

Middle Eastern Fashion Influences

Overview:

In this lesson plan, students will use various internet sources (newspaper articles, blog sites, and advertisements) to investigate the ways in which fashion trends develop in the United States. By looking at how Middle Eastern dress has influenced western fashion, students will come to see that the Middle East influences the culture of the western world and that the dress of the Middle East is not that different from their own. They will also develop critical thinking skills aimed at examining the reaction to these fashion influences. This lesson plan is aimed at discussing how Middle Eastern headdresses have been appropriated by the West, without a larger understanding of the practice itself.

Objectives:

Students will:

1. Consider how fashion trends develop in the United States.
2. Research dress from the Middle East in order to understand how it has influenced the west and to determine the practical, political, and religious implications of dress.
3. Examine the current fashion trend emanating from the Middle Eastern dress of veiling and the keffiyeh by reading and discussing newspaper articles about this new trend.
4. Analyze the reaction to this trend in blog sites and advertisements.
5. Write a reflective essay on the United States' relationship to Middle Eastern fashion.

Activity:

1. Students respond to the following questions in their journals (written on the board prior to class): "What are your favorite current clothing trends? Are any of these trends influenced by other cultures? Can you think of any fashion trends that come from other countries or areas of the world? (Japanese kimonos; Indian tie-dye; Bohemian clothing [boho-chic]; Australian Uggs boots; Native American, etc.)" Allow students to share responses briefly. You may want to record a list of international fashion trends on the board.
2. Review briefly with photos and explanation the dress of the Middle East, focusing on the keffiyeh, hijab, and niqab (See lesson plan on Middle Eastern Dress Vocabulary). Focus on the following questions:
 - a. What is the keffiyeh and why do Middle Eastern men wear it?
 - b. What is the hijab and niqab? Why do women in the Middle East wear them?
 - c. Besides the practical uses of these items, what political or religious functions do they have?

3. As a class or in groups, read and discuss the following articles and fashion photos, examining how these elements of Middle Eastern dress are entering mainstream western fashion trends:

--*The Village Voice* "Checkered Past: Arafat's trademark scarf is now military chic" by Nina Lalli

<http://www.villagevoice.com/nyclife/0508,lalli2,61280,15.html>

--Fox News "Bye Bye, Hair! Hello, Turban Chic" By Catherine Donaldson-Evans

<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,250413,00.html>

- a. Why do Americans and Europeans wear Middle Eastern inspired dress?
- b. How do their reasons relate to those in the Middle East?

4. Critical thinking: Divide students into small groups and ask them to examine the following blog sites.

--Ted Swedenburg, Professor of Anthropology, University of Arkansas

<http://swedenburg.blogspot.com/2007/01/kufiyaspotting-12-urban-outfitters.html>

<http://swedenburg.blogspot.com/2007/02/kufiyaspotting-14-new-york-times-citing.html>

<http://swedenburg.blogspot.com/2007/02/hijab-couture-goes-mainstream.html>

- a. How does Professor Swedenburg react to the Urban Outfitters keffiyeh scarf line and other instances of Middle Eastern dress appearing in mainstream western clothing trends?
- b. Why do you think he feels the way he does?

5. As a follow-up, ask students to write a reflective essay addressing their culture's relationship with fashion and fashion sources. Direct students to start by responding to the quote from the New York Times article "Where Some See Fashion, Others See Politics" by Kibum Kim: "I'm not too up to speed in what's going on in the Middle East," said Liz Chernett, a strategic consultant in branding and a youth trends expert who bought a kaffiyeh from a vendor on St. Mark's Place three months ago. "It's an aesthetic thing." Do most people in the United States think about where fashion comes from and the implications it may have to other people? Why or why not? What may one's relationship to fashion say about one's culture?

Bibliography

- Donaldson-Evans, Catherine. "Bye Bye, Hair! Hello, Turban Chic." *Fox News*. Feb. 6, 2007.
- Kim, Kibum. "Where Some See Fashion, Others See Politics." *New York Times*. Feb. 11, 2007.
- Lalli, Nina. "Checkered Past: Arafat's Trademark Scarf is now Military Chic." *The Village Voice*. Feb. 17, 2005.