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Islamophobia Lesson Plan—Part 1

By: Nassim Elbardouh

"To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin." –Bell Hooks

Subject(s): Social justice, social studies, English language arts
Core Competencies: Personal and Social, Thinking, Create and Communicate
Grade Level: Big Ideas and Curricular Competencies are taken from the new **Grade 9 curriculum,** but they can be applied to most intermediate grades.
Time: Approximately one 80-minute block (Part 2 requires 80 minutes as well)

Big Idea(s)

- Exploring and sharing multiple perspectives extends our thinking (English language arts).
- People understand texts differently depending on their worldviews and perspectives (English language arts).
- Emerging ideas and ideologies profoundly influence societies and events (social studies).

Curricular competencies: Students Will Be Able To (S.W.B.A.T)

- Use writing and design processes to plan, develop, and create engaging and meaningful literary and informational texts for a variety of purposes and audience (LA 9).
- Recognize and identify the role of personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in texts (LA 9).
- Make reasoned ethical judgments about controversial actions in the past and present, and whether we have a responsibility to respond (ethical judgment) (Socials 9).
- Define Islamophobia.

Materials required

- Junot Diaz quote (included below)
- Hamdulillah music video: *www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ISHZQJdeSw*
- True or False Quiz (Included below. Adapted from: Give the Red Card to Racism UK: *www.srtrc.org/uploaded/ISLAMOPHOBIA%20ED%20PACK%20FINAL%20PDF.pdf*)
- K/W/L chart.

Lesson Summary

This is Part 1 of a two-part lesson plan aimed at getting students to think about how stereotypes are created and what we can do as writers, critical thinkers, musicians, etc., to challenge them. Specifically, this series is focused on Islamophobia and how it impacts Muslims. Many of our Muslim students, particularly those who wear headscarves (hijabs), have reported feeling alienated and judged in the public school system. As educators, we need to ensure that our classrooms are places in which Muslim students feel safe from the negative stereotypes that are propagated by the media. This is of particular importance after terrorist attacks because Muslim students may feel like they are being blamed for the actions of people who have carried out terrorist attacks in their names. It seems absurd to associate the Ku Klux Klan with Christianity, but the same distinction is rarely made for Muslims. As Wajahat Ali shared in the report Impact of School Bullying and Discrimination on California Muslim Students, "your existence is always interrogated, investigated, and questioned."

In this two-part lesson, students will be asked to participate in an icebreaker, analyze a quote, watch a Ted Talk and music video, engage in difficult conversations with one another, do some writing, and think critically about the messages that they receive about Islam and Muslims.

Key understandings that students will walk away with include, but are not limited to the following:

- To **stereotype** is "to believe unfairly that all people or things with a particular characteristic are the same" (Merriam Webster Dictionary). If Muslim people are routinely depicted as violent terrorists in the media, the message we are receiving is that Islam is an inherently violent religion and by extension, Muslims are violent.

- Negative stereotypes can lead to **discrimination**: "the practice of unfairly treating a person or group of people differently from other people or groups of people" (Merriam Webster Dictionary).

- Stereotypes about Muslim people can create **Islamophobia**: "unfounded hostility towards Muslims and therefore fear and dislike of all or most Muslims" (University of California's Center for Race and Gender Studies).

- Anytime you let a negative stereotype paint your view of an entire group of people, you aren't using your critical thinking skills. If you are antiracist, a feminist, an LGBTQ ally, or if you believe in equity, then you should learn more about the impact of Islamophobia and work to end it.

Time	Lesson Component	Teacher Activities/Optional Discussion Guide	Student Activities
15 minutes	**Introduction**	Move your butt: the purpose of this activity is to learn about the things that we can't see and what we have and don't have in common. Arrange chairs in a circle, one less chair than the number of people. The teacher stands in the middle and explains the rules of the game. **Rules** 1. The person in the middle has to say one thing that is true about themselves that people can't know just by looking at them, using the sentence starter: "Hi, my name is_____. Move your butt if…" If the statement is true for you too, you have to move at least two chairs. One statement per student. Start off superficially and go deeper as the activity continues. 2. After the first practice round, the teacher sneaks into one of the chairs, leaving one of the participants in the middle. 3. If the person doesn't know what to say, help guide them by asking questions like: what do you love to do, what is something about yourself that you are proud of, etc. 4. The game can go on for as long as you want, and the longer it goes, the easier it is to deepen the personal nature of the questions. For example, have you ever witnessed homophobia? Racism? Has a friend helped you through something hard? Who learned something new? Did anything surprise you? What did it feel like to share a part of yourself that nobody sees? Feeling seen and heard is an essential part of our wellbeing. What might it feel like to have people judge you based purely on what you look like? For many Muslims around the world, this is increasingly becoming a reality—particularly after terrorist attacks are carried out in the name of Islam.	Prepare the circle of chairs in advance
5 minutes		Today we are going to discuss Islamophobia. By the end of these two-part lessons, you should be able to define stereotypes, Islamophobia, and discrimination.	

		Fill out K/W/L chart: What do you know and wonder about Islam? Leave out the “learn” part for the end of the lesson. If you don’t know anything, write “I don’t know.” This will be your exit slip/summative assessment.	
10 minutes to discuss		"Did you know that vampires have no reflections in a mirror? There's this idea that monsters don't have reflections in a mirror. And what I've always thought isn't that monsters don't have reflections in a mirror. It's that if you want to make a human being into a monster, deny them, at the cultural level, any reflection of themselves. And growing up, I felt like a monster in some ways. I didn't see myself reflected at all. I was like, ‘Yo, is something wrong with me? That the whole society seems to think that people like me don't exist?’ And part of what inspired me, was this deep desire that before I died, I would make a couple of mirrors. That I would make some mirrors so that kids like me might seem themselves reflected back and might not feel so monstrous for it." –Junot Diaz	Have students sit in groups of four. Each student should have a copy of the quote, or it can be projected on the board.
5–10 minutes share back	**Lesson development**	In small groups, have the students discuss connections they have to the quote. Project the quote on the wall or distribute one copy per group. Share back: which groups in society don’t see themselves represented accurately in the media? Do you feel that your religion, identity, or culture is accurately represented in the media? Did anything from the quote resonate with you? Do you agree or disagree with what he is saying? Why? As young people, people may try to tell stories about you that aren’t always true or reflective of your lived reality. As your teacher, I want you to gain the reading, writing, and speaking skills you need to tell your own stories so that even if you don’t feel like you are adequately represented in the media, you have the skills to write your own narratives. Use the quote to lead the students into a discussion about what can happen when negative stories are told over and over again about a particular group of people. What happens when the mirrors are consistently negative? How does this change how people perceive themselves? Others?	Students discuss Diaz’s quote. Share back with the large group.

5 minutes		Today we will be examining the rise of Islamophobia. Are Muslims represented in the media? In what ways? What is the narrative? Is it positive or negative? How does this impact the way that you have viewed Islam and Muslims? **Important:** If you have Muslim students in your class, be sure to monitor this discussion very carefully. Try a K/W/L chart or writing activity as an alternative way to access this information.	
5 minutes		Although Muslims are represented in the media, the ways in which they are portrayed is often negative. What happens when negative stories are told over and over again about a particular group of people? What happens when the mirrors are consistently negative? How does this change how people perceive themselves? Others? This negative representation creates what is called Islamophobia—the "unfounded hostility towards Muslims, and therefore fear and dislike of all or most Muslims" (University of California's Centre for Race and Gender Studies). • You can introduce one of the extension activities at this point, or move on to the quiz.	
5-minute music video, 10–20 minutes discussion		Before we review the answers to the quiz, we are going to watch an example of two musicians (Yassin Alsalman and Shadia Mansour) doing what Junot Diaz does through his writing (creating mirrors). The song is called "Hamdulillah" which means to be grateful for what one has. The music video is a portrait of Muslims from around the world. Yassin and Shadia did this so that they could "claim their faces back." As you watch, pay attention to how the music makes you feel and what the lyrics and images make you think of. • Watch: *www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ISHZQJdeSw* • Think/Pair/Share: initial reactions? What literary devices did the musicians employ? What grabbed your attention?	Students watch and discuss the music video quote. Share back with the large group.
5 minutes	**Closure (summarize big ideas and key points)**	Yassin, Shadia, and Diaz all have two key things in common: they come from groups who are not accurately represented in the media and they are use written and oral language to weave their personal narratives into public discourse. What else do the two texts have in common?	

		Quiz results • Next class we will explore what impacts Islamophobia has had on Muslims. • For now, remember that we all have secret worlds inside of us that nobody can see, and that is why it is important to be careful with one another. • There is a big difference between what we can *see* and who somebody actually *is.* • Review class definition of Islamophobia. • Write in K/W/L chart but don't hand it in until the end of lesson 2.	
5 minutes	**Assessment** (formative and summative)	• Formative: active listening and participation in class discussion, free writes • Summative: K/W/L Chart, effective completion of the extension activities (see below).	
10 minutes	**Extensions/ Adaptations**	**French connection** A short two-minute video that defines a stereotype: *www.vimeo.com/88978636* **Writing exercise** *"If you want to make a human being into a monster, deny them, at the cultural level, any reflection of themselves." —Junot Diaz* Think about your identity and how aspects of it might be invisible in the media (e.g., age, gender, religion, ethnicity, language, appearance, etc.). Junot Diaz writes so that kids can see themselves reflected in his writing and feel like they are worthy. Imagine you are an award-winning author about to publish a major book, and there is a kid like you who feels invisible. • Write a personal narrative so that they can see at least one aspect of their identity reflected in literature. What narrative do you want to share? • This can be part of a poetry unit. Have students write "Where I'm From"	

		poems—adapted from George Ella Lyon; there are many templates online—or "I Am" poems. • Have students do free-writes using sentence starters from the Ted Talk or quote. **Video project** Using Yassin and Shadia's music video as inspiration, have students create their own music videos in which they represent themselves and their communities in a positive light. • Students with limited written output, or who need more structure, can complete the inner portrait assignment below.	

True or False Quiz

Adapted from Show Racism the Red Card: *www.srtrc.org/uploaded/ISLAMOPHOBIA%20ED%20PACK%20FINAL%20PDF.pdf*

Mark the following statements as either **true** or **false**.

1. Islam is the world's second biggest religion.
2. All Muslims are Arab.
3. Muslims worship a different god than Christians and Jewish people.
4. The Muslim holy book is called the Qur'an.
5. In recent history, women have been head-of-state in four Islamic countries.

True or False Quiz Answer Key

Adapted from Show Racism the Red Card: *www.srtrc.org/uploaded/ISLAMOPHOBIA%20ED%20PACK%20FINAL%20PDF.pdf*

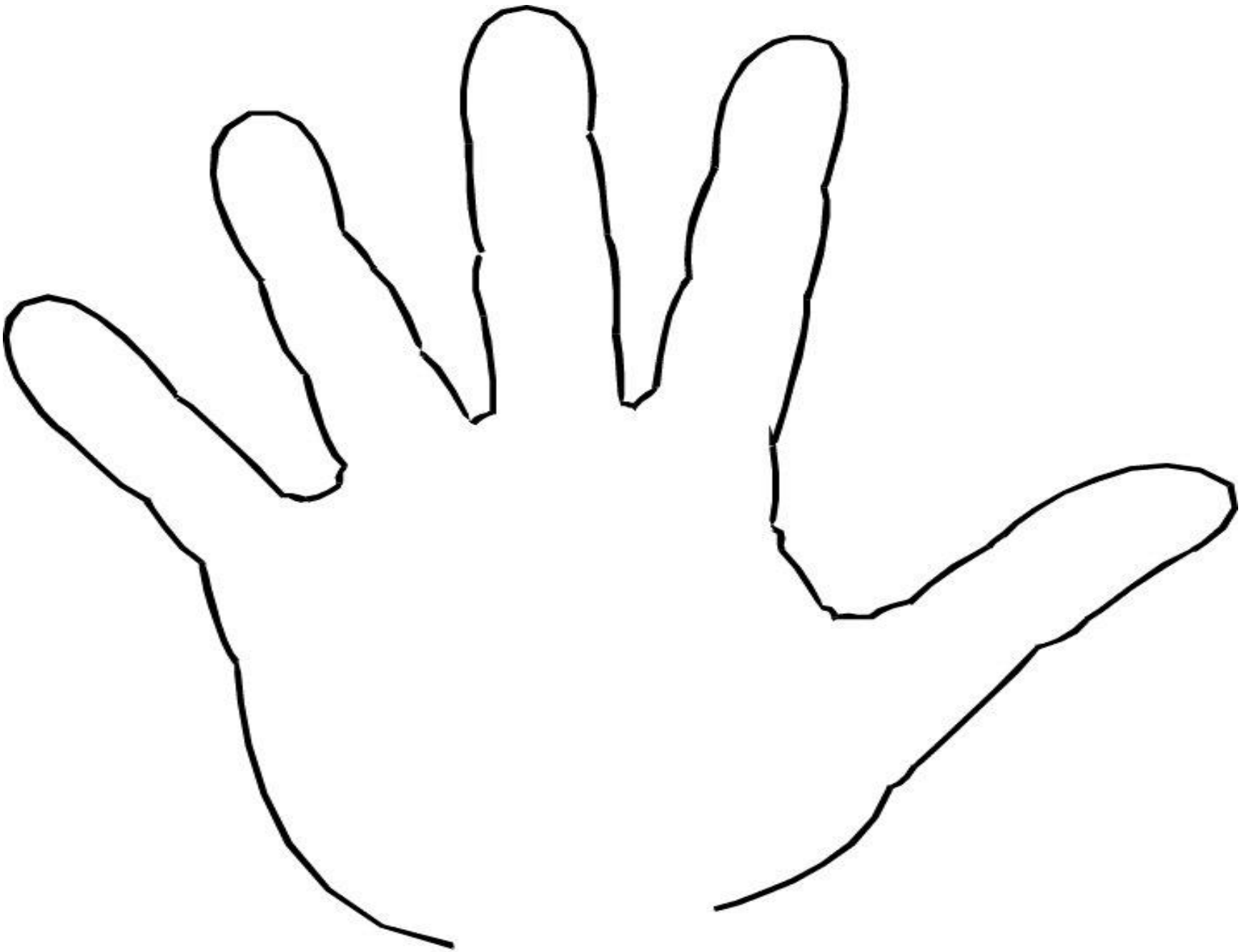
1. Islam is the world's second biggest religion.
   TRUE
   Christianity has 2 billion followers, Islam has over 1.3 billion followers, and Hinduism has 900 million followers.

2. All Muslims are Arab.
   FALSE
   While Islam is often associated with Arab people, they make up only 15% of the world's Muslim population. The country with the largest population of Muslims is Indonesia. Large numbers of Muslims are found in Asia (69% Muslim), Africa (27% Muslim), Europe (3% Muslim), and other parts of the world.

3. Muslims worship a different god than Christians and Jewish people.
   FALSE
   Allah simply means "god" and the roots of the Islamic, Jewish, and Christian faiths are the same.

4. The Muslim holy book is called the Qur'an.
   TRUE

5. In recent history, women have been head-of-state in four Islamic countries.
   TRUE
   Contemporary Muslim women heads-of-state have included Megawati Sukarnoputri of Indonesia, Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, Tansu Ciller of Turkey, and Khaleda Zia and Sheik Hasina Wazed of Bangladesh.



Inner Portrait Assignment

Learning Intention

Learning meaningful, personal facts about each other that are not appearance-based helps us to be more empathetic and compassionate toward each other.

Step 1: Write down five facts about yourself that somebody would **not** know just by looking at you. For example: your hopes, dreams, fears, beliefs, favourite memories, family structure, or languages spoken. Do not write facts about yourself that are related to your physical appearance, such as your hair colour or height.

Step 2: Ask an adult or classmate to edit your sentences and check your spelling.

Step 3: Write your name in the middle of your hand cut-out, and write one fact per finger. Decorate your hand with pictures and colours that will help people get to know you. For example, I might colour my name in green because it is my favourite colour.

Step 4: Read the checklist on the next page. Put a check mark if you have met the criteria.

Step 5: Give yourself a mark based on the criteria. Circle the box that best fits and give at least two reasons for why you believe you deserve this mark.

Read the checklist below. Put a check mark if you have met the criteria.

Criteria	Met	Not yet met
I have read the learning intention for the assignment.		
My inner portrait contains five personal and meaningful facts about myself that someone would not know just by looking at me.		
I have asked an adult or classmate to check my spelling or scribe for me (if I needed help).		
I have written down one sentence per finger.		
My name is written clearly.		
I have included at least one picture.		

Step 5: Give yourself a mark based on the criteria. Circle the box that best fits your completion of the assignment, and provide at least two reasons why you believe you deserve this mark.

Not Yet Meeting	Minimally Meeting	Fully Meeting	Exceeding