ARAB AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

APRIL

TEACH ARAB HISTORY

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SOLIDARITY

EDWARD SAID

ARAB RESOURCE & ORGANIZING CENTER
Celebrate Arab American Heritage Month

A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS AND STAFF ON ARAB AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH CREATED BY ARAB YOUTH

“WE GOT US” - CECE CARPIO

AROC
ARAB RESOURCE & ORGANIZING CENTER
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*CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD THE POSTER
Why This Guide?

Youth leaders of Arab Youth Organizing (AYO), the youth program of the Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC), are inviting school educators, staff, and administrators to use this as a resource in your classrooms and districts to support and celebrate Arab American students and families.

What is Arab Youth Organizing? (AYO)

In 2008, Arab youth came together to form Arab Youth Organizing (AYO), to organize for social change in areas that most impact their lives. AYO has expanded to include weekly leadership development programs for Arab and Muslim youth across the Bay Area, and within the Oakland and San Francisco Unified School Districts.

AYO leaders develop leadership skills and successfully lead campaigns that advance racial and economic justice, connecting around their shared experiences and envisioning the world they are collectively building alongside other movements for social change.
In 2022, the U.S. Department of State recognized April as National Arab American Heritage Month! This came after years of organizing and advocacy by Arab American organizations, in celebration of the long and rich history of Arab Americans in the United States.

Arab is defined by being from or having heritage from one of the 22 Arabic-speaking countries. SWANA is a term increasingly used in recognition of the diversity of communities from the South West Asia and North African region. Both terms represent communities with shared experiences of racialization and Othering in the US.

Although the federal government recognizes Arab American Heritage Month, few resources exist to support schools in implementing programming and lessons to mark this important month. When available, existing materials do not center the voices of Arab youth, who often feel marginalized in the classroom while being hypervisible by anti-Arab racism and islamophobia in school and in society. This guide reflects their experience in schools and in the communities in which they live. Join us in uplifting Arab youth stories and voices!

WATCH:

Why We Need Arab American Heritage Month
Arab culture is as beautiful as it is diverse. It includes incredibly detailed architecture such as the dome, built atop renowned mosques throughout the Arab region, and the colorful tiles that cover Arab walls. There is divine tea and coffee (that used to be primarily cultivated and exported from Yemen) poured into matching cup sets. Coffee is offered as a form of greeting to guests, whether it be in shopping markets or their own homes. From the food, clothing, music, art, language, and architecture, there is so much to be celebrated, including the connection Arab youth feel to one another and to their ancestors. This section highlights Arab heritage with the hope that through narratives and visuals, educators and school administrators will be more equipped to learn and teach about the values and practices of Arab culture and heritage.
CAN YOU SHARE ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND AND WHERE YOUR FAMILY IS FROM?
My name is Maya, a second-generation Yemeni American. Growing up in the public school system, in particular, growing up in San Francisco with its diverse student population has been a positive experience. However, this is not to say that there aren’t still things we could do better, such as better displaying or representing Arab students in SFUSD.

ARE YOU ABLE TO MAINTAIN A CONNECTION WITH YOUR COMMUNITY OR HOMELAND?
I am able to keep in touch with both my native country and the Arab community. As a proud Yemeni, I carry my heritage and culture with me wherever I go and wear it as a crown.

WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES AND DREAMS FOR THE ARAB COMMUNITY AND THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION IN THE SF BAY AREA?
My wish is that we will feel at ease and that we will have a place to go back to where we can live and thrive as Arab youth.

WHAT DO YOU THINK TEACHERS CAN DO TO HELP SUPPORT ARAB STUDENTS AND ARAB AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH?
I believe Ethnic Studies and Social Studies teachers should incorporate an Arab American lesson into their lesson plans, along with a lecture on Arab history. They should talk about the difficulties the Arab community faces, uplift our stories… empower Arab voices and identities.

ARE THERE PEOPLE FROM YOUR COMMUNITY OR FAMILY WHO INSPIRE YOU TO THRIVE AND PRACTICE RESILIENCE?
From my mother’s resilience in continuing to attend school after 9/11 to my grandmother educating me about our culture, practices, and how we create cultural art, everyone in my family has helped me develop resilience.
CAN YOU SHARE A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND AND WHERE YOUR FAMILY IS FROM?

My name is Aisha, a second-generation Palestinian American. I am able to maintain a connection with my homeland through my Teta (grandmother). I maintain that connection by learning about our enriching cuisine & our stories of resistance & resilience.

ARE THERE PEOPLE FROM YOUR COMMUNITY WHO INSPIRE YOU TO THRIVE AND PRACTICE RESILIENCE?

Being in AYO has helped me connect with my Arab community and reestablish my Arab identity. As I work with Arab youth to change the systems that oppress us & reconstruct ways of representation within our communities I’ve found myself feeling empowered as I realize I am not alone.

My Teta (grandmother) inspires me; she migrated here leaving her family behind to provide her children with a better life while also being the anchor of our culture here in the U.S. Sharing her culture with pride I have adopted her traits and go on to continue to educate with resilience.

WHAT DO YOU THINK TEACHERS CAN DO TO HELP SUPPORT ARAB STUDENTS AND ARAB AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH?

To better support Arab youth and AAHM I believe ethnic and social studies teachers should adapt lesson plans that highlight Arab history, and allow Arab youth the space to teach the class a lesson about their history and their stories.

CAN YOU SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE GROWING UP IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM OF OAKLAND?

Growing up in the Oakland public schools has been difficult for me. There’s a diverse student population but a lack of representation for Arab students. That lack of representation has hugely impacted my identity as an Arab student.

Getting news updates about my homeland Palestine is also devastating as it is never accurately portrayed and discussed in the media, leaving my community to suffer. I observe the pain my Teta endures watching her home become forgotten.
WHAT DOES BEING ARAB MEAN TO YOU?

"Being a part of a strong and loving community where there is a hand to guide you and a body to hug"

"Having roots and passionate values that are held even when they are opposed"

"Resisting oppression"
In 2021, Arab students initiated a petition calling on making Eid a holiday in the San Francisco Unified School District. In the fall of 2022, the Board of Education passed a resolution to implement the school holiday.

In 2023, San Francisco Unified School District officially moved spring break in order to accommodate the Eid holiday, to be celebrated by San Francisco students in 2024. The move came after hundreds of students and community advocates mobilized to pressure the district to implement Eid.

The significance of the Eid campaign is beyond winning a school holiday of cultural significance for the Arab community. For Arab youth leaders, it is one example of what school districts can do to honor, celebrate, and represent Arab communities in the public education system. We encourage school districts to adopt Eid-Al-Fitr and Eid-Al-Adha as school holidays in their district calendars to celebrate with their Arab students.

Read/Watch more on the campaign and the latest developments here.
There has long been misrepresentation or complete lack of information in schools (only 2.3% of students learn about Arab history or culture in schools, TURATH 2020) about Arab American communities, homelands, histories, and cultures. Here are some common misconceptions:

You're Arab and Christian?! Aren't all Arabs Muslim?

Don't you all live in deserts and ride camels?

I heard that Arabs were white.

Oh you're Arab do you live in like a war zone?

Aren't Arab women oppressed?
Although many Arabic-speaking countries have desert-like geographies, these are orientalist tropes that paint a single story of what is a rich history and culture of the Arab region.

Early Arab immigrants identified as white in order to gain access to citizenship. There is NO racial or ethnic classification for Arab Americans in the U.S. Census Form. Arab American classification as “white” has led to serious problems in underrepresenting the community.

Arab is an ethnicity while Muslim is a religious identity. Arabs come from Muslim, Jewish, and Christian religious backgrounds amongst other religions.

Muslims can be from any racial or ethnic background, and Islam is a majority religion in many countries outside the SWANA region.

Statements like this are very harmful, this is reflective of post 9/11 sentiment that Arab women needed saving by way of the “War on Terror”.

“Particular strands of U.S. liberal feminism and U.S. imperialism have worked in tandem... Both rely upon a humanitarian logic that justifies military intervention, occupation, and bloodshed as strategies for promoting ‘democracy and women’s rights.’ This humanitarian logic disavows U.S.-state violence against people of the Arab and Muslim regions rendering it acceptable and even, liberatory, particularly for women” (INCITE! Nader 2011)

Although most recent Arab Americans migrated to the U.S. because of instability in the region created primarily through imperialist wars, this hasn’t always been the case. The portrayal of Arabs as inherently violent and in need of saving is simply an orientalist trope that legitimizes interventions by the West, and normalizes war.
The Arab youth spotlights and the AROC TURATH report included in this guide point to a lack of institutional support for Arab students and a lack of Arab representation in the school curriculum.

Whether it is correcting the pronunciation of a word or a name, or having to challenge a so-called joke that causes harm, it is a heavy burden for Arab youth to be expected to represent and explain an entire region to an audience whose understanding of the region is based solely on western stereotypes. Educators in the classroom have a responsibility to teach about the region and our cultural histories from the perspective of Arab intellectuals, historians, artists, student activists, and community leaders.
Nearly 30% of teachers said they don't feel comfortable teaching about Arabs or Muslims in their classroom.

Do you feel uncomfortable teaching about Arabs and Muslims?

No 71.9%
Yes 28.1%

ARAB AMERICAN HISTORICAL FIGURE HIGHLIGHT

NAGI DAIFALLAH
YEMENI LEADER IN THE UNITED FARM WORKERS MOVEMENT

PODCAST:
VIVA BROTHER NAGI

DOWNLOAD MISSION HIGH ACC NAGI DAIFALLAH POSTER

WATCH: TAKALAM! OAKLAND ARAB YOUTH ON NAGI DAIFALLAH

ARAB AMERICAN HISTORY AND TURATH
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CURRICULUM & RESOURCES
For teaching about Arab Americans, teaching Arab American students, & Arab American studies

TURATH
Teaching Understanding & Representing Arabs Throughout History

A 2020 survey of Arab youth and public educators in the Bay Area conducted by AYO! TURATH includes the classroom assessment s and solutions proposed by Arab youth.

DOWNLOAD PDF REPORT

Watch: Arab Youth Speaking Up: Oakland Takalam Program

OUSD Office of Equity Slide Deck: What does it mean to be Arab American?

Download book from the Arab American National Museum on Arab American history, culture and experience.

WATCH: ARAB | How You See Me
Teach Arab American Studies: A Workshop for Teachers, Students, and Community Members (Webinar & Slidedeck)

**Lesson:** Solidarity between Black and Arab autoworkers  
GRADE LEVEL: 9-12  
by Yahya Josh Cadji

When Arab and Black Detroit Auto Workers went on Strike for Palestine and better working conditions

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**Lesson:** Understanding Arab and Muslim Americans & their challenges in contemporary social/political contexts in the US  
GRADE LEVEL: 9-12  
by Samia Shoman

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**RESOURCES:** SUPPORTING ARAB STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM

- Supporting Arab American Students in the Classroom | Learning for Justice

- What Every Teacher Should Know About Serving Immigrant-Origin Students

- Research finds sustained impact from an ethnic studies class | Stanford News

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**CURRICULUM & RESOURCES**

For teaching about Arab Americans, teaching Arab American students, & Arab American studies
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CURRICULUM FROM THE LIBERATED ETHNIC STUDIES MODEL CURRICULUM CONSORTIUM (LESMCC)

INTRODUCTION TO ETHNIC STUDIES K-12
CHAPTER FOUR: ASIAN AMERICAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER STUDIES/ARAB AMERICAN STUDIES (GRADE LEVEL: 7-12)

CURRICULUM FROM THE ARAB AMERICAN NATIONAL MUSEUM (AANM)

Lesson plans from Arab American National Museum (AANM). Grade levels: K-12
Virtual English-Arabic Storytime with AANM

MORE RESOURCES
FOR EDUCATORS - ARAB AMERICAN NATIONAL MUSEUM
KARAMA: ARAB AND ISLAMIC WORLD INFORMATION PROJECT
A DOCUMENTARY ON MEDIA PORTRAYAL OF ARABS AND ARAB AMERICANS

RESOURCES

ADVOCATING FOR ARABIC - RETHINKING SCHOOLS

ARAB MUSLIM CANADIAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS CALL FOR GLOBALIZED CURRICULUM TO CHANGE STEREOTYPES - THE CONVERSATION

AS AN ARAB AMERICAN MUSLIM MOTHER, HERE IS THE EDUCATION I WANT FOR MY CHILDREN - RETHINKING SCHOOLS

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT ARAB IDENTITY AND CULTURE - ARAB AMERICA

DABKE TIME - A SHORT DOCUMENTARY FILM

ETHNIC STUDIES: BORN IN THE BAY AREA FROM HISTORY'S BIGGEST STUDENT STRIKE - KQED

HOW TEACHERS CAN SUPPORT STUDENTS DURING RAMADAN - PBS

INTERVIEW: ARTNELSON CONCORDIA: WHY WE NEED ETHNIC STUDIES - LLAG RADIO

LOVE FOR SYRIA - RETHINKING SCHOOLS

'MORE THAN ALADDIN': DISMANTLING COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT ARAB AND MUSLIM STUDENTS - EDUCATION WEEK

PODCAST: THE WHITENESS MYTH - THROUGHLINE NPR

SAVE ARAB AMERICAN STUDIES! EDUCATORS FIGHT FOR AUTHENTIC ETHNIC STUDIES - RETHINKING SCHOOLS

SHORT VIDEO: EXPLAINING ORIENTALISM - TRT WORLD

WATCH THESE DOCUMENTARY FILMS

REEL BAD ARABS
A DOCUMENTARY ON MEDIA PORTRAYAL OF ARABS AND ARAB AMERICANS

POET AGAINST PREJUDICE
A FILM BY PBS ON YOUNG YEMENI WOMEN WHO FOUND POETRY AS HER CREATIVE AND POLITICAL OUTLET
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BOOKS ARAB YOUTH AND THEIR PARENTS RECOMMEND DURING ARAB AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH:

PRE-K AND EARLY ELEMENTARY LEVEL
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LEVEL

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BOOKS ARAB YOUTH AND THEIR PARENTS RECOMMEND DURING ARAB AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH:

- The Cat Man of Aleppo
  - Written by Claire Fontaine
  - Illustrated by Bill Farnsworth
  - Grade level: 4-8

- The Stars in My Geddooh’s Sky
  - Written by Alana Hefny
  - Illustrated by Abigail Stearns
  - Grade level: 4-8

- Silverworld
  - Written by Shara Inouye
  - Illustrated by Abigail Stearns
  - Grade level: 4-8

- One Wish
  - Written by M.F. Yehid
  - Illustrated by Susan Meissner
  - Grade level: 4-8

- Jasmine Warga
  - Other Words for Home
  - Written by Jennifer Niven
  - Illustrated by Abigail Stearns
  - Grade level: 4-8

- Sitti’s Secrets
  - Written by M.F. Yehid
  - Illustrated by Abigail Stearns
  - Grade level: 4-8

- Farah Rocks Fifth Grade
  - Written by Naomi Shihab Nye
  - Illustrated by Susan Meissner
  - Grade level: 4-8

- The Arabic Quilt
  - Written by Ranya M. Baladi
  - Illustrated by Amaar Semerdjieva
  - Grade level: 4-8
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BOOKS ARAB YOUTH AND THEIR PARENTS RECOMMEND DURING ARAB AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH:

MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL

- I Was Their American Dream
- Determined to Stay

HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

- Ibtisam Barakat: Tasting the Sky
- Leila Aboulela: Elsewhere, Home
- They Called Me a Lioness
- Home is Not a Country

(Grade levels: 6-12)
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MOVIES/SHOWS/DOCUMENTARIES ARAB YOUTH AND THEIR PARENTS RECOMMEND DURING ARAB AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH:

- The Swimmers
- Ramy
- Farha
- Theeb
- Born in Gaza
- A New Day in Old Sana'a
- Arab Blues
- Mo
- Secrets of the Nile
- Amreeka
- We Are Lady Parts
- Caramel
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LOCAL ARAB COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Arab Resource & Organizing Center, AROC
Arab Asian Pacific Islander Student Achievement, OUSD
American Association of Yemeni Students and Professionals, AAYSP
Teach Palestine, Project of Middle East Children’s Alliance
Center for Middle Eastern Studies, UC Berkeley
Arab & Muslim Ethnicities & Diasporas Program, SFSU
The Markaz Resource Center, Stanford University

ARAB AND SWANA CULTURAL GROUPS AND RESOURCES

AL JUTHOOR OF THE ARAB SHATAT
Al-Juthoor, meaning “roots” in Arabic and “shatat” meaning diaspora, is a Bay Area Palestinian folkloric dance troupe.

GOLDEN THREAD FAIRYTALES
Golden Thread Fairytale Players is the Bay Area’s only multicultural theater that offers a child-centered cultural exploration of the Middle East.

ASWAT ENSEMBLE
ASWAT is the Bay Area’s Premier Arab Music Ensemble.

ARAB FILM AND MEDIA INSTITUTE
The Arab Film and Media Institute (AFMI) is a non profit organization founded by the team behind the largest and oldest Arab Film Festival in North America.