

Arab Spring Protest Art Ties to Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley*

This lesson is designed specifically for high school juniors studying Nahgib Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley*, but can readily be adapted for any age level or text dealing with issues of suppression or bias in the Middle East and specifically Egypt. This lesson asks students to connect a novel written by the Egyptian writer almost fifty years prior to Arab Spring in 2011 to connect how this novel foretells the socio-economic and religious problems of the nation that led to the uprising for democracy by looking at protest art. While this helps the students understand the historical background and implications of the novel, it also builds on their writing and multi-textuality literacy skills by teaching them how to view and "read" and image, as well as pose an argument and defend it. This lesson is designed for 1-2 90 minute block.

Concept:

Understanding how past events and social issues are connected to the policies and events of the present, as well as defending a position.

Common Core Standards:

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3](#) Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5](#) Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.2](#) Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.7](#) Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.7](#) Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.8](#) Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.

Goal:

Students will be able to see the relevancy of literature in their own lives, as well as develop critical thinking skills by looking at a variety of literacy textualities and making connections between them, developing their analytical and writing skills.

Objectives:

- Relate literature to events in own personal lives.
- Develop ability to read/view different textualities.
- Interpret different textualities with authentic explication of work.
- Distinguish the difference between a feature in literature and a technique used by an author.
- Craft a clear, precise argument and defend it with specific examples and details.

Materials Needed:

- Slideshow of Egyptian Protest Art found at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/08/04/protest_art?#0
- Video Projector (or print of slides is not available for students)
- Handout on difference between Technique and Feature
- Handout on Arab Spring
- Arab Spring Research Assignment
- Butcher paper or white board
- Markers or dry erase markers
- Large Index Cards

Anticipatory Set:

- Students will have read the entire novel prior to this lesson, which ends in the death of the protagonist Abbas because he does not able to abide the lack of morality in Midaq Alley, where he lives.
- Have students begin by writing in their notebooks why they think Mahfouz kills Abbas in the end of the novel and if the Alley is at all impacted by the death.
- Have students share their ideas to the larger class, noting down key ideas as they do so on butcher paper or the white board. Follow up each point they make by asking for specific evidence of their view. They will want to have this evidence later in the lesson.
- Ask students what they feel the purpose of this novel is, given that it was written so long ago. Have them keep notes of what their peers say in their notebooks. You are trying to guide them toward how to interpret a novel for theme, thus it is important for them to get their initial ideas down and see how they transform over the course of the novel.

Procedures

- Explain to students that before you go on discussing the end of the novel and its importance, you would like to take a quick detour to look at something you feel connects to the novel - Egyptian Protest Art. Ask students if they know anything about the Arab Spring and its origins in Tahar Square. If they need so more information, provide them the handout on the origins and key dates of the Arab Spring provided.
- Have students pull out a start sheet of paper in their notebooks. Explain that for each image that you will show them, you would like them to spend the 3-4 minutes trying to record details about the image that they think are important and what they meaning of each image is. Show the students the about five of the images from the slide show. You may want to zoom in on a few so they can see all the details. If technology resources are in issue, print the image and give the actual images to students in groups. Have each group analyze it for the same time and then pass it to the next group until all images are seen.
- Tell students that before the talk, you will be having a silent gallery discussion. For this, place a print of each image on a larger piece of butcher paper and place these five papers on the wall around the classroom. Have students walk and record their interpretations for each image. If someone has already written their idea, have them draw a line from it and expand on it. This should take another 10 minutes or so. The reason to do this silently is to enable students to remain unbiased in their interpretation but also enables them to build upon their initial interpretation further if they see something that makes their idea click. You are teaching them how the process of interpretation takes time, thus this is building that skill.
- Review the interpretation of each image briefly based on the students notes. Ask them to explain to you why they chose that interpretation - what was in the piece that lent it to that interpretation? At this time, it might be helpful to ask students which image they would like to look at the most, as this will enable them focus on one image for the remainder of the lesson and enable you to build their skills further.
- Create a chart on the board that looks like the following and record their reasons for their interpretation in it. Often students struggle with noting the difference between these three things, so start by categorizing them yourself and then begin to ask them to do so as they give you their reasons. An example is provided below

Element from Art Work	Artistic Technique Used (brush stroke, color, etc)	Effect/Associations of Element	Connection to Interpretation
Lack of faces on people	Swirls where faces should go	Feels less personal, no identity Looks like finger print	Connects to distance government had from people it suppressed

- Have students note which is the technique the artist uses and which are the features of the work. Once they have done this, explain how this is the same difference between techniques and features when addressing an author's style. Use the handout noted in the materials to aid you in your explanation.
- Drawing on this distinction, ask students then to pick one passage that creates a vivid image of setting. Have them address the features of the setting and techniques that Mahfouz uses to create these features. This portion is also detailed on the handout.
- Have students compare their findings in small groups of 2-3. Ask them to identify if the setting they selected are accurate in terms of their understanding of Egypt today and when Mahfouz wrote the novel. You will probably get varying answers to this question, but that is exactly what you want, as now you can build on this difference to ask what is the purpose of Mahfouz depicting Egypt in the negative light he does. What is he ultimately trying to achieve? Not only does this get students to think about writer's purpose, but also it plants the seeds of analyzing the connection of the novel to contemporary changes occurring in the country.
- Ask students to pull out their notebooks again. Tell them to write down any connections between what Mahfouz wrote about Egypt decades earlier and the events of the Arab Spring in Egypt that they now have after this lesson. Have students share their ideas with the class and write them on the board.
- Explain to students that there are two issues that they have danced around but not fully addressed yet. One is what the purpose of an artist is - to depict the beauty or the reality of life - and how each inspires viewers/audiences in their different ways. Two, how accurate does art have to be to convey reality (i.e. can an artist use hyperbole but do so that it is more accurate to the conditions people are experiencing than if he just related the events as they actually happened in neglecting the emotional element of these events).
- Tell students that they will be looking at both of these ideas for homework and discussing them the next class.

Independent Practice:

- Assign the students the Arab Spring Scavenger Hunt assignment. If students do not have readily access to research materials at home due to technology lacking, then make this assignment an in class activity the following class period.
- Once students have completed their research, they can share their findings on a class wiki or in person the next class period. Use the questions you ended the previous class to discuss their findings and address what the role of art is - to inform or escape reality. You also will want to address how a text type achieves different purposes, which ties into the discussion of the purpose of art.

Adaptation:

- For students with with learning disabilities, it is helpful to use the handouts provided, as they will be able to follow along with the class discussion more readily.
- For students with physical impairments, such as vision, it will be necessary to print the images used for this class. Additionally, if you are able, you can let them use a tablet or computer as the class works to follow along.
- For a middle school level class, this same lesson can be applied, but the discussion of feature vs. technique might not be as relevant as the idea of how a literary work connects to the issues happening around the world at the moment, as well as how different types of texts affect their

purpose. Of course you would need to adapt the lesson to fit the work you are studying, but the independent practice can still apply, though at a shorter length.

Extension:

- To extend this lesson further, you can have student choose one feature that is prevalent in the novel and analyze how the author makes different choices to create that feature. Once they have done this, have students then choose a different textual type or medium to depict how those choices create a specific effect in regards to that feature. For example, students can write an instrumental song that highlights how Mahfouz uses mood to foreshadow events through their use of differing harmonics. Or, students could create a mathematical equation to convey how the tension is created in a particular scene. The idea is to get them to use a different modality than they would typically find in the Literature to convey their findings and really make them demonstrate their knowledge.

Connections to Other Subjects:

Fine Arts (Visual and Musical) - use the extension assessment to make a cross-curricular lesson with the fine arts teachers and discuss similar terminology in Literature with these other subjects. This works particularly well when addressing poetic terms with music and imagery terms with visual arts.

Social Studies - use this lesson in conjunction with the social studies classes to explore the reasons for the Arab Spring and the tradition of protest in these regions. Additionally, you can address the psychological effects of poverty and oppression that the characters and many Egyptians experienced, as well as how it ties to the Arab Spring.

Science - in conjunction with the students' scavenger hunt, you can have students address different technological uses of social media and communication or other scientific advancements made by different Muslims over the course of history.