

Countering Islamophobia and Anti-Arab Racism

Variation of Learning for Justice's [Countering Islamophobia](#); recommended to be paired with [Countering Antisemitism](#)

Overview

This lesson helps students explore, confront and deconstruct stereotypes targeted at Muslims and Arab people. Students will learn about the impact of Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism and create an anti-Islamophobia and anti-racist campaign to display in school.

Grade Level

9-12

Time

Total: 70 minutes, plus optional time for assessment

Warm up activity (20 minutes), discussion part 1 (30 minutes), discussion part 2 (20 minutes), optional assessment (varies)

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- analyze myths and misconceptions about Muslims and Arab people.
- explain the meaning of Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism and their effects.
- create an anti-Islamophobia and anti-racist campaign to display in school.

New Jersey Content Standards

9.4.2.GCA.1: Articulate the role of culture in everyday life by describing one's own culture and comparing it to the cultures of other individuals (e.g., 1.5.2.C2a, 7.1.NL.IPERS.5, 7.1.NL.IPERS.6).

9.4.5.GCA.1: Analyze how culture shapes individual and community perspectives and points of view (e.g., 1.1.5.C2a, RL.5.9, 6.1.5.HistoryCC.8).

9.4.8.GCA.1: Model how to navigate cultural differences with sensitivity and respect (e.g., 1.5.8.C1a).

9.4.8.GCA.2: Demonstrate openness to diverse ideas and perspectives through active discussions to achieve a group goal.

9.4.12.GCA.1: Collaborate with individuals to analyze a variety of potential solutions to climate change effects and determine why some solutions (e.g., political, economic, cultural) may work better than others (e.g., SL.11-12.1., HS-ETS1-1, HS-ETS1-2, HS-ETS1-4, 6.3.12.GeoGI.1, 7.1.IH.IPERS.6, 7.1.IL.IPERS.7, 8.2.12.ETW.3).

Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.9,
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.5

Resources Needed

- Internet access
- “Debunking Misconceptions About Muslims and Islam” handout
- Student devices with internet access
- Instructor device with internet and projector access
- “Hijab in Europe” handout
- Poster making supplies, audio and video recording equipment, and other materials for assessment activities

Warm Up Activity

1. Begin your work by discussing stereotypes. As a class, define the term. Then identify some stereotypes that you sometimes experience because you are a student. For example, do people sometimes make assumptions about you based on your age or the school you attend? What is wrong about those assumptions? Generalize from your discussion by answering the question: What makes stereotypes destructive?
2. Divide the class into small groups to explore the handout [Debunking Misconceptions About Muslims](#) and the article [Myths and Stereotypes about Arabs and Culture](#). Have a group member read aloud the first misconception. Have each group member take a turn answering these questions: Have you heard this stereotype before? Did you believe it? Then have the same group member read the explanation on the handout of what makes the misconception inaccurate. Consider the other stereotypes one at a time, following the same procedure. When your group has debunked all four stereotypes, formulate a group statement that completes this prompt: *In this activity about stereotypes, we learned _____*. Have each group share its statement.
3. Ask students, “What happens when stereotypes and prejudice go unchecked?” Students may describe the negative consequences without explicitly using the terms discrimination, oppression, Islamophobia, or anti-Arab racism. Introduce the following terms and definitions in the discussion.

discrimination [dih-skrim-uh-ney-shuh n] (*noun*) the treatment of a person or a group of people as less worthy than other people, often because of traits such as race, gender, religion, ethnicity, ability or sexual orientation

hijab [hi-jahb] (*noun*) a traditional scarf worn by Muslim women to cover the hair and neck and sometimes the face

Islam [is-lahm] (*noun*) the religious faith of Muslims, based on the words and religious system founded by the prophet Muhammad and taught by a spiritual text called the Koran

Islamophobia [is-lahm-uh-foe-bee-ah] (*noun*) hatred or fear of Muslims or of their politics or culture

Muslim [muhz-lim] (*adjective*) relating to the religion, law or civilization of Islam
(*noun*) a person who follows Islam

oppression [uh-presh-uh n] (*noun*) the exercise of authority or power in a burdensome, cruel or unjust manner

stereotype [ster-ee-uh-tahyp] (*noun*) An oversimplified or biased characterization of a group or a “typical” individual member of a group

Discussion: General Islamophobia and Anti-Arab Racism

1. Show a picture of [Ahmed Mohammed](#) and ask students what happened to him (many may know or can guess from the photo). Ahmed was arrested for bringing a homemade clock to school. President Obama later invited him to the White House. How did stereotypes and Islamophobia cause Ahmed to be arrested?
2. Show a photo of an [anti-Muslim bus ad](#). What is the message of the ad? What does it mean? This ad was posted on buses in major cities in the U.S. by an anti-Muslim organization called the American Freedom Defense Fund.
3. Show photos of [Kamala Khan ad cover ups](#) in San Francisco. An artist covered the bus ads in San Francisco. How does the Kamala Khan artwork fight Islamophobia?
4. Islamophobia is affecting students in other countries as well. Show the video “[Hijab in Europe](#).” Have students answer questions on the “[Hijab in Europe](#)” worksheet.

Discussion: Islamophobia and Anti-Arab Racism Today

1. Let students know that Islamophobic, anti-Arab, and anti-Palestinian incidents are on the rise since the events of October 7. While the events of October 7 are not the focus of this lesson, it is important to acknowledge the impact that these events have had on Muslim, Arab, and Palestinian people in the United States. Ask students if they are familiar with any of these incidents. (Examples may include [the shooting of three Palestinian college students in Vermont](#), [the stabbing of a 6-year-old Palestinian boy in Chicago](#), [Islamophobic posters at the University of Ottawa](#), or [the censure of Rep. Rashida Tlaib](#).)

2. Ask students to reflect on the misconceptions and stereotypes explored in the warm up activity. Are any of those indicated in the incidents that students listed?
3. Ask students to think about the ways that they have seen individuals counteract Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism (for example, the Kamala Khan ad cover ups), and what could have helped them in their own experiences that they wrote about on the Hijab in Europe worksheet.

Assessment (Optional)

1. Ask students to develop an [ad campaign](#) that counters the Islamophobic and racist ideas they observed in the lesson. The campaign can include posters, public service announcements and radio commercials. Display posters around campus and allow students to show PSAs to the student body.
2. When the campaign is finished, use journal writing or Talking Circles to facilitate student reflection. Some suggested reflection questions:
 - What did you learn from the PSAs and posters you observed? Which was your favorite? What were its strengths? Why was it effective?
 - What did you learn from this experience? What about the process stands out for you?
 - How does your anti-Islamophobia and anti-racism campaign relate back to the stories we heard in our Islamophobia lesson?

Connecting Islamophobia and Antisemitism

Share with students [that researchers have found](#) that both Islamophobic and antisemitic hate crimes tend to be perpetrated by the same extremist communities, and that individuals with Islamophobic views also tend to hold antisemitic views. Ask students to reflect on whether there overlaps between the Islamophobic and antisemitic stereotypes or incidents covered in these lessons, if they have also completed the Countering Antisemitism lesson.

Next, share [this article](#) about an interfaith group that came together to paint a mural over antisemitic vandalism on a synagogue in Seattle. Ask students to discuss why interfaith solidarity is particularly important in light of current events, and reflect on how they can support these efforts.