The Middle East is a region that encompasses Western Asia and Northern Africa. The term is Eurocentric (i.e. it is the area East of Europe, but West of India, North of Africa, etc.) and used in opposition to the Far East. The history of the Middle East dates back to ancient times, and throughout its history, the Middle East has been a major center of world affairs. In very real terms, history began in the Middle East because that is where writing started. The territory of the Middle East is also the origin of monotheistic religions like Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. However, the rise of European Empires and the modern rise of nationalism have led to violent struggles for power and independence throughout the Middle East, which also suffers from the history of a negative reputation in Europe. Generally speaking, the Middle East has an arid and hot climate. The region is dominated by flat deserts, grassy plains, hills and several mountain ranges. Because of relatively low rainfall, its major rivers are of vital importance. The Middle East remains economically, politically, culturally and religiously sensitive region.
1. There are many ethnic groups in the Middle East. The Middle East is not comprised of one homogenous group of peoples. There are several ethnic groups, some forming majorities in their respective countries and other large groups split over several countries, forming a minority in each. The division into these groups is a modern invention and does not actually reflect the cliché of “age-old ethnic conflict.” Rather, conflicts were between groups defined in other ways beside ethnicity, which continues today.

2. “Muslim,” “Arab,” “Middle Easterner,” and “Islamist” are not synonyms. Muslim is to Islam what Christian is to Christianity. Arab is an ethnic term, not a religious term. In other words, many Arabs are not Muslim. The term Islamist previously referred to one knowledgeable in Islam (though we do not use its analog “Christianist”); or is a more direct way to refer to a proponent of a more severely conservative Islam. The media has often made the term synonymous with “extremist,” “terrorist” or “militant,” whether accurate or not.

3. There is no single cause for violence and political instability in the Middle East. The belief in interminable violence and conflict in the Middle East is a recent invention. The Middle East faces no more violence or warfare than any other region in the world. Ethnicity and religious tension are poor tools for explaining the violence and warfare that does exist; the majority of violence exists interiorly within these groups.

4. The Middle East and the US regard each other as sources of terrorism. Terrorist attacks committed by people born in the Middle East have killed thousands of American and tens of thousands of Israeli citizens. The American and Israeli militaries’ response to that violence has killed hundreds of thousands of citizens of the Middle East, the majority of which were non-combatants.

5. There are conflicting arguments for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. With this little space, perhaps it is best just to remind your students that here in the US we naturally receive more of one side of the story than the other.

6. There is no consensus on what the Middle East is. It variously includes between 20 and 40 countries; it is as small as the Holy Land and as large as stretching from Morocco and Mauritania to Afghanistan and Pakistan. Geographers prefer continental descriptions: North Africa, West Asia, and so on.

7. The vast majority of Muslims are neither Arab nor from the Middle East. Only about 15% of the world’s more than 1 billion Muslims are Arab. A similar percentage of Muslims are Shia rather than Sunni.

8. Imperial history is much less academic for people in the Middle East.

9. Iran and Iraq are much more different than being spelled with a different letter. Iran’s population is made of a majority of Persian-speaking Iranians, and Persian is a language closely related to European languages (unlike Arabic and Hebrew). There are practically no Arabs in Iran, nor is modern Arabic spoken there. Iran is home to most of the world’s Shia Muslims. For much of its history, the capital of Iraq (Baghdad) was a predominantly Persian city, the source of the large Shia minority in Iraq. However, Iraq is an Arab country, with its largest minority being the Kurds, whose language and culture are similar to Iran’s – however, Kurds are predominantly Sunni.

10. Social media changed very little in the Middle East. Twitter, Facebook, and the popularity of cell phones have changed very little in the Middle East. The so-called Arab Spring succeeded in some places because of direct military support (Libya) and in others due to long-standing conflicts between the military and the regime (Egypt and Tunisia, for different reasons). Western media portrays the growth of social media in the Middle East partly as a argument for the growth of Western technological influence and the importance of “western-style” democracy.
CONFLICT AND RESOLUTION

Two Sides of the Same Story

Description:
The United States has recently been in the business of “exporting democracy” to other countries of the world. These democracies have, in essence, been struggling to recreate the American model of non-“Nation State,” pluralist societies where minorities and majorities use government to reach agreements through checks and balances. However, important allies of the United States do not follow these principles, with few consequences.

Though we speak of “peace in the Middle East,” this often translates directly to “peace in Israel,” a nation-state pluralist society where large segments of the population are excluded from the government process. Students should learn that there are political, rather than religious, reasons for the existence of the modern State of Israel. There are political, economic, and social reasons for Palestinian resistance to Israel that are far more prevalent than religious reasons.

Related Resources:
- Free Palestine (A political group dedicated to equal treatment of Palestinian people): http://www.freepalestinemovement.org/home.html
- Interview with Historian of Israel-Palestinian Conflict: http://www.logosjournal.com/morris.htm

Remembering Genocides

Description: In 1915 the Ottoman Empire was crumbling, yet still able to stage a defense of the Anatolian core of its political power. The colossal loss of life during the Gallipoli Campaign is the backdrop for the Armenian Genocide (AG)/War Crimes/Insurgency that afflicted some of the Armenian people in the Eastern parts of modern Turkey (some sections were, at the time, under Russian control). Estimates suggest that over one million Armenians were killed as the Young Turk faction of the Ottoman Empire sought to create a homogeneous Turkish State during World War I, working to eliminate the Armenian minority. The term genocide was not coined until the 1940s and was retroactively applied to the loss of Armenian life by twenty countries, in addition to various other War Crimes defined by nationalism. In short, the term genocide requires a genus, a group or nationality generally termed “ethnicity” in the United States, but in most of the world called a “nationality” and refers to an attempt to destroy this group. Successive Turkish regimes have either denied the existence of the Armenian Genocide or argued that “genocide” is not an accurate term to describe the events.

(Continued on next page...)

Center for the Study of the Middle East, http://iub.edu/~csme
Remembering Genocides Continued...

They argue that many people died on both sides as a result of violence between ethnicities and WWI, and that the killings were not orchestrated by the government. This lesson has no easy answers or solutions, and exists simply to expose students not to the melodrama or melancholy of war crimes, but to the very real issues surrounding the remembering, recollecting, writing and rewriting, and thoroughly conflicting versions of atrocities. It’s worth noting that neither side of the AG debate denies that millions died during WWI on the territory of modern Turkey – the difference lies in assigning motives, political plans, and appropriate responses from the survivors.

Related Resources:
- Surviving the Armenian Genocide: My Grandfather’s Story:
  http://www.huffingtonpost.com/courtney-cachet/armenian-genocide-anniversary_b_1448315.html
  Article selected as typical Armenian-American standpoint on atrocities
- Recognition could threaten Turkey ties: Israel discusses recognition of Armenian genocide:
  Article to give background on Israel-Turkey relationship
- Resource Library for Teaching the Genocide: http://www.teachgenocide.org/
ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

Pollution and Oil

Description: The Gulf Wars have been traumatic events for the population of the Middle East. However, there are other costs of war aside from the toll of human life and property. In this case, the cost is connected with the source of much of the wealth of the Middle East: oil reserves around the Persian Gulf. Not only have NATO- and US-led military strikes caused damage, but nearly every military engagement (including the intermittent violent acts between Israel and its neighbors) runs the risk of incredible environmental damage through the destruction of oil refinery areas, the oil transportation network (pipes, ports, and tankers), and the oil wells themselves.

Related Resources:
- “Middle East conflict causes massive oil spill.” Edie Newsroom: http://www.edie.net/news/news_story.asp?

Historical Water Problems

Description: The question of how people will access adequate water in a global future with a world population that has doubled in size is controversial. The answer to this question is of particular importance to the people and political leaders of the Middle East. The region’s economics are already as dependent on global water as they are on the renewable waters of the region. There will be much more dependency on global water in future. Educators should be aware of many excellent electronic sources, including the English-language website out of the Netherlands called Waternet (www.waternet.nl):

“This website focuses on the challenge of politics and policies with regard to development and potential conflict in water scarce environments in the Middle East. Information is organized on three main topics: the impact of water on politics in the Jordan river basin, a broader view on water issues in the Middle East and more general international aspects of water resources and policies.”

Related Resources:
- Waternet – English Language website with great resources on Middle Eastern water crisis: http://www.waternet.be/
Food Security: What is it?

Description: Food Security is a term that has become increasingly popular in the post-Cold War global reality, referring to people being able to access sufficient, safe, and nutritious food. The Middle East is often included in these discussions as another segment of the “Global South,” the “Third World,” the under developed, or developing countries. Saudi Arabia, for example, receives about four inches of rainfall a year, and agriculture absorbs nearly 90 percent of it, with the deficit coming from underground aquifers, a finite resource that is quickly disappearing.

Sixty percent of food is already being imported in the Gulf. Meanwhile, the population of the Gulf is increasing; between 2000 and 2030, it is expected to double. Saudi Arabia, for example, was a net wheat exporter in the 1980s and 1990s, but it cannot sustain the needed irrigation levels. By 2060, the desert will have reclaimed the farmland where wheat was once grown. There has also been a rise in export restrictions on food by major trade partners, who are concerned about their own food security. These are major issues that regional governments will have to address in coming decades to meet their population’s food needs.

Related Resources:
- Time lapse videos from TIME http://world.time.com/timelapse/
  Shows growth of irrigation in Saudi Arabia, though commentator is ignorant of their source, stating they come “from nowhere.” In fact, this practice of irrigation will soon deplete all of Saudi Arabia’s “fossil” groundwater.
OPEC and its continued relevance

**Description:** OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) came to dominate the world in a market unrecognizable today. Formed in 1960, it had the objective to “co-ordinate and unify petroleum policies among Member Countries, in order to secure fair and stable prices for petroleum producers; an efficient, economic and regular supply of petroleum to consuming nations; and a fair return on capital to those investing in the industry.” Unlike in the 1960s and 1970s, today the top oil producers sell to a more varied market and there are many producers outside of OPEC. The growth of China as an oil consumer with the recent rise in US oil production has led to a change in OPEC tactics.

**Related Resources:**
- Iran’s President to Chair Next OPEC Meeting: [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/20/world/middleeast/20iran.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/20/world/middleeast/20iran.html)
- Arab Spring at an OPEC Meeting: [http://www.mywesttexas.com/business/oil/article_00d70134-70bc-5e0a-9515-3d200be38c44.html](http://www.mywesttexas.com/business/oil/article_00d70134-70bc-5e0a-9515-3d200be38c44.html)

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Tourism and the Middle East

**Description:**
The era of the super-rich tourist has begun, but where it will go next is anyone’s guess. With tourist destinations like Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and super-exclusive resorts across the Middle East resuming their rise following the 2008 crisis, the likelihood of an economy based on tourism for Middle East countries increasingly depends on attracting the wealthy with untraditional services including access to off-shore banking and luxury on-demand. In a global world, the super-rich visitors come from many areas outside the US and Western Europe.

**Related Resources:**
- Turkish Tourism Feels Ripples of Arab Spring: [http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/16/uk-turkey-tourism-idUSLNE83F03B20120416](http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/16/uk-turkey-tourism-idUSLNE83F03B20120416)
- BBC | Arab nations aim to win back tourists: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-15651730](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-15651730)
POPULAR CULTURE

Art and Culture Post-Revolution

Description: The uprisings that occurred across the North Africa and Middle East region resulted in the toppling of regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, and resulted in uprisings in Syria, Bahrain, Algeria, Jordan, and several other countries. Graffiti art is one form of revolutionary art that was widely used by protestors during the 2011 uprisings in addition to music and dance. Artistic expression facilitated the uprisings against dictatorial regimes in untraditional ways, particularly the rise of politically savvy graffiti artistry. These revolutions have paved the way for a new era and greater degree of freedom of expression. However, artists continue to face challenges post-revolution from the general public and specific groups that oppose certain forms of artistic expression and artistic content. Censorship, however, remains for artists in the post-revolution.

Related Resources:
- Art in Egypt’s Revolutionary Square: http://www.merip.org/mero/interventions/art-egypts-revolutionary-square?ip_login_no_cache=13acdd903068a73d71e95d0e470f6e18
- Revolutionary Art on the Streets of Tunisia: http://pdq.rwu.edu/news/revolutionary-art-streets-tunisia
- You Tube Video Asmaa Mahfouz: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgjlgMdsEuk

Dealings with Europe and Europeans

Description: There are both similarities and differences between Mexican/Latino migration into the United States and the migration of Turks and Arabs into countries of the European Union. The labor shortage that started these migrations happened in the 1950s, following the boom of the post-WWII economy. As the Middle Class created by manufacturing began to leave the factories, fields, and “low-class” work, the hole was filled by the closest available pool of cheap labor: in the case of Europe, this at first meant Turkey, and then other Middle Eastern populations.

In Europe, the understanding was that such a movement was temporary, and the populations were referred to as “guest workers.” While ethnic discrimination exists in both Europe and the United States, that most Turkish and Middle Eastern migrants practice Islam seems to separate them from Mexican and Latino migrants in the US, many of whom share a common religion with many American – Christianity in general and Roman Catholicism more specifically. However, many Romanian and Portuguese (Christian) guest workers are treated very poorly in Europe alongside their Muslim cohort, suggesting that classicism is more likely than racism in this example.

Related Resources:
- Turkish Immigration a Sad History: http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,716067,00.html
- BBC 2001 story: Germany’s Guest Workers Mark 40 Years: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1627912.stm
- Turkish Guest Workers Transformed German Society: http://www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,15489210,00.html
RISK AND RESISTANCE

Syria So Far

Description: In March 2011, in a Syrian city called Deraa, locals took to the streets to protest after 15 schoolchildren had been arrested and reportedly tortured for writing anti-government graffiti on a wall. The protests were peaceful to begin with, calling for the children’s release, democracy, and greater freedom for people in the country. The government responded angrily and the army opened fire on protesters, killing four people. The following day, security forces shot at mourners at the victims’ funerals, killing another person. People were shocked and angry at what had happened and soon the unrest spread to other parts of the country.

While the protesters first called for democracy and greater freedom, once security forces opened fire on peaceful demonstrations, people demanded that the President, Bashar al-Assad, resign. President Assad has refused to step down. As the violence worsened he has offered to change some aspects about how the country is run, but his many supporters inside and outside of Syria have helped him to hold onto his office.

Related Resources:

- "Young, Exiled Syrians Still Believe in Revolution:"
  http://www.npr.org/2013/03/18/174594723/young-exiled-syrian-still-believe-in-revolution
- Full “Newsworthy” Timeline of Syria, including detailed 2011-present:
  http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14703995
- Syria Infographic: http://visually.visually.netdna-cdn.com/TheSyrianUprising_4efc64647d8a4.jpg
- NYTimes Infographic of Syrian Protests
  http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/05/01/world/middleeast/01syria-map.html?ref=middleeast
Other Useful Resources

CSME Website Resources

http://www.iub.edu/~csme/resources.shtml

INFOGRAPHICS

- Who Buys Iranian Oil?: http://www.ngoilgasmena.com/media/media-news/infographics/Iranoil.png
- Unrest in Arab countries: http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_dr3S8zqPnj4/TUxM07dbBeI/AAAAAAAAULc/_qTfp1Oytzw/s1600/162453012.jpg
- Religious/Demographic May: http://www.blog.benjieboo.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Mid_East_Religion_Lg.jpg
- Middle East as Global Travel Hub: http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-U608w1Sz7bo/TV05f1HgKGI/AAAAAAAAAGI/KaqAmj41HqY/s1600/v5.jpg
- The Coming Water Wars: http://www.princeton.edu/~ina/infographics/water.html
- The Burj Dubai: http://www.menainfra.com/media/media-news/infographics/burj-dubai.jpg