



**American Immigration Law Foundation
Immigration Curriculum Center Lesson Plan**

**From War on Terror to War on Bias:
Examining Fear with Immigrants of Iraq and Muslim Descent**

Grant Project Summary

The goal of this project was to broaden the view students may have of people from Iraq, and Muslim immigrants. I had noticed that quite a few of my students pictured Iraq as “the enemy,” and they did not see the human side of war. In addition, it seemed some of my students were very uncomfortable with others who were dressed differently, and had differing cultural practices.

I didn’t want to just *tell* students to be more open-minded. I wanted them to come to that conclusion themselves. Children’s literature was the tool I used.

Before using the books The Librarian of Basra and Alia’s Mission, I asked my students to complete a self-survey. They needed to respond with “agree or disagree” to statements such as, “If my country is at war with another one, it does not matter to me what gets bombed in the other country.” After reading the two books, students repeated the same survey. In a discussion, students were invited to share their thoughts and insights. Students found they cared about Alia and her friends. They wanted to know if the library had been rebuilt. They found themselves thinking in a new way about the people of Iraq. And they realized one person can make a difference.

By using the book One Green Apple, I wanted students to examine how they might judge others by the way they dress. In addition, I wanted them to gain insight into the struggles an immigrant may face while adapting to a new culture. Before reading the book, I had the students look at a page with a close-up of the main character in a head dress. I asked the students to write down what thoughts and questions would go through their minds if this character were a new student, assigned to sit beside them. One student sheepishly shared this thought: Is she a terrorist? Others then admitted that the same thought had crossed their minds, but they thought it wouldn’t be appropriate to say. I had hoped for this kind of honesty. This simple picture book provided an abundance of wisdom. Students were reminded that each person is unique. They built an awareness of the many situations a new immigrant needs to integrate. They gathered information on the ways

people work at learning a new language. They realized that once they knew a person a bit better, they no longer thought of the word “terrorist.” Extension activities included reflecting on first impressions that are based on the way a person dresses and reaching out to others when they are struggling to learn something new.

I chose the documentary Coming to America: A Muslim Family’s Story so students could walk with a real family during their immigration to America. The book begins in Egypt, highlighting how and why the family decides to immigrate. The father is awarded a green card, and he is the first family member to head for America. I had the students create short plays to illustrate the family’s process of immigrating. While reading the book, students learned about basic Muslim beliefs, such as the value of family. By including information about aspects of daily life such as food, parent careers, money, and school, the book makes the Mahmoud family very accessible. My students enjoyed reading of the differences in schools and deciding which foods they would be willing to sample. In the end, students were asked to imagine the Mahmoud family was moving into their neighborhood. Students were prompted to think of what they would have in common with the family, and how they could welcome them to the neighborhood.

As the students spoke openly with me concerning their experience with these lessons, their growth was very evident in the way they talked. They were surprised at the things they had in common with the people in the books. They were honest in looking at the biases they bring into new situations. The goal of the grant project was realized. We had walked with each other, and ended in a place where our minds were more open to those around us. I hope that other teachers who use these lessons will find their students are able to expand their boundaries as well.



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**Picture Books as a Tool for Facing Bias:
Examining Fear of the People of Iraq
And Muslim Immigrants**

Grade Level: 4th – 8th Grades

Project Goal: Lead students to examine preconceived ideas they may have toward groups of people, such as Muslim immigrants, citizens of Iraq, and enemies of war. Use picture books to accomplish this goal:

- [*The Librarian of Basra: A True Story from Iraq*](#) by Jeanette Winter
- [*Alia's Mission: Saving the Books of Iraq*](#) by Mark Alan Stamaty
- [*One Green Apple*](#) by Eve Bunting
- [*Coming to America: A Muslim Family's Story*](#) by Bernard Wolf

Goals:

- Challenge students to observe their own stereotypes of Muslims and people of Iraq.
- Lead students to see the everyday and heroic faces of those who live with war firsthand.

Objectives:

Students will:

- Compare and contrast their personal opinions and stereotypes from before and after being exposed to information
- Identify the ability of heroic individuals to make a difference for many others.
- Examine the effects of war on everyday people and their lives.

Materials:

Alia's Mission: Saving the Books of Iraq by Mark Alan Stamaty

(A copy for each student, or at least one for every three)

The Librarian of Basra by Jeanette Winter

(One copy of book to use as a read aloud)

Procedure:

1. Administer the self-survey. The blank in front of each statement is divided into two sections. Students should place their A for agree, or D for disagree, on the left side of each blank.
2. Locate the country of Iraq on a world map.

Discuss:

- a. What do the students know about the country of Iraq and its people?
 - b. What do they know about the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the events since then?
 - c. What is Islam and who are the Muslims?
 - d. Do they know of Muslims who live in the United States?
 - e. How can books be an important way to preserve culture and history?
3. Introduce additional vocabulary:
 - a. Baghdad, Looters, Stroke (noun – what happens to a person’s body)
 4. Read aloud – *The Librarian of Basra* by Jeanette Winter
 5. Read the first four pages of *Alia’s Mission*

Discuss:

- a. Why did the historic burning of the Great Baghdad Library make a painful impression on Alia?
 - b. What kinds of irreplaceable treasures do students think may have been lost in the fire?
6. Assign students to complete the book on their own. Students should answer these questions as they read:
 - a. As Iraq is invaded, Alia asks the government for help. What does she ask, and what response does she get?
 - b. Who does Alia find moving into the library, and on the library roof?
 - c. What does Alia do at night when it is time to leave the library?
 - d. Who is Anis and where is his restaurant located? Why is the location of his restaurant important, and how do Alia and others work with him?
 - e. How many books do Alia and her friends save?
 7. Share this information with students after completing the book:
 - a. The library in Basra was rebuilt in 2004. Alia Baker was once again assigned as its chief librarian. Funds for the rebuilding came from the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development, through a program set up to help rebuild public services in Iraq.

Assessment:

1. Have students retake the self-survey. This time their answers should go on the right side of each blank.
2. Students should compare and contrast their self-survey answers, and reflect in writing. Did any of their answers change on the self-survey? If so, why? If not, why not? What thoughts, feelings and questions do they have after reading the two books about the library in Basra? How much influence do students believe Alia had? How can one person have an effect on so many others?

Self-Survey

To be taken both before and after reading the books

**The Librarian of Basra by Jeanette Winter
&
Alia's Mission by Mark Alan Stamaty**

Directions: Each blank is divided in half. Before reading the books, Write A for agree, or D for disagree for each statement. Write the letter on the left-hand side of the blank. At a later time, your teacher will explain what to do with the right-hand side of each blank.

____/____ Libraries can be a very important part of a community. Books are filled with ideas and and hold important information about history.

____/____ If my country is at war with another country, everyone in that country is my enemy.

____/____ If my country is at war with another one, it does not matter to me what gets bombed in the other country.

____/____ War involves two militaries fighting each other, but everyday life for regular citizens doesn't change.

____/____ You can only accomplish big jobs if the government helps you.

____/____ When it comes to war, everything is fair.

____/____ One person can make a big difference.



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One Green Apple

By Eve Bunting

Grade Level: 4th – 8th Grades

Goals:

- Teach students to appreciate how each unique person brings flavor to a group
- Build student awareness of the hardships of adjusting to a new culture
- Prompt students to reflect on ways to assist others when they are struggling to learn something new

Objectives:

Students will:

- List hardships faced by the main character, Farah
- Infer ways immigrants learn English if they don't speak the language
- Brainstorm ways to help others take risks and try new things

Materials:

- One or more copies of *One Green Apple* by Eve Bunting
- Crayons/markers/colored pencils, paper, apples

Procedure:

Before Reading

- **Prereading Activity #1**

Choose A or B to focus on the differences/similarities of apples

- A. Give students crayons, colored pencils, or markers. Ask them to draw apples. After the apples have been drawn, mix students into groups, and have them contrast the differences in the apples. How are the apples unique? Did they find they had any thoughts about what an apple “should” look like before they started to draw? Next, have students compare the apples to look for similarities.

- B. Bring in a variety of apples for the students to observe and taste. Before showing the students the apples, ask them to visualize an apple in their minds. Then, observe the real apples. Contrast to find differences and compare to find similarities, using the apples. At the end of the observation time, again ask students to visualize an apple. Did they gain a new point of view by becoming familiar with different kinds of apples?

Discussion:

1. How can people be like apples? Do we sometimes group people together because we think they are the same, only to find out that they are actually each unique? With the apples, perceptions changed after spending time with them. Can the same be true with people?

- **Prereading Activity #2**

2. Show the class the picture on page 31 or page 9. Instruct students to pretend the girl in the picture is a new girl who just arrived at school. Have each student jot down thoughts and questions they would have if this girl were assigned to sit at a desk beside them. Allow students to share what they have written.

- **Discussion Guide for Reading**

Pages 5 – 7

1. What differences does Farah notice?
2. What difficulties does Farah name?

Pages 8 – 12

1. What things do Anna and the teacher do to try to communicate with Farah?
2. What is Farah feeling and thinking?
3. How are the other children like the dogs in the story and how is Farah like the short tree with green apples?

Page 17

1. When we are in new situations, we use our prior experiences to make predictions about what to expect. Because of her prior experiences, what predictions does Farah make about the wood house at the bottom of the hill?

Pages 18 & 19

1. Why do you think the boy tries to stop Farah from putting her green apple into the machine?

Pages 20 – 32

1. What kinds of things happen to let the reader know Farah is starting to feel like part of the class?
2. Infer all the ways you think Farah is learning to speak English.
3. What is the importance of sneezing, burping, and laughing in this story?

Post Reading Activities and Questions

1. Make a list of ways to help a new student feel welcome
2. Think about how dress has an effect on first impressions of people
3. How do you think Anna's clapping on page 30 encourages Farah to keep on trying more "outside-myself" words?
4. How can we be encouraging to others around us when we notice them struggling with something new or difficult?



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Coming to America: A Muslim Family's Story

By Bernard Wolf

Grade Level: 4th – 8th Grades

Goals:

- Help students understand challenges of immigrating to the United States
- Assist students in understanding basic Muslim beliefs
- Encourage students to make a personal connection to a real family of Muslim immigrants

Objectives:

Students will:

- Infer thoughts and Emotions that may be involved with immigrating to the United States
- Identify basic elements of the religion of Islam
- Compare their own lives with the lives of the Mahmoud family and consider what it would be like to have the family move in to their neighborhood

Materials:

- *Coming to America: A Muslim Family's Story*
A copy for each student or at least one for every three students is desirable
- paper plates, markers

Procedure:

- **Walking in Another Person's Shoes:** Writing and Performing brief skits/plays based on information from the text

After reading the first page of *Coming to America: A Muslim Family's Story*, divide students into groups. Have each group create a short play to portray the activities and range of emotions that accompany each scene. What might the people be saying? Doing?

Situation 1: Hassan working hard and applying for a green card (Green Card: permit allowing person from another country to live and work permanently in the United States)

Situation 2: A letter arrives to say that a green card has been won

Situation 3: Hassan lives and works in New York by himself

Situation 4: Rowan is reunited with her father in America

- **School in Egypt vs. School in America**

Using information found in the book, how is school in Egypt different from school in the United States? How is it the same?

- **Culture Through Food**

Read the two pages that describe how Soad prepares food, and how/where the family eats. Study the pictures.

Give students paper plates and have them draw lines in the form of a big “X” to separate the plate into four parts. Have them respond to the reading by placing information in each plate part:

Part 1: List food included in the meal

Part 2: Students write which foods they would be willing to taste

Part 3: Write where and when the family eats their evening meal(s).

Part 4: Draw one or more of the entrees from the photo

Discuss:

1. How does food represent a culture?
2. What is a common meal that the students eat? Do they think that meal would feel foreign to Rowan and her family?
 - a. **The Religion of Islam**
3. Use the information from the story, *as well as the facts provided in the back of the book*, to answer these questions about the religion of Islam:
4. Which day of the week is the holy day for Muslims?

5. Some ways to describe modesty are: having formal manners, being trustworthy, being an honorable and upright person. How do Muslim women show their modesty?
6. What is the name of the building where Muslims go to worship, and what is the name of the holy book?
7. The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of _____ and gives guidance on _____ .
8. Why do men and women pray separately?
9. Where is Mecca and why is it important?
10. Who do Muslims worship?
11. What are the five pillars (duties) of Islam?
12. Why do Muslims pray five times a day?

A Personal Response to the Book

1. If Rowan Mahmoud's family moved in next door to you, what would you have in common with them?
2. What kinds of things could you and your family do, to reach out to these new neighbors and start a friendship?
3. How would you feel about the Mahmoud family becoming your new neighbors? Excited? Nervous? Why do you feel the way you do?
4. Pretend the Mahmoud children attend your school. One day in the hall, you hear someone say, "Why does her mother keep her head covered? What does she have to hide? Is she a terrorist?" You know these students have no idea how kind and gentle Soad is? What are some ways you could react to this situation?