



AFTERSCHOOL EXCHANGE ACTIVITY

IDENTITY AND RELIGION

PREPARATION

Grade Levels: 9-12

Prerequisites:

The activity is created for a small group of teens in grades 9-12, with no more than twelve in a group, and is designed for 5 one hour to one hour and fifteen minute sessions.

- Record a tape of the public television program, “WIDE ANGLE: YOUNG, MUSLIM, AND FRENCH” (check local listings for time; running time: approximately 50 minutes) and watch the episode in order to be familiar with the subject matter and characters, and to fully implement the activities.
- Depending on prior knowledge, you may want to read background material related to the film. Suggested Web sites include:
 - WIDE ANGLE - <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/>
 - FRONTLINE - <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/teach/muslims/beliefs.html>
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/muslims/portraits/turkey.html>
 - NATIONMASTER - <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/French-colonies>
 - UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/humanrelations/womeninislam/whatishijab.html
 - HUMAN RIGHT'S WATCH
<http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2004/02/26/france7666.htm>
 - BBC - <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3333047.stm>
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3459963.stm>
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3476163.stm>
 - OPEN DEMOCRACY –
<http://www.opendemocracy.net/debates/article-5-57-1811.jsp#>
 - RELIGION & ETHICS NEWSWEEKLY -
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week746/p-cover.html>
- In advance read articles on the Web sites used in the activities (see below).
- If your program does not have computers for student use, print out the articles used in Activities 2 and 3 and make copies for the students.
- Prepare index cards with the following words on each: gender, nationality: American, nationality: (list other nationalities of teens in the group such as: Puerto Rican, Dominican, Caribbean, Chinese, Indian) religion, sexuality, teenager. Prepare nearly as many cards for each word as students (presumably each student will not choose each card).
- Prepare questions on poster paper: How do you identify yourself? Is there an order of importance? If you had to pick one as most important, what would it be, and why?

Materials Needed

Group leader will need:

- A television and VCR to show the WIDE ANGLE film
- Poster paper
- An easel to display the paper or tape to hang on walls
- Markers
- World map
- Push pins
- String

Students will need:

- Paper
- Pencils
- Computers with Internet access (activity can be done without computers as well)
- One or two dictionaries

Academic Goals

Teens will:

- explore issues of identity
- research a position in favor of or against the headscarf ban in France
- extract relevant information from articles
- write up supporting material in a coherent form for presentation
- compare and contrast laws regarding the wearing of headscarves in countries around the world
- sharpen presentation skills
- compare and contrast identity issues facing Muslims in France and the Netherlands
- increase awareness and knowledge regarding a worldwide issue relating to identity and religion
- reflect upon the influence of media in shaping perceptions

Social Goals

Teens will:

- share self-perceptions regarding identity issues with peers
- work cooperatively in small groups to accomplish research tasks
- share social concerns relating to their lives and those of teens represented in the film

STEPS

Warm-up activity (30 minutes)

1. Place the prepared index cards in the middle of a table. Have students choose cards that apply to how they identify themselves. Post the prepared chart paper with questions to assist in the process. Have each student comment on the ease/difficulty in choosing the

cards, and to share his/her responses to the questions. Lead a discussion: Was there similarity of opinion? If so, why do they think so? Be sure to also discuss areas of difference among student responses, and their meaning. During the discussion, post an index card for each category on a piece of poster paper.

2. Ask students how they outwardly display their identity. Answers will revolve around issues such as: clothing, jewelry, religious symbols, and hairstyle. Have students write examples on poster paper next to the corresponding index card.

Introduction (30 minutes)

1. Relate this exercise to the WIDE ANGLE film they will watch, YOUNG, MUSLIM, AND FRENCH. Explain that the film relates to issues of religious and national identity among second and third generation French-born Muslims, and that it specifically deals with the following issues:
 - the recent ban on girls wearing head scarves in public schools
 - the influence of media on the ban and perceptions of Muslims in a post 9/11 world
 - and social and educational issues facing French-born Muslims
2. In preparation for the watching the film, ask students what they know about Islam, and to describe any specific practices they're familiar with. Write responses on poster paper. See if they are familiar with the terms: Koran, Imam, Mecca, religious and secular, which figure into the film. Define or have students look them up in a dictionary. Write responses. The below definition are taken from [Merriam-Webster](#).
 - Koran - the book composed of sacred writings accepted by Muslims as revelations made to Muhammad by Allah through the angel Gabriel
 - Imam - the prayer leader of a mosque
 - Mecca - Saudi Arabia, a destination of pilgrims in the Islamic world
 - Religious - relating to or manifesting faithful devotion to an acknowledged ultimate reality or deity
 - Secular - of or relating to the worldly or temporal; not overtly or specifically religious
3. Ask if any of the students are Muslim or if they know anyone who is. What are their perceptions of Muslims and Muslim practices such as women wearing headscarves? What informed their knowledge or understanding? (Personal experience, interaction with Muslims, media – television, radio, newspaper, magazines, internet, film.) With reference to the latter, have them give examples of messages that are “out there.” Write responses on poster paper.
4. Ask students to locate the following countries and/or cities on a world map by marking with a pin: France, Paris, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and Turkey. Attach string from the North African countries and Turkey to Paris (symbolic of their immigration to France, although not all Muslims live there specifically).

Activity 2 (1 hour fifteen minutes)

1. Read with students half of the article about head covering in Islam with references to the Koran before watching the film. (Start reading from the beginning, end after the sentence, “In the present time, the context of hijab is the modest covering of a Muslim woman.”) <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/humanrelations/womeninislam/whatishijab.html>
2. Distribute the STUDENT HANDOUT. Read through the sheet with students before beginning the film to make sure they all understand the questions. Encourage students to write down additional questions they may have during the viewing. Show the WIDE ANGLE film.

Activity 3 (one hour)

1. Use the questions on the handout to start a discussion of the film and have the students role play the scenarios described on the handout. You don’t have to discuss all of the questions – if time is an issue, choose a few specific questions to talk about. Students may also write down their thoughts prior to the discussion in order to stimulate individual thought and expression during group discussion. Discussion can also take place in smaller groups, with each group focusing on a different question or two and reporting their ideas back to the larger group during the last fifteen minutes of the session.

Activity 4: (one hour to one hour fifteen minutes)

1. Divide students into three small groups. One group will read articles in favor of the headscarf ban, one will read articles opposing the ban, and the third group will focus on the broader context of headscarves in European countries. (The articles can be read online or printed in advance and distributed to students.) Ask each group to come up with at least four points supporting the opinion in the articles they read. Each group will list their points on poster paper and prepare an oral presentation of their argument to the rest of the group.

Against the ban:

- <http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2004/02/26/france7666.htm>
Human Right Watch’s position on the headscarf ban as violating religious freedom.
- <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3333047.stm>
Reaction to the French ban in the city of Lille, which has the first Muslim private school in France.

In favor of the ban:

- <http://www.opendemocracy.net/debates/article-5-57-1811.jsp#>
Article from Patrick Weil, one of the policy’s creators. Includes references to other issues plaguing French youth of North African descent that need to be addressed.

Both groups can read for relevant information:

- <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3459963.stm>

Site offers a number of different viewpoints on the ban on headscarves.

2. The third group will focus on the broader context of headscarf bans in Europe and other countries in the world, and issues of importance to Muslims in the Netherlands. They will choose two countries with bans; describe their situation, and how it is similar or dissimilar to the French situation. In addition, they will compare the issues and problems of Muslims in the Netherlands with those in France as depicted in the film. This group will write their responses on poster paper as well (the more academically able students in the class should have this topic as it requires comparing and contrasting with the French situation in addition to locating relevant information).

- <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3476163.stm>

Brief reports and links to additional information regarding countries that have bans on headscarves: France, Russia, Germany, Belgium, Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and Denmark.

- <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/> (available August 23)

Interactive Map on PBS site highlighting similar controversies and responses in 21 countries: Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria, Somalia, Tunisia, Afghanistan, Malaysia, Turkmenistan, Austria, Germany, France, Turkey, Sweden, United Kingdom, Italy, Iran, Iraq, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United States, and Australia.

- <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/muslims/portraits/turkey.html>

A look at the Turkish government's ban on headscarves at universities and government buildings from both perspectives, and an interview with a female Muslim scholar, which includes her view as to why Turkish Muslim girls are choosing to wear the veil.

- www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week746/p-cover.html

Short interviews with a writer, a councilman, a kickboxer, a legislator, and the president of the Arab European League, regarding Muslims in Europe and the Netherlands.

Activity 5 (one hour)

1. The first two groups present their area of research and positions. As a large group, discuss with the students which arguments are the most compelling. Check to see if students have changed their opinion of the ban based on the presentations.
2. The third group presents their information, which broadens the conversation and trend regarding headscarf laws. Discuss the commonalities and differences in the various countries and the opinions of Muslims in terms of identity issues, challenges they face in terms of media representation, and acceptance in European societies and around the world.

Follow up:

1. An additional area to explore with students includes activities on the topic of common misconceptions about Muslims. If your afterschool program has computers with Internet access, have students visit the Web site of public television's teen reality series [IN THE MIX: THE NEW NORMAL](#), which focused on issues relating to post 9/11. Students can take the quiz about R.M., a Muslim girl, to see what assumptions they make about her based on appearance and what they presume her life to be like. Discuss how their judgments differed from the reality. Why do they think they responded the way they did? Students can also listen to or read the transcript of conversations with four Muslim teens as they discuss what Islam is, and misconceptions of Muslims in episode three of [IN THE MIX: THE NEW NORMAL](#) series "Dealing with Differences."
3. Have each student write down three new things they learned about Islam that interests them, and three misconceptions that they also believed to be true prior. Compare in large group to see if they held common misconceptions. What was their knowledge based on? How does this information relate to what they learned from the film or activities related to it? Is there an aspect of the religion or a misconception they would like to learn more about? Have them search the Web for answers to their questions. Suggested Web sites:
 - http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/questions/women/#the_veil
Video clip of feminist perspective on wearing the hijab (veil).
 - <http://www.islamfortoday.com/hijabcanada2.htm>
An article written by a young Muslim Canadian woman who discusses her reasons for wearing a veil and rejecting modern dress.
 - <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3328277.stm>
Questions and answers regarding the history behind the ban and secularism in France, its relation to politics, ability to challenge the law, affect of ban on other religious groups, wearing of headscarves in other parts of Europe.

CREDITS

This AFTERSCHOOL EXCHANGE activity was developed by Julie Spiegel, Ph.D., Educational Specialist at The Point CDC, based on the Thirteen series [WIDE ANGLE](#).

HANDOUT: YOUNG, MUSLIM, AND FRENCH

Main characters you will meet in the film:

- Manal (French Muslim teen)
- Manal's mother, high school principal
- Journalist
- the President of France
- member of French Parliament
- Mayor of Dammarie
- male youth in Dammarie
- Khalil (rector of the mosque)
- Haji (teacher)
- male youth converting to Islam

Questions for Discussion:

1. The new school year is approaching, and the headscarf ban will be in effect. What advice would you give to Manal and other girls who wear the headscarf? Have you or someone you know faced similar issues or struggles regarding beliefs clashing with school/state laws or job discrimination because of your ethnic background?
2. Choose two people with opposing views in the film. Do a role play with them together in the same room. Do they come to a mutual understanding and acceptance of one another?
3. Based on what you have heard from people in the film, do you think that French citizens can be both Muslim and French at the same time? What are their challenges? How do you balance aspects of your identity?
4. Respond to the following comment made by a man at a mosque at the closing of the film:
“The more attacks on headscarves, the more headscarves there will be.”
Does this relate to anything in your life or the lives of youth?
5. Agree or disagree with the statement made in the film:
“The laws of exclusion won't help us live together.”
What are some barriers that make living together difficult, and what suggestions do you have for helping the situation in France with regard to Muslims? (For example, youth interviewed in “ethnic ghettos”)