrians want Allah to bless others with peace in their lives.

It is interesting to note that some of these expressions have similar counterparts in other languages. For example, many English speakers use phrases such as “May God rest his soul” to show respect for a deceased person. Expressions of hope are common in a number of cultures and show the concern people have for one another.

Other hope expressions focus on the relationship between Allah and man. One such expression is *al hamdu lillah* [ill-hum-do li-lah], which means “praise be to God.” This is used often in speech to indicate that a person is well, attributing his or her health to the blessings that Allah bestows upon him or her. Expressions of this type abound and are quite varied. Some express a person’s wish that Allah permit good things to happen in his or her life, such as *Allah yafuthuk* [ah-lah ya-futh-uk], which means “may God preserve you.” For Muslims, a good relationship between God and man is very important.

**Respect for Expressions**

Muhammad, the prophet who established Islam, is believed to have started many of these expressions. In his life, Muhammad used many sayings that are now collectively entitled the *hadith* [ha-deeth]. Since Muhammad is considered the greatest prophet, his expressions are sacred to Muslims. His words are visibly preserved through calligraphy, paintings, carvings, embroidery, and the everyday language of Syrians (see Folklore & Language Visuals 4 and 5).

**Activities**

1. In small groups of three to five, think of a specific expression of hope. Create a skit that uses this expression and present it to the class; afterwards, explain how this expression shows important values.

2. Who are your closest friends? Teach them what you have learned about Syrian hope expressions and how these affect the way Syrians approach and value relationships. Do you think hope expressions would improve your relationships with friends and family? Why? Would hope expressions change the way you treat people you don’t know? Write a brief summary of your thoughts.
3. Select a hope expression and use it three times in your day-to-day interactions with fellow students, teachers, parents, or others. If necessary, explain to these people why you are using a hope expression. Write a brief summary of your experience using a hope expression.

4. Imagine you are a Syrian teenager and have grown accustomed to using and hearing the expressions of hope that we have learned about. What would it be like for you to move to the U.S.? Would you continue to use hope expressions, even though they are not common in English? What would you think about the way U.S. teenagers express themselves? Discuss this topic in small groups and report your ideas to the class.

5. Think of the expressions that you have learned and how they help you understand Syrian culture, particularly relationships with friends. Write a summary of what you have learned from these expressions and how this has helped you to better understand what Syrians value.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do idiomatic expressions form? How do the meanings of expressions develop? What enables expressions to become widespread?

2. What do expressions of hope tell you about the Syrian people? How do such expressions help you determine what values these people have? Why would knowledge of such expressions help you understand Syrians?

3. Think about commonly used expressions in English such as “bless you” or “thank God.” How do such expressions show desires similar to those we have studied in this lesson? Why do you think that such expressions appear all over the world?

4. How do hope expressions relate to the values of Islam? What do they show us about the belief Syrians have in their religion?

5. Why is hope such a fundamental concept in the lives of Syrians? How do you express your hopes? How do these methods differ from the methods used by Syrians? What similarities exist between the methods?

6. What do hope expressions teach you about the importance of relationships to Syrians? Why do you think Syrians treasure these relationships? How do you show your values with respect to relationships? What similarities or differences exist between the ways you and Syrians value relationships?
**FOOD**

**RAMADAN**

*Ramadan* [ram-uh-dahn] is the holy month of Islam. From sunrise to sunset, Muslims abstain from food, drink, tobacco, and all other items that can be physically consumed. They do, however, eat a small meal before dawn and another meal after the sun sets. Each evening meal during Ramadan is a time for families and friends to gather together and strengthen relationships. Hospitality is especially important during Ramadan, and any guests are treated with profound respect.

### Starting Points

1. Look at the pictures of people eating together (*see Food Visual 1*). Is mealtine important to your family? When do you gather as a family and eat meals together? Food is an important part of Ramadan. On each day of this month, friends and family join to share a meal in celebration of the end of the fast.

2. Imagine that you have just gone through a long day of school and you have not been able to participate for the whole day in an activity that you desire to do. How do you feel? Whom would you want to share that activity with? Ramadan is a holy month for Muslims in which they fast from sunrise to sunset each day. In the evening, they share a meal with friends and family.

3. Why is food important in our lives? Why is eating commonly accompanied by social interaction? How do meals foster social interaction? Evening meals during the month of Ramadan demonstrate how food enables people to build relationships, especially among friends and family.

### Information

**Introduction to Ramadan**

Ramadan is important to Muslims because it promotes fasting, one of the fundamental principles of Islam. These principles are called pillars because they are the foundational practices necessary for all Muslims. There are five pillars: *shahadah* [shah-hah-duh], or testimony; *salah* [suh-la] (prayer); *sawm* [sawm] (fasting); *zakat* [zuh-khat] (purification); and *hajj* [haj] (pilgrimage).

Fasting, the third pillar, is an established activity in Muslim homes throughout the world. During the ninth month of the Islamic calendar (Ramadan), all Muslims fast on a daily basis. The meal eaten before dawn, which is called *suhoor* [sue-huur], or related to dawn, begins the fast. The meal eaten after the sun sets on each day, called *iftar* [if-tar], or breaking, ends the fast for that day (*see Food Visuals 1 and 2*).
Religious Teachings
The Cow 2:185 reads: “Ramadhan is the [month] in which was sent down the Qur’an, as a guide to mankind, also clear [signs] for guidance and judgment [between right and wrong]. So every one of you who is present [at his home] during that month should spend it in fasting.” According to this passage, Allah gave Muhammad the Qur’an during the month of Ramadan, and so Allah expects Muslims to show their gratitude by fasting. The Qur’an also teaches the importance of fasting. One passage in the Cow 2:183 states, “O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may [learn] self-restraint.”

Prayer, the second pillar of Islam, is important during Ramadan. Although Syrians pray on a daily basis to purify themselves, prayer is even more crucial during the month of Ramadan. During this month, Muslims offer prayers in mosques to show their gratitude for what God has allowed them to accomplish during Ramadan (see Food Visual 3).

Purification, the fourth pillar of Islam, is a fundamental aspect of Ramadan. Purification is divided into two stages: first seeking purification through fasting, and then giving a certain sum of money to help the needy. Although this was originally measured in terms of agricultural products, such as wheat, dates, or rice, it is now normally given in currency. This practice gives Syrians a chance to show their faith in Allah and develop care for others, completing the process of purification.

Food
The first pillar of Islam is the testimony that Muslims pronounce to show their faith in God and in his prophet Muhammad. Breaking the fast is one way Muslims demonstrate the respect they have for Muhammad. As Muhammad traditionally ate dates (known as tamar [tum-mer]) to break his fasts, Muslims generally break their fast by first eating a few dates as well (see Food Visuals 4 and 5).

Syrians eat many other foods to break their fast, including a salad with croutons called fattouch [fat-touch]; soup made from lentils; hollow balls of meat paste prepared from minced meat and cracked wheat, then stuffed with minced meat and pine nuts and deep fried, called kubbeh [coo-bay]; a dip, called hummus [boom-uh-s], made of chickpeas and tahini [ta-hi-ni], or sesame paste; and a variety of sweets, or helawiyaat [hell-a-wee-yat]. Coffee, or qahwa [ka-ha-wa], is a popular beverage for breaking the fast (see Food Visual 6).
Hummus Recipe
You will need:

- 1 large can chickpeas (garbanzo beans)
- 2 garlic cloves
- 3 T tahini
- juice of 2 lemons

Preparation
1. Put all ingredients in food processor.
2. Add small amounts of water until the desired consistency is reached.
3. Serve as dip for chips or topping for bread.

Lentil Soup Recipe
You will need:

- 2 C lentils
- 6 C chicken broth
- 3 garlic cloves
- 1 chopped onion
- 2 diced tomatoes
- 1 tsp turmeric
- 2 T olive oil
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 fresh lemon
- pepper to taste

Preparation
1. Wash lentils thoroughly in a colander and soak them in a bowl of water for 30 minutes.
2. Sautéé garlic and onion in olive oil. When onions are soft, add cumin seeds and stir until seeds pop.
3. Add turmeric and tomatoes and stir for 2 minutes. Add chicken broth and lentils.
4. Cook in a pressure cooker for 10 minutes and set the pressure cooker aside to cool. If a pressure cooker not available, cook in a covered pan for 1 hour, then uncover the pan and cook for 15 minutes. Use a whisk to blend.
5. Add freshly squeezed lemon juice and pepper.

Taboule Recipe
You will need:

- 1 ½ C bulgur (cracked wheat)
- ½ C chopped fresh parsley
- 2 T chopped fresh mint
- 3 tomatoes seeded and chopped
- 1 small red onion chopped

Dressing:
- juice of 1 lemon
- 4 T olive oil
- salt
- pepper

Preparation
1. Wash and soak cracked wheat in bowl of water for 30 minutes.
2. Drain wheat and combine first 5 ingredients in a salad bowl.
3. Combine lemon juice, olive oil, salt, and pepper in small bowl. Mix.
4. Add dressing to salad. Toss salad.
5. Let chill for at least 1 hour.
Strengthening Relationships

Syrians are generally very hospitable, and their hospitality is even more pronounced during Ramadan. They go to great effort to make their guests comfortable, which once again demonstrates the emphasis that Syrians place on relationships and helping one another. An abundance of food is prepared, shared, and enjoyed by everyone. In Syria, there is a saying that goes, “The eye must be as satisfied as the mouth and stomach.” In other words, your table needs to be covered with many sumptuous dishes.

Islam reaches beyond national and cultural boundaries. Muslims strive to develop a relationship of kindness and tolerance with other cultures and religions. In fact, Syrians show great excitement at having people of different races and cultures over for an iftar. They love to share what they have with others because it provides them with the enjoyment of blessing others (see Food Visual 7).

As a result, Ramadan festivities are not limited to the Muslim population; many Muslims invite Syrian Christians to take part in the iftar along with them. The month is widely respected by the Christian population of Syria, and most Muslims are happy to allow Christians to participate in their celebrations of Ramadan.

Celebrations

On the last day of Ramadan, a special celebration is held, called Eid al Fitr [aid ill fitter], which means “celebration of the breaking (of the fast).” An eid is an important event, like a holiday. Having family and friends over to celebrate an eid is considered a privilege and a duty, since the eid is the meal to end the last fast of the month and to celebrate the start of Eid al Fitr.

Eid al Fitr officially begins as the new month begins. In a lunar calendar, such as the Islamic calendar, a new month begins according to the phases of the moon. The next (tenth) month of Shawwal [sha-wall] marks the beginning of the celebration of Eid al Fitr.

Activities

1. In groups of three to five, think about what it would be like to participate in an evening meal during Ramadan with friends and family. You are responsible for preparing the meal and activities for this particular day. Brainstorm possible ideas for the meal. Try making some of the recipes given in this section.

2. Write about what you felt as you learned about Ramadan. What similar experiences in your life would help you relate to what goes on during Ramadan? What do you think it would be like to participate in such an event? What would you do to ensure that you were observing the important aspects of the evening meals?

3. Think of something you crave. What would it be like to try and ignore that craving for a month, with exceptions at sunrise and sunset? Write about how you would feel in such a situation. Compare this with what you think Syrians feel as they participate in Ramadan.
4. Write a summary of what you have learned about Ramadan and what it teaches you about Syrians and their values. Teach three friends or family members about Ramadan using your summary. Write down the reactions, comments, or questions of those you taught. Does their feedback change what you think about Ramadan?

5. In groups of five, think of three trivia questions related to Ramadan. Take turns asking and answering each other’s questions. Discuss any interesting issues that come up, including your own opinion about what you have learned.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Why do Muslims observe Ramadan? How does an understanding of Ramadan help identify Syrian values?

2. Why are meals important? How does sharing food help build relationships? What is it about Ramadan that deepens relationships between family and friends?

3. Why do you believe Muslims are hospitable even to those of other faiths? How is this demonstrated during Ramadan? What does this say about how Muslims value relationships?

4. How do meals during Ramadan compare with holiday meals in the U.S., such as Thanksgiving, Easter, or Christmas? What are some of the similarities that exist between meals during or at Ramadan and holiday meals in the U.S.? What do these similarities tell us about human nature?

5. Why do many people dedicate time and energy to providing a hospitable environment for their friends and family? How do these efforts help us understand the importance of relationships to Syrians? What is it about Ramadan and the preparation of the evening meal that creates this desire to sacrifice?

6. Muslims have five principles, or pillars, that help them make good choices. What pillars or guidelines do you use in your life to help you make choices? Is it important to have principles? Do they benefit you?
CROSS-CULTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS

THE SILK ROAD

Because of Syria’s geographic location, it was able to create important trade routes in the country, many of which were part of the Silk Road. Though referred to as a road, the Silk Road was actually a network of interconnecting routes similar to a highway system. Historically, the system’s use promoted the exchange of ideas, art, and goods between civilizations from Europe and the Orient. Trade routes in Syria enabled the Silk Road to provide cross-cultural sharing between Eastern and Western cultures and thereby affected the development of the world.

Starting Points

1. Look at the pictures of camels traveling in desert areas (see Cross-cultural Contributions Visuals 1–3). What do you think about when you see these pictures? Historically, taking caravans on desert trade routes allowed distant peoples to trade goods and exchange ideas. The Silk Road is a prominent example of this kind of trade route.

2. The Internet is used every day, but what is its main purpose? It allows people from all over the world to share thoughts, ideas, and information. Like the Internet, the Silk Road, in its time, provided a means by which goods and ideas could be shared between people who previously had no contact with each other.

3. What are some ways ideas are shared? Is it difficult to share ideas? What are some ways modern technology makes sharing ideas easier? In ancient times, people had to travel long distances in order to conduct trade. How did the Silk Road make communication easier in its time? The Silk Road allowed cultures from Europe and the Orient to swap ideas, which contributed to the cultural development of the world.

Information

Geography of Syria

Syria’s location and geographical characteristics made it the most convenient area for trade caravans to pass through en route to Europe or the Orient (see Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 4). These series of routes, known as the Silk Road, made it easier to trade ideas, goods, art, and services between different parts of the world. As trade persisted, people of different cultures became more familiar with one another.

The modern nation of Syria has an interesting geographic location. It shares borders with Turkey and Iraq, both of which also held important routes along the Silk Road. Syria also has a coastline of 193 kilometers along the Mediterranean Sea. Because of this coastline, Syria has several ports and harbors. Also, the Euphrates River flows through a large portion of Syria, allowing for easy transport of goods via the river for trade with neighboring countries (see Cross-cultural Contributions Visuals 5 and 6).
The Mediterranean Sea borders countries in Europe, so goods for trade could easily be shipped from Europe across the Mediterranean to Syria, then on to people in the Orient (see Cross-cultural Contributions Visuals 7 and 8). Because shipping is considerably faster than land travel, Syria’s ports and harbors were an invaluable asset for European traders using the Silk Road.

Ancient Cities
Syria had a crucial role in the development of trade along the Silk Road because it provided travelers and caravans with a shelter in the middle of a harsh, desert climate. A type of ancient motel, known as a khan [khan], became popular along the Silk Road. A khan is a square complex with only one entrance, which is large enough to allow pack animals to enter. The middle is a large, uncovered courtyard, and merchant quarters line the walls. Here, travelers could rest, obtain supplies, and store their goods. Khans may still be found today in cities such as Damascus and Aleppo.

The Syrian city of Aleppo and the nearby Antioch (in modern-day Turkey) were of particular significance at the time. Aleppo’s position, midway between the Euphrates and the Mediterranean, made it a rest stop for several trade routes—and a site of extensive cultural transmission. Antioch, which was once the capital of Syria, was also a major city along many trade routes. These cities throughout Syria made travel along the Silk Road safer and easier.

Syria expanded the opportunities for international trade. It helped travel become safer by providing both a safe haven and sea access to travelers and traders on the Silk Road. Cities along the trade route became centers for the mixing of cultures and new ideas—hot spots of intercultural exchange that have affected the development of the world.

Effect of Trade on the World
Trade along the Silk Road was important to the development of many great civilizations. Some of these included ancient Egypt, China, India, and Rome. The Silk Road was critical to the advancement of technology. Some of these advances included new materials that could be used for buildings and weapons. Two very influential technologies were transmitted from the East to the West via the Silk Road: gunpowder and printing. Other commodities such as silk and spices gave life new flavor (see Cross-cultural Contributions Visuals 9–11). This exchange of ideas still affects us in modern times.

Gunpowder was in widespread use in China by 1000 C.E. This technology was soon adopted by the Persian Empire through pre–Silk Road trade routes between China and the Middle East. Europeans were exposed to gunpowder during the Crusades, and as European nations developed, they built upon the uses of gunpowder. The Silk Road provided the means for spreading gunpowder from the Orient to Europe.

Modern printing practices are also the direct result of idea exchanges across the Silk Road. Printing was invented in China between the fourth and seventh centuries C.E. These early printing presses consisted of carved wooden blocks and were primarily used to reproduce Buddhist scriptural texts. Although movable type was also invented in China (1040 C.E.), the complexity of Chinese characters made its use limited.
Johannes Gutenberg adapted several of these Chinese inventions into the printing press in the 1450s C.E., an event that has had incredible influence on world history. As ideas and goods were traded, people gained a greater understanding of one another. Technological advances spread quickly and pushed progress all over the world. Ideas were spread and shared more rapidly than ever before.

Trade along the Silk Road promoted unity and understanding of other cultures. Weak nations could not have survived if strong nations had not protected the trade routes. For example, the powerful Mongol Empire protected the Silk Road and enabled it to function efficiently for a time; however, as the empire declined, a lack of unity in the different cultures along the Silk Road resulted in its downfall. It became too dangerous to use without protection from a powerful nation, and this once great trade route fell into disuse.

Activities

1. In groups of four, identify two cultures that lived along the Silk Road. Two of you will represent one culture, and the other two will represent the other culture. Think about the contributions or ideas that you would want to share with the other group. Present your ideas to the other culture group. What do you have to offer? What do they offer in return? How does sharing ideas help each group?

2. Using the Internet or an encyclopedia, search for a map of the Silk Road. Imagine that you had to make your way from Chang’an (ancient capital of China) to Rome. Make a travel outline as if you were going to make a journey with a caravan. Which routes would you take? What would you need to bring? Write out your travel outline.

3. Think of a culture you have heard of but are unfamiliar with. Use any sources available to learn about the culture. What similarities or differences are there between what your culture is like and what the other culture is like? Write a summary of what you learned.

4. Other than the Internet, what is a modern example of a situation or idea exchange that is comparable to the Silk Road? Write a description about what the Silk Road allowed people to accomplish and compare it with your chosen modern example. How could this example be implemented to promote exchanges between groups that have not had much contact? What would this intercultural contact accomplish?

5. Think of a product or idea that might have been exchanged along the Silk Road. If billboards had been around at the time of travel along these routes, how would they have been designed? Make a billboard design for your product that would encourage Silk Road traders and travelers to buy it.
Discussion Questions

1. How has exchanging ideas and goods affected the world? What modern examples can you think of that facilitate similar exchanges? Why is sharing ideas important? How might you participate in this process?

2. How does the geography of a region affect its ability to interact with other countries? What are some ways the geography of an area determines its role in the world? How has this changed over time with technological advances?

3. As ideas and goods were exchanged anciently, how did this affect the perceptions different cultures had of one another? What misconceptions would these people have had about each other prior to trade? How do you think trade affected these misconceptions? What positive or negative consequences would result?

4. What does the Silk Road teach us about the importance of sharing ideas? How can sharing ideas help us to better understand others?

5. How did Syria’s role in the Silk Road affect its history and people? Why were trade routes through Syria able to function so well? What might be different today if Syria had not been involved in Silk Road trade?

6. Why do you think sharing ideas and thoughts is so prevalent today? How was it accomplished anciently? What different methods have evolved?
**FACTS ABOUT SYRIA**

Official name: Syrian Arab Republic (Syria)

Capital: Damascus

Government Type: republic under an authoritarian military-dominated regime

Area: 185,180 sq km

Land Boundaries: Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey

Climate: mostly desert; hot, dry, sunny summers and mild, rainy winters along coast; cold weather with snow or sleet periodically in Damascus

Lowest Point: unnamed location near Lake Tiberias 200 m below sea level

Highest Point: Mount Hermon 2,814 m

Natural Resources: petroleum, phosphates, chrome and manganese ores, asphalt, iron ore, rock salt, marble, gypsum, hydropower

Natural Hazards: dust storms, sandstorms

Population: 19,314,747 (2007 est.)

Ethnic Groups: Arab 90.3%; Kurds, Armenians, and others 9.7%

Religions: Sunni Muslim 74%; Alawite, Druze, and other Muslim sects 16%; Christian 10%; small Jewish communities

Languages: Arabic (official); Kurdish, Armenian, Aramaic, Circassian; French, English (somewhat understood)

GDP: $86.59 billion (2007 est.)

GDP Per Capita: $4,500 (2007 est.)
**HISTORY AND HOLIDAYS**

**TIME LINE**

1517 C.E. Ottomans establish control over the area and rule for most of the next four hundred years

1918 Arab revolt in Damascus; Emir Faysal establishes the independent kingdom of Syria

1920 League of Nations mandate orders the French to enter Syria

1946 Syria gains independence from France; republican government takes control

1949 Series of military coups begin that cause instability in civilian rule over the next few years

1951 Adib Shishakli seizes power and becomes president

1954 President Shishakli is overthrown

1958 Egypt and Syria unite in the United Arab Republic

1961 Syria secedes from union with Egypt and establishes itself as the Syrian Arab Republic

1963 The Ba’ath party (political party that was established in Iraq and Syria) assumes power under Amin-al Hafez

1967 Syria loses the Golan Heights to Israel as a result of the Arab-Israeli War

1970 Hafiz al Asad stages a military coup and becomes prime minister

1971 National referendum establishes al Asad as president for a seven-year term

1973 October War: Syria invades Golan Heights and reclaims a small portion of it

1976 Syria sends troops into Lebanon for peacekeeping purposes

1976 A Sunni Islamist movement, the Muslim Brotherhood, begins an armed insurgency against the government

1982 Uprising of Muslim Brotherhood ends as government forces attack the stronghold of its opposition group in Hama

1991 Syria participates in coalition against Saddam Hussein

1991 Syria participates in Middle East Peace Conference in Madrid, beginning direct negotiations with Israel that continue throughout the decade

2000 President Hafiz al Asad dies

2000 Parliament reduces mandatory minimum age of president, allowing for Bashar al Asad to be nominated and elected by referendum as the next president

2000 Bashar al Asad opens up society, lifting bans on Internet, mobile phones, and the spread of computer technology

2001 Syria begins limited cooperation with the U.S. global war countering terrorism
2005 Syria withdraws military from neighboring Lebanon because of pressure from the UN
2005 UN investigations implicate possible Syrian participation in the assassination of Rafik Hariri, a former Lebanese Prime Minister

HOLIDAYS

1 Jan New Year’s Day
8 Mar March 8 Revolution (commemoration of Ba’ath Party assumption of power on 8 March 1963)
21 Mar Mother’s Day
17 Apr Independence Day (Syrian independence from Vichy France)
1 May Labor Day
6 May Martyrs’ Day (honors martyrs of the Arab nation)
25 Dec Christmas
Rabi’ al Awwal 12 Mawlid (celebrates the birth of Muhammad in the third month of the Islamic calendar)
Ramadan 1 Ramadan (ninth month of the Islamic calendar; also the month of fasting for Muslims)
Shawwal 1 Eid al Fitr (falls on the tenth month of the Islamic calendar and commemorates the end of Ramadan)
Dhu al Hijjah 10 Eid al Adha (twelfth and final month of Islamic calendar and celebrates those completing pilgrimage to Mecca in this month)
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

SYRIAN EMBASSY TO THE UNITED STATES
2215 Wyoming Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20008
Phone: (202) 232-6313
Fax: (202) 265-4585 (consular affairs, passport, visa)
        (202) 232-4357 (culture, trips, certifications)
E-mail: info@syrembassy.net
Web site: http://www.syrianembassy.us/

MINISTRY OF TOURISM
Barada Street
PO Box 6642
Damascus, Syria
Phone: 00963 11/221-0122, Fax: 00963 11/224-2636
E-mail: min-tourism@mail.sy
Web site: http://www.syriatourism.org

BOOKS
Farha, Hanna. Courtesy Expressions in Spoken Arabic, s.n., 1971.
MacDougall, Elizabeth and Richard Ettinghausen. The Islamic Garden, Dumberton Oaks/Trustees for Harvard University, 1976.


**INTERNET SITES**

**A Country Study—Syria:**
http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/sytoc.html

**Arabic Literature:**
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabic_literature

**Caravanserai:**
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caravanserai

**CIA World Factbook:**

**Gardens of Paradise—Part Two:**
http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/garden_design/61662

**Hadith:**
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadith

**IslamiCity:**
http://www.islamicity.com/MOSQUE/ARABICSCRIPT/AYAT/3/3_15.htm

**IslamiCity Qur’an Search (trans. Yusuf Ali):**
http://www.islamicity.com/QuranSearch/

**Medina Portal—Syria:**
http://www.medinaproject.net/syria/pages/home.php

**Paradise Gardens:**
http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/668/23917

**Printing:**
http://www.silkroadfoundation.org/artl/printing.shtml

**Ramadan—Basic Facts and History:**
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramadan

**Ramadan’s Significance:**
http://www.islamiclifestyles.com/Ramadan.htm

**Sham Gardens:**
http://www.shamgardens.com

**Silk Road:**
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silk_road

**Silk Road Trade—History of Gunpowder:**
Syria:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syria

Syria—Country Briefing:

Syrian Colloquial Arabic Course:
http://www.syrianarabic.com/

Syrian Food:
http://www.syrialive.net/food/food.htm

The Arabic Language:

The Seljuk Han of Anatolia:
http://www.turkishhan.org/definition.htm

TRANSLATIONS
Surah 2—The Cow:
http://www.islamicity.com/mosque/QURAN/2.htm

Surah 13—The Thunder:

Verses About Fasting:
http://www.islamicity.com/ramadan/Fasting_in_the_Quran.shtml

MEDIA
Syrian Arabic Phonology, School of Languages and Linguistics: Georgetown University, 1971.
Guidelines
The link to http://www.islamicity.com/Mosque/Arabicscript/Ayat/3/3_15.htm shows a verse (Al-Imran 3:15) from the Qur’an in Arabic.
Click on the box containing the verse to hear audio.
The transliteration is written to the left, and the translation is shown below.
For convenience, the passage, along with its transliteration and translation, are shown here:

Transliteration
Qul aonabbiokum bikhayrin min thalikum lillatheena ittaqaw AAinda rabbihim jannatun tajree min tahtiha alanharu khalideena feeha waazwajun mutahharatun waridwanun mina Allahi wallahu baseerun bilAAibad.

English Translation
Say: Shall I give you glad tidings of things Far better than those? For the righteous are gardens in nearness to their Lord, with rivers flowing beneath; therein is their eternal home; with companions pure [and holy]; and the good pleasure of Allah. For in Allah’s sight are [all] is servants.

(All repeated from the Web page: http://www.islamicity.com/Mosque/Arabicscript/Ayat/3/3_15.htm)
Traditions Visual 3: Hadiiqa (Landscape)
Traditions Visual 6: Syrian Money
The following is an excerpt from a journal I kept while I was in Syria. It records one of my most memorable experiences in a Syrian garden:

As I was sitting in a garden in Aleppo, I saw a man wearing a *kufiyya* [ku-fi-ya], or cloth worn by Bedouins to cover their head, walk by. He was rolling a soccer ball on his finger. His wife accompanied him, wearing a *hijaab* [hee-jab], or a covering worn on the head by women. In addition, some children were skipping along through the rays of sunlight that penetrated the foliage of the trees above.

As I sat in the garden and wrote in my journal, I felt strongly that gardens were places of peace similar to holy places in other religions and that in such places, relationships can be fortified.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intercultural Outreach CultureGuides</th>
<th>Folklore &amp; Language Visual 1: Hope Expressions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allah yanam aleek</td>
<td>may God make you tender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as salaam aleekum</td>
<td>peace be upon you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wa aleekum as salaam</td>
<td>and upon you be peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yaselleumuu eedaik</td>
<td>may God keep your hands safe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maa salaama</td>
<td>go with peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mabruuk</td>
<td>blessed one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>al hamdu lillah</td>
<td>thanks be to God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allah yafuthuk</td>
<td>may God preserve you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allah yurhumhuu [al-lah yir-ha-mu]</td>
<td>may God be merciful to him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sabah (masaa) al khayr</td>
<td>morning (evening) of goodness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[sa-bah (ma-sa) al-khayr]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sabah (masaa) annur</td>
<td>morning (evening) of light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[sa-bah (ma-sa) an-nur]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allah yasellmuk [al-lah yi-sal-le-mak]</td>
<td>may God keep you safe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allah yaatiik al afiiyah</td>
<td>may God give you health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[al-lah ya-tik al afi-yah]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eid mubarak [eid Mu-ba-rak]</td>
<td>blessed holiday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Folklore & Language Visual 2: The Qur’an
Folklore & Language Visual 5: Calligraphy in Aleppo Citadel
Food Visual 2: Word Search (1 of 2)

SYRIAN FOOD FEST

Find the eighteen words related to food and Syria in the word search below.

Allah  Kazah  prayer  shahadah
Eid Al Fitr  Mecca  Qur’an  zakat
family  Mohammad  Ramadan  tradition
fasting  mosque  salah  sawm
hajj  Muslim  sawm

Intercultural Outreach CultureGuides
Food Visual 4: Tamar (Dates)
Food Visual 5: Tamar Tree (Date Palm)
I was invited to a few iftars while I was living in Syria. At one of these iftars, I was admiring a set of beads that one of the people had there. These beads are basically a necklace-like object with three sets of thirty-three beads each. In Muslim tradition, there are one hundred names of Allah, of which only ninety-nine are known. Many of the names describe attributes of Allah that the Muslims admire. The beads are used by Muslims to memorize the ninety-nine names of Allah, allowing them to learn of his characteristics. As I told a teenage boy how neat the beads were to me, he offered them to me as a gift. I was shocked by his proposal, but he kept persisting, and I have them today. This experience demonstrated to me the desire that Syrians have to bless the lives of others. It seems that learning the attributes of Allah through his names has a lasting effect on the people of Syria, as Allah is described as a giver of good things.
Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 1: Camels Resting
Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 3: Camels Feeding in the Deseret
Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 4: Trade Caravan Mosaic
Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 6: Bridge Crossing over Euphrates River
Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 7: Boasts on the Mediterranean Sea
The flag of Syria is a tricolor with three horizontal bands: red (top), white, and black. The red band represents the Arab Liberation flag, and the white band incorporates the former flag of the United Arab Republic, where two green five-pointed stars symbolized the constituent states of Syria and Egypt. This flag is similar to the flag of Yemen, which has a plain white band; the flag of Iraq, with three green stars (plus an Arabic inscription) in a horizontal line centered in the white band; and the flag of Egypt, which has a gold Eagle of Saladin centered in the white band. The current flag design dates to 1980.