

Teaching Materials

Teaching Strategies

One of the most challenging aspects of teaching the history of women in Islamic Empires is getting the students to recognize the humanity of those they are studying. Because of the remote context of the history in time and place, students may have a difficult time feeling that they relate to the people they are learning about. However, this module deals with many issues that students today grapple with in their own society; questions of marriage, family, dress, and behavior are all relevant points of reference to their own emotional worlds, making the women of the Islamic empires easier for students to understand and to relate.

Another challenge in teaching Islamic history in modern American classrooms is the fact that Islamic societies and cultures have been denigrated in popular media accounts and by many religious and secular organizations. Muslim women in particular have been singled out as “benchmarks” for Islamic societies and the way they are judged as either “civilized” or “uncivilized” by Westerners. Images of Muslim women as oppressed slaves of Islamic patriarchy, coupled with images of Muslim women as sexual objects, are common fixtures everywhere, from *Oprah* to Disney’s *Aladdin* to Fox News. Thus, students should be exposed to more nuanced images of Muslim women, and, in particular, the balanced view of women found in the *Qur’an* and the *Hadith*.

Finally, it is important to remind students that the experiences of Muslim women in the world today are as diverse as those in history. “Muslim” is not a race or ethnic group, nor a nationality, although it is often referred to in that way in American discourse. Muslim women’s history runs concurrent with the history being studied, that is, it is not stagnant. Orientalist discourse has presented the Islamic world as one unit, fixed in ancient times. Islamic history, both at its beginnings and up to the present day, is dynamic and variable. Thus, issues of race, class, gender, and historical specificity must be kept in mind when teaching about women in Islamic history.

Discussion Questions:

- What are the ramifications for allowing women to be valid reporters of the *hadith*? What does it tell us about the nature of gender relations during the time of the first umma? Do you think that influenced later roles for women, according to the sources you have studied? Why or why not?
- Compare and contrast the images of women and their equality with men in the eyes of God from the Qur’an with the poem mourning the death of Hasan ibn al-Firat’s daughter. How do you reconcile these differences in value of women? Explain, using comparisons with other societies you have studied, as well as various times and places in Islamic history.

Lesson Plan: The Significant Contributions of Islamic Women to the Growth and Expansion of Islamic Civilization

Time Estimate

One 90-minute class period and DBQ as an independent assignment.

Objectives

After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

1. read and understand the historical evidence that supports the viewpoint that Islamic Women have made significant and lasting contributions to Islamic Civilization.
2. read and analyze secondary and primary sources relevant to the topic.
3. work in small groups to answer questions and then present data to the class.
4. respond to a document based question related to the topic integrating information from both secondary and primary sources.

Materials

- Provisioning: Duplicate required number of each of the following items for each student. Make a packet for each student and distribute at the beginning of class for efficiency.

Islamic Empire Introduction

Primary Sources:

Source 6: Poem, Abbasid-era

Source 3: Religious Text, Marriage Customs

Source 4: Religious Text, Mosque Customs and Public Behavior

Source 10: Architecture, Ayyubid and Ottoman

- Sufficient copies of Primary Source Analysis Worksheet: Images
- Sufficient copies of Primary Source Analysis Worksheet: Texts

Strategies

- **Historical Context (20 minutes):**
 - Read: Islamic Empire Introduction
 - Discuss: What bias have male historians traditionally brought to the study of women in the Islamic empire?
 - Identify: Islam, Hadith, Companion, Fitna, Patriarchal, Sufism, Private Sphere, Sharia
 - Key People: Identify-Muhammad, Khadija, A'isha, Umm Salama

- **Think-Share (20 minutes):**
 - Divide class into groups of four to facilitate discussion.
 - Assign one question to each group based on the reading.
 - Each group will present its response to the class.
 - Discuss briefly the responses and check for understanding.
 - Suggested Questions:
 - Who was Khadija and list reasons why she has been a most revered woman throughout Islamic history?
 - Outline the evidence that supports the fact that Islamic women played integral roles in Islamic Civilization both politically and spiritually.
 - What is the significance of the Battle of Camel to Islamic women?
 - The article suggests that the majority of Islamic women were most influential in the “private sphere?” Explain what that means and give examples of that influence.
 - Compare the spiritual relationship of Islamic women to the deity to the position given them in the patriarchal social structure.

- **Reading Primary Resources (25 minutes):**
 - Check for understanding: What is the critical difference to historical research between secondary and primary resources?
 - Individually read the primary resources in the packet and answer each of the following questions.
 - Review responses with the students.
 - Questions:
 - **Source 6: Poem, Abbasid-era:** Explain why this poem reflects the patriarchal beliefs and attitudes toward Islamic women.
 - **Source 3: Religious Text, Marriage Customs:** Women as Teachers: Give specific examples from the three excerpts that show Islamic women as spiritual teachers.
 - **Source 4: Religious Text, Mosque Customs and Public Behavior:** Which Hadith, or ways of Muhammad, do Islamic women discuss in these sources?
 - **Source 10: Architecture, Ayyubid and Ottoman:** How did the prestige of Islamic women influence architecture?

- **Responding to Primary Sources (25 Minutes):** Distribute **Primary Source**

Analysis Worksheet: Images and **Primary Source Analysis Worksheet: Texts from** to each student. Assign an equal number of students to work independently and complete the work sheet for Primary Source 6, 3, 4, or 4. Discuss.

- **Document Based Essay Question (10 minutes):** In class permit students to work on the outline for the essay. A completed printed essay will be due in class at the next block session.

Differentiation

Advanced Students: Assign the reading and responses to the questions relating to the reading in the “Historical Context” activity for homework. Based on these responses, lead a 10-minute class discussion. To assess the completion of the assignment, consider a peer review or circulating and completing a quick check of the homework while students are involved in the other activities. Allocate the time saved on the “Historical Context” activity to the “Document Based Essay Question” activity. Alter this activity by using the backward design model. Provide students with the topic, but not the thesis statement. Allot the students about 20 minutes to work on the body of the essay. Then, from the factual content the students have outlined, take 5 minutes and ask them to write a draft thesis for the paper. Conclude the activity by asking volunteers to write their thesis on the board. Invite the other students to critique and offer positive suggestions that improve the thesis. The completed, typed essay will be due the next block period.

Less Advanced Students: Focus on ensuring that students comprehend what they are reading and learn tools to assist with this comprehension. For the “Historical Context” activity, direct students to scan the introductory pages and spend 5 minutes highlighting words or phrases that they do not comprehend. Then, ask the students to build a list on the board. Review the list, soliciting clarifying info from the class. Encourage students to jot down the meanings. Check for understanding. Condense the time in the later activities to allow for this.

Document Based Question (Suggested writing time: 40 minutes)

Directions: The following question is based on the documents included in this module. This question is designed to test your ability to work with and understand historical documents. Write an essay that:

- Has a relevant thesis and supports that thesis with evidence from the documents.
- Uses all or all but one of the documents.
- Analyzes the documents by grouping them in as many appropriate ways as possible. Does not simply summarize the documents individually.
- Takes into account both the sources of the documents and the authors' points of view.
- You may refer to relevant historical information not mentioned in the documents.

Question: Using the content information from at least three of the four primary documents, discuss how traditional historic perspectives do not reflect the vital contributions that Islamic women have made to Islamic civilization.

Be sure to analyze point of view in at least three documents or images.

What additional sources, types of documents, or information would you need to have a more complete view of this topic?

Template: Click [here](#) to download a sample template in .pdf format.

Bibliography

Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam*. Yale University Press, 1992.

This is one of the fundamental historical reflections on the role of women in Islamic history, written from a feminist perspective.

Helminski, Camille Adams. *Women of Sufism: A Hidden Treasure*. Shambala, 2003.

A fantastic collection of writings by female Sufis, the translations in this book are both evocative and reliable.

Kabbani, Shaykh Muhammad Hisham, and Leleh Bakhtiar. *Encyclopedia of Muhammad's Women Companions and the Traditions They Related*. Kazi Publications, 1998.

This is an excellent compendium for tracing important *hadith* transmitted by the female Companions of Muhammad.

Mernissi, Fatima. *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*. University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

One of many of Mernissi's insightful studies of the exclusion of women from power in Islamic societies, this book interrogates the language of power, as well as resurrects histories of forgotten female leaders.

Peirce, Leslie P.. *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*. Oxford University Press, 1993.

This masterpiece of Ottoman studies reveals the intricacies of politics and power within the longest-lasting Muslim harem, that of the Ottoman sultan.

Spellberg, D. A.. *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past: The Legacy of 'A'isha Bint Abî Bakr*. Columbia University Press, 1994.

This book is a must for anyone interested in studying the history of the manipulation of the legacy of Muhammad's wife, 'A'isha, and her role in defining women's participation in public life, as well as Shi'a and Sunni identity.

Stowasser, Barbara F. *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*. Oxford University Press, 1994.

This is an insightful examination of various interpretations of women's positions in Islamic law, based on Qur'anic revelations.