

RETHINKING THE REGION:

New Approaches to 9-12 U.S. Curriculum on the Middle East and North Africa

UNIT:

ARTS AND TECHNOLOGY

TOPIC

Art as Artifact

LESSON OVERVIEW	In the first part of this lesson, students will examine artwork from 19th century European and American travelers to MENA. They will consider the content and perspective of the artwork and how people, places and events are represented. Students will then analyze contemporary works of art from MENA, focusing on young artists from Saudi Arabia, or from another source. Prints of the works will be hung around the classroom in the form of a gallery. Students will spend 10 minutes walking around the artworks to get a general sense of them. Then they will choose one work of art on which to focus their analysis.
ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What might art reveal to historians about society during a particular historical period? • How has art been used as a medium for self-expression? For social and political engagement? • How might art serve to reinforce commonly held biases or stereotypes about a people, society, particular cultural practices, or historical events? How might it serve to resist commonly held biases or stereotypes?
STANDARDS	<p><u>Common Core Standards</u></p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.</p> <p>(Optional assignment) CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.</p>

(Optional assignment) CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

(Optional assignment) CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

New York State Standards

Learning Standards for the Arts:

Standard 3, Visual Arts: 3. Students will reflect on, interpret, and evaluate works of art, using the language of art criticism. Students will analyze the visual characteristics of the natural and built environment and explain the social, cultural, psychological, and environmental dimensions of the visual arts. Students will compare the ways in which a variety of ideas, themes, and concepts are expressed through the visual arts with the ways they are expressed in other disciplines.

Standard 4: Visual Arts: 4. Students will explore art and artifacts from various historical periods and world cultures to discover the roles that art plays in the lives of people of a given time and place and to understand how the time and place influence the visual characteristics of the art work. Students will explore art to understand the social, cultural, and environmental dimensions of human society.

Learning Standards for Social Studies:

Performance Indicators Students will:

Standard 2, Key Idea 1

- Understand the development and connectedness of Western civilization and other civilizations and cultures in many areas of the world and over time
- Understand the broad patterns, relationships, and interactions of cultures and civilizations during particular eras and across eras
- Analyze changing and competing interpretations of issues, events, and developments throughout world history

	<p><u>Standard 2, Key Idea 2</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze evidence critically and demonstrate an understanding of how circumstances of time and place influence perspective Explain the importance of analyzing narratives drawn from different times and places to understand historical events <p><u>Standard 2, Key Idea 3</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze the roles and contributions of individuals and groups to social, political, economic, cultural, and religious practices and activities Explain the dynamics of cultural change and how interactions between and among cultures has affected various cultural groups throughout the world Examine the social/cultural, political, economic, and religious norms and values of Western and other world cultures <p><u>Standard 2, Key Idea 4</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interpret and analyze documents and artifacts related to significant developments and events in world history Analyze different interpretations of important events, issues, or developments in world history by studying the social, political, and economic context in which they were developed; by testing the data source for reliability and validity, credibility, authority, authenticity, and completeness; and by detecting bias, distortion of the facts, and propaganda by omission, suppression, or invention of facts (Taken from National Standards for World History)
MATERIALS	<p><u>PART 1: Examining 19th Century Orientalist Art by Travelers in MENA</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Computer and projector, to present images of selected artworks to the class (alternatively, these could be color printed into large high resolution images that can be shown to the class). Images: Choose three images from among the suggested artworks under Lesson Resources below. These can be projected or color printed. Handout 1: Art Analysis Worksheet (1 copy per student).

	<p><u>PART 2: Analyzing Contemporary Art from MENA</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art critic’s worksheet (1 copy per student): Several excellent resources are available to assist students in analyzing works of art. Choose one from among the suggested worksheets under Lesson Resources below, or use Handout 1 (Art Analysis Worksheet) to guide this activity. • High-resolution color print images of 5-7 contemporary artworks (approximate size not less than 8.5 x 11 inches), along with their title, artist’s biographical sketch, and other supplementary material (optional). These should be hung on the walls to resemble an art gallery. Choose from among the suggested works under Lesson Resources below. • Optional: Supplementary material about these artworks may be made available to students and is available at: http://edgeofarabia.com/content/uploads/default_site/exhibition_uploads/Rhizoma_Cataloge_Final_interactive_1.pdf. See also Additional Resources below.
<p>NOTES TO TEACHER</p>	<p><u>Lesson pairing:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This lesson can be used as part of a unit of study on 19th century European imperialism. Where a school arts program is available, teachers may consider partnering with an art teacher for cross-disciplinary thematic instruction. <p><u>Note on the artwork:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part 1 features a genre of 19th century art known as Orientalism, inspired by a number of historical events (e.g. The Egyptian Campaign, 1798-1799; French conquest of Algiers, 1830; opening of the Suez Canal, 1869, etc.) during a period of European imperialism that brought increased attention to the MENA region from travellers, artists, and their patrons in Europe (and to a lesser extent, the Americas). At this time, the “East” increasingly became a source of inspiration for painters, writers, and poets. Orientalism refers to the study and depiction of “Eastern” societies and cultures by “Westerners.” Recurrent subject matter in Orientalist art includes combat, leisure and entertainment, harems and sex slaves, and merchants and markets. The works of art generally romanticize the “Orient” as exotic, luxurious, mysterious, and fascinating, as well as strange and frightening, at times having supernatural or possessed qualities. Men are generally depicted as aggressive, barbaric, threatening, villainous, or cunning, as well as passive, weak, lazy, or entranced (particularly by women, but also by the

	<p>supernatural). Women are commonly depicted as exotic, mysterious, entrancing, sensual, passive, and willing to be enslaved. The cultural representations in this body of artwork served to capture the imagination of its European audience. Over time, these representations helped shape and reinforce commonly held biases or stereotypes about peoples, societies, cultural practices, and historical events in MENA. For more on Orientalism as a lens through which MENA has been viewed, watch the documentary featuring Edward Said under Additional Resources below. For an examination of how MENA peoples have been represented in film, see the documentary <i>Reel Bad Arabs</i> featuring Jack Shaheen, under Additional Resources below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The second part of this lesson is designed around selected artworks from the “Rhizoma (Generation in Waiting)” exhibit, which showcased the artwork of young Saudi artists. More can be learned about the artwork and artists at Edge of Arabia (http://edgeofarabia.com/exhibitions/rhizoma-generation-in-waiting). The Exhibition Guide provides an overview and commentary from the various artists and may be used to accompany the lesson to help students further contextualize and interpret the art: http://edgeofarabia.com/content/uploads/default_site/exhibition_uploads/Rhizoma_Cataloge_Final_interactive_1.pdf. In addition, a publication detailing some of the artwork is available here: http://edgeofarabia.com/publications/edge-of-arabia. • The rationale for highlighting the artistic production of this particular generation and region is to help students to examine their assumptions about their contemporaries and how they are resisting stereotypes by using artwork as a medium for self-expression and for social and political engagement. However, alternative artwork may also be used with this lesson. Possible sources for images are included under Additional Resources below.
PROCEDURE	<p>PART 1: Examining 19th Century Orientalist Art by Travelers in MENA (35 minutes)</p> <p>1. <u>Introducing the lesson (5 minutes)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce the essential questions and lesson activity, by saying that you will be exploring artwork produced by travelers to MENA during the 19th century, as well as contemporary artwork by MENA artists, to consider:

(1) what art might reveal to historians about society during a particular historical period; (2) how art has been used as a medium for self-expression and for social and political engagement in MENA; and (3) how art might serve to reinforce or resist commonly held biases or stereotypes about a people, society, particular cultural practices, or historical events.

- Distribute Handout 1: Art Analysis Worksheet (1 copy per student). Tell students that you will be projecting three paintings by travelers to MENA during the 19th century. The class will analyze these together using the worksheet as a guide. Go over the dimensions or steps of the analysis, as described at the top of the worksheet. In brief, these are:

Describe	What is the subject matter of the artwork?
Analyze	How has the artist chosen to represent the subject matter?
Interpret	What does the representation suggest about the perspective or message of the artist? Of society?
Evaluate	What do you find appealing about the painting?

2. Class activity (15 minutes)

- On a wall or screen at the front of the class, project each of the three images, one at a time, spending 5 minutes on each image. Ask students to describe, analyze, interpret, and evaluate, taking notes on their worksheet.

3. Class discussion (15 minutes)

- After students have had a chance to take notes on each of the paintings, facilitate a discussion by posing the following questions.
 - a. What subject matter appeared to fascinate travelers to MENA in the 19th century? What do you find in common among the three paintings? (Go through the three again so that students can have a second look.)
 - b. This genre of artwork is called “Orientalism,” a term reflecting the subject matter, style, and perspective of the artwork. What might this body of art reveal to historians about society during the historical period in which it was produced?
 - c. In what ways might this genre of art serve to reflect or reinforce biases or

stereotypes about a people, society, or particular cultural practices?

- d. What do you know about historical events during the period of time in which these paintings were made? How does that influence your interpretation of the works?

PART 2: Analyzing Contemporary Art from MENA (35 minutes)

1. Gallery walk (10 minutes)

- Distribute the art critic's worksheet (1 copy per student).
- Invite students to walk around the classroom gallery, spending 1-2 minutes at each station, looking at the artwork, and reading the title and artist's biographical sketch.
- While they look at each piece, ask them to consider: What is the subject of the piece? How has the artist chosen to represent it? Which of the pieces appeals to you the most and why? (Write these guiding questions on the board as a reminder.)

2. Art critics at work (15 minutes)

- Ask students to choose one piece of art from the classroom gallery that they will analyze in greater depth using the art critic's worksheet. (Optional: Students may work in pairs for this exercise.)
- Tell students that the worksheet is designed to take them through the general steps of critique, which are to: (a) describe; (b) analyze; (c) interpret; and (d) evaluate.
- Using the worksheet as a guide, ask students to spend 15 minutes at one station, examining the artwork in greater detail and taking notes. After an initial impression, encourage them to read supplementary material, where provided, to assist them in interpreting the piece.

3. Class discussion (10 minutes)

- Facilitate a discussion around the following questions. Ask students to refer to specific artworks as evidence to support their answers.
 - a. When considered together, what do the artworks tell us about contemporary society?

- b. In what ways have the Saudi/MENA artists whose works you studied used art as a medium for self-expression? For social and political engagement?
- c. How might this artwork serve to resist commonly held biases or stereotypes about a people, society, particular cultural practices, or historical events?
- d. Reflect on the utility of art “as artifact,” or primary source material. What might it reveal that other sources might obscure?

4. Questions for Further Reflection/Connections to Today

- Writing a critique:

Ask students to choose one of the works of art they viewed today and to write a 1-2 page essay in which they describe, analyze, interpret, and evaluate the artwork and its significance to contemporary issues. Alternatively, students might choose an image of their own from a MENA artist. They might consider exploring the works of internationally recognized artists, such as Mona Hatoum (Palestinian video and installation artist); Akram Zaatari (Lebanese archival artist); or the award-winning architecture of Zaha Hadid (Iraqi-British architect).

- Multicultural connection:

Have students research the works of Khalil Gibran (1883-1931), a Lebanese-American artist and writer, who lived much of his life in the US. Gibran is said to be the third best-selling poet of all time, after Shakespeare and Lao-Tzu.

- Contemporary Islamic Art:

Have students explore contemporary Islamic art through either (a) the Caabu curricular resource, which considers the influence of traditional Islamic art on western artists, such as Matisse and British artist Vanessa Hodgkinson, or (b) Malikka Bouaissa’s (2013) interview with Saudi artist Dana Awartani (see links to both texts under Additional Resources below). How are young artists making meaning of Islamic art? What makes a “traditional” art form transcend time and space?

**LESSON
RESOURCES****PART 1: Examining 19th Century Orientalist Art by Travelers in MENA**

Suggested 19th century artworks (choose three):

- a. Jean-Léon Gérôme (France). c. 1870. *The Snake Charmer*.
[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jean-Léon_Gérôme -
_Le charmeur de serpents.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jean-Léon_Gérôme_-_Le_charmeur_de_serpents.jpg)
- b. Eugène Delacroix (France). 1837-1838. *Fanatics of Tangier*,
[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Eugene_Delacroix_Fanatics_of Ta
ngier Painting.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Eugene_Delacroix_Fanatics_of_Tangier_Painting.jpg)
- c. Jan-Baptist Huysmans (Belgium). Before 1906. *The Captive*.
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jan_Baptist_Huysmans_6.jpg
- d. Adolf Seel (Germany). 1883. *The Favorite*.
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Adolf_Seel_Die_Favoritin_1883.jpg
- e. Frederick Arthur Bridgeman (United States). 1875. *Harem Fountain*.
[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Frederick_arthur_bridgeman-
harem_fountain.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Frederick_arthur_bridgeman-harem_fountain.jpg)
- f. Nicola Forcella (Italy). Before 1868. *In the Brass Market*.
[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Forcella,_Nicola -
_Dans le souk aux cuivres - before 1868 \(hi_res\).jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Forcella,_Nicola_-_Dans_le_souk_aux_cuivres_-_before_1868_(hi_res).jpg)
- g. Jean-Joseph Benjamin-Constant (France). 1879. *Favorite of the Emir*.
[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1879_Benjamin-Constant -
_Favorite of the Emir.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1879_Benjamin-Constant_-_Favorite_of_the_Emir.jpg)
- h. Jean-Léon Gérôme (France). c. 1887. *The Carpet Merchant in Cairo*.
[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jean-
Léon_Gérôme_015_Carpets.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jean-Léon_Gérôme_015_Carpets.jpg)
- i. Fernand Cormon (France). After 1877. *The Harem*,
[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cormon_Fernand_Le_harem_Oil
On_Canvas.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cormon_Fernand_Le_harem_Oil_On_Canvas.jpg)
- j. Mariano Fortuny (Spain). 1867. *Arab Fantasia*,
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fortuny_Fantasia_àrab.jpg

PART 2: Analyzing Contemporary Art from MENA

Suggested art critic's worksheets:

- a. Art Gallery Viewing and Response Worksheet. Northwest Missouri State University:
[http://www.nwmissouri.edu/dept/frosh/pdf/Activities/Art_Gallery_Viewing_.
doc](http://www.nwmissouri.edu/dept/frosh/pdf/Activities/Art_Gallery_Viewing_.doc)
- b. Art Analysis Worksheet. BYU Honors:

http://honors.fye.byu.edu/sites/default/files/student_files/GW_Worksheet_Art.pdf

- c. Looking at Art: Seeing Questions. Incredible Art Department:
<http://www.incredibleart.org/files/crit.htm>
- d. Art Analysis Worksheet (pp. 1-4). Skyline High School, AZ:
http://www.mpsaz.org/skyline/staff/elreed/class1/mps/files/aa_art_analysis_project1.pdf

Suggested contemporary artworks:

- a. Eiman Elgibreen. Painting. 2013. *Don't Judge Me*.
<http://edgeofarabia.com/artists/eiman-elgibreen>.
- b. Basmah Felemban. Installation. 2013. *Drawn out Truths*.
<http://edgeofarabia.com/artists/basmah-felemban>. Additional image available at: <http://www.khaleejesque.com/2013/05/art-design/rhizoma-generation-in-waiting-by-edge-of-arabia-at-the-55th-venice-biennale/>.
- c. Awartani, Dana. Islamic art. 2013. *Illumination*.
<http://edgeofarabia.com/artists/dana-awrtani>. Additional images of the artist's work and interview with the artist are available at <http://www.alartemag.be/en/en-art/the-crucial-role-of-geometry-in-islamic-art/>.
- d. Shaweesh. Photography. 2013. *Captain America*.
<http://edgeofarabia.com/artists/Shaweesh>.
- e. Gharem, Abdunnasser. Industrial lacquer paint on Indonesian plywood. 2010. *Men at Work III*, or Installation. 2012. *The Capitol Dome*. Several images available, plus short video explaining the work.
<http://edgeofarabia.com/artists/abdunnasser-gharem>. More on his work is available at: <http://edgeofarabia.com/publications/abdunnasser-gharem>.
- f. Angawi, Ahmad. Audio installation. 2012. *Street Pulse*. Several images available. <http://edgeofarabia.com/artists/ahmad-angawi>.
- g. Beydoun, Huda. Photography. 2013. *Documenting the Undocumented*.
<http://edgeofarabia.com/artists/huda-beydoun>. Additional image from the series available at: <http://www.khaleejesque.com/2013/05/art-design/rhizoma-generation-in-waiting-by-edge-of-arabia-at-the-55th-venice-biennale/>.

Supplementary material about these artworks is available at:

http://edgeofarabia.com/content/uploads/default_site/exhibition_uploads/Rhizoma_Cataloge_Final_interactive_1.pdf. See also Additional Resources below.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**Additional sources of artwork:**

Arab Art Gallery: <http://www.arabartgallery.com/categories.htm>

Athr Gallery: <http://www.athrart.com/>

Edge of Arabia: Saudi Artists at <http://edgeofarabia.com/artists/saudi-arabia>; other MENA artists at <http://edgeofarabia.com/artists/arab-world>.

Ismail Shammout: <http://www.ismail-shammout.com/gallery/>

Muslima: Muslim Women’s Art and Voices: <http://muslima.imow.org/>

The Palestine Poster Project: <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/>

Travelers in the Middle East Archive: <http://timea.rice.edu/index.html>

Gifts of the Sultan: <http://giftsofthesultan.com/> and <http://www.qma.com.qa/exhibitions/gifts/>

Art and Architecture in the Arab World: <http://arab-aa.com/category/art/>

Curricular resource:

Caabu. Islamic Art:

<http://www.caabu.org/sites/default/files/resources/Islamic%20Art.pdf>

Incredible Art Department:

<http://www.incredibleart.org/lessons/high/highlessons.html>.

Interview:

Bouaissa, Malikka. “The crucial role of geometry in Islamic art.”

al.arte.magazine. 2013. <http://www.alartemag.be/en/en-art/the-crucial-role-of-geometry-in-islamic-art/>.

This interview with young Saudi Artist Dana Awartani explores her work and the deeper meaning of geometry in Islamic art. It includes rich images from Awartani’s artworks.

Documentaries:

Media Education Foundation. “Edward Said On Orientalism.”

Introduction: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwCOSkXR_Cw. *YouTube* video, 10:35. Full version: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVC8EYd_Z_g. *YouTube* video, 40:32.

Media Education Foundation. "Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People." Featuring Jack Shaheen. <http://www.reelbadarabs.com/> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdRc8c8jhU8>. *YouTube* video, 50.12.