

**Through Saudi Eyes:  
Insight into the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia through Children's Artwork  
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**Introduction**

I have always been fascinated by the idea of artwork as the mirror of a culture. The 1995 issue of *Saudi Aramco World* featured a story highlighting Saudi children's artwork from an annual national contest sponsored by Aramco. The vibrantly colored entries detailed the daily life of these Saudi children's culture, and I used these pictures in my classroom lessons. In November of 2007, I was able to travel to Saudi Arabia as a part of the Aramco Educators to Saudi Arabia program. One focus of my trip was to photograph children's artwork in the schools we visited. This lesson serves as an introduction to a study of Saudi Arabia and provides insight into the culture first through an examination of photographs of Saudi landscapes and culture and then through a study of children's art.

**Objectives**

The students will be able to:

- identify the major physical features of Saudi Arabia and discuss the influence of geography on the culture of Saudi Arabia
- examine the basic tenets of Islam and its influence on Saudi culture
- compare and contrast the United States and Saudi Arabia
- analyze children's artwork as a mirror of the culture
- compare artwork at their own school to Saudi children's artwork to discover the similarities and differences between the two cultures

Time Required: 1- 2 class periods

Materials Required: Handouts, computer access, LCD projector

**Procedure**

- I. Introduction to Saudi Arabia
  - A. Geography, Economics, and Culture
    1. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Geography
    2. Saudi Arabia Facts and Figures
    3. Five Pillars of Islam and Vocabulary
    4. *Inside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* Online Slide Show
- II. Comparing the United States and Saudi Arabia
  - A. Land area
  - B. Ethnicity
  - C. Religions
  - D. Government
  - E. Products
  - F. Oil
- III. Children's Artwork
  - A. *Children's Artwork from Saudi Arabia* Online Slide Show
  - B. Analysis of Artwork as a Mirror of Culture
  - C. Comparing Saudi and Local Art

## Teacher Directions

1. Introduce students to Saudi Arabia through the use of textbook information and maps. Use Handout, *The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* to explore the borders, neighbors, coastline, land area and natural resources. Use the Handout *Saudi Arabia: Facts and Figures* to provide a brief overview of some basic characteristics of the country. *The Five Pillars of Islam* can be used as an overhead transparency to familiarize students with the basic beliefs and vocabulary of the Muslim's religion.
2. Use the following link to present *Inside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* online slide show to students. Advise them to take notes in two columns during the slide show, one column for what they see that seems to be uniquely Saudi Arabian (or different from American culture) and another column for listing similarities or what you would also find within the culture of the U.S. Sample lists are provided below.

<http://www.photoshow.net/watch/jJ6Uf6AN>

### Sample initial lists

#### Differences

Arabic language  
Minarets  
Mosques  
Makkah (Mecca)  
Modesty of women's dress  
calligraphy  
traditional wooden door  
juice boxes with Arabic  
camels  
traditional tent setting  
henna hands  
Fulla (Middle Eastern,  
Barbie-type doll)

#### Similarities

Barbie/Fulla  
modern architecture  
McDonalds  
vegetables in store

Discuss briefly how Saudi Arabia's location as an historic crossroad for trade routes has influenced its culture. Also the two most holy places (Makkah and Medina) for the religion of Islam are located in Saudi Arabia. The Quran serves as the basis for the Saudi constitution, therefore there is no separation of church and state.

Point out that there are mosques and minarets in some communities in the U.S. Dearborn, Michigan, for example, has a large Muslim population. The Headquarters for the Islamic Center for North America is in Plainfield, Indiana.

3. Use the *Comparing the U.S. and Saudi Arabia* handout to point out specific similarities and differences between the two countries. Discuss the cause and effect relationship that result from some of the information provided here.

**Possible questions for discussion include:**

- a. Why are there such differences when comparing the ethnic groups of both countries? What exactly is an Arab?
  - b. What kind of a constitution do we have? What is Shari'a law? What is the oldest constitution in the world? Why is Saudi Arabia's constitution so young? What did they have before this constitution?
  - c. How does oil production and consumption affect our relationship with Saudi Arabia?
  - d. How does Saudi Arabia's telephone usage compare to ours? What about cell phone usage?
4. Now that factual background information has been provided, it's time to take a look at children's art and determine what can be learned about the Saudi people "through children's eyes." Use the following link to play the online slide show entitled *Children's Artwork from Saudi Arabia*.  
<http://www.photoshow.net/watch/Ud3Pu9Nt>
- a. Introduction to slide show. These pictures will provide artwork of various types including textiles, crayon, watercolor, collage, colored markers, and acrylic paint. The ages of the artist range from nursery school to high school level and were produced by students in schools in Dhahran, Jeddah and Riyadh. Safeya Binzagr is an artist in Jeddah who also provides a variety of art classes and workshops for children, as well as a recent competition. This competition challenged art students to creatively decorate figures of angel fish. (For more information about Safeya Binzagr, there is a website listing in the Resources section of this lesson.)
  - b. There is brief descriptive text with each photo. The following questions can assist in guiding students as they watch the slide show.
    1. What ecosystems are depicted in the first slides? What about these slides did you not expect?
    2. What religious influences do you observe in the pictures?
    3. Double wooden doors that are carved and/or intricately decorated are common in Saudi Arabia. What sort of statement does this make about the inhabitants of the house?
    4. Notice the simple drawings of the "family members" on cork board. How do these differ from drawings that American children might make for their family members?

5. There are also several examples of dressy clothes for women. How are these dresses similar to and different from what you might see in your community? What do you think is the reason for these differences?
6. There are several drawings of the inside of a house. How does this differ from what you might have expected from a Saudi Arabian house? In what ways are they similar to houses in your community?
7. The watercolor pictures of landscapes may not be from scenes in Saudi Arabia. Do you agree with this statement or not? Why were these scenes chosen?
8. The last picture is a desert scene. This photo was a contest winner created by Imad Jaha of Jeddah. Analyze the picture and discuss the ways in which men's and women's roles are depicted in the picture.

#### **5. Conclusion/Wrap Up/Follow up**

Discuss the ways in which the children's art work has broadened an understanding of the similarities and differences between the land and customs of Saudi Arabia and students' local culture.

Ask students to bring in examples of student art work from their home or school to display. Discuss what these pieces of art say about the local culture.

#### **6. Enrichment/Extensions**

Students can use personal digital cameras to produce a slide show of their own community, including additional pieces of artwork produced by students. These slide shows can be presented as a mirror reflection of their community and compared to what was presented about Saudi Arabia.

## *The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Geography*



### *Location*

*The kingdom occupies eighty percent of the Arabian Peninsula. Most of the country's boundaries with the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Yemen have been defined*

### *Area*

*The Saudi government's estimate is approximately 2,250,000 square kilometers (868,730 square miles)*

### *Geography.*

*Saudi Arabia, about one-fourth the size of United States, is spread over approximately 2,250,000 square kilometers (868,730 square miles), occupying almost 80 percent of the Arabian Peninsula. Located in the southwest corner of Asia, the Kingdom is at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa. It is surrounded by the Red Sea on the West, by Yemen and Oman on the South, the Arabian Gulf and the United Arab Emirates and Qatar on the East, and Jordan, Iraq and Kuwait on the North. Saudi Arabia's Red Sea coastline stretches about 1,760 kilometers (1,100 miles) while its Arabian Gulf coastline is roughly about 560 kilometers (350 miles).*

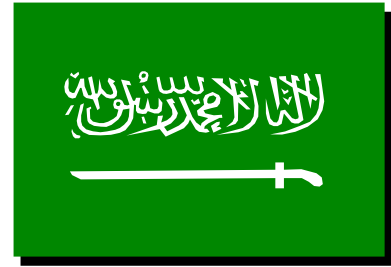
*Desert covers more than half the total area of Saudi Arabia. A narrow coastal plain runs through the Kingdom's western coast while a range of mountains run parallel to the coastal plain along the Red Sea. Along the Arabian Gulf in the east is a low-lying region called Al-Hasa. The mountains in the west of the Kingdom are very rich in minerals with large deposits of limestone, gypsum and sand. The eastern region has the richest reservoirs of oil.*

*source: [www.mofa.gov.sa](http://www.mofa.gov.sa)*

## Saudi Arabia: Facts & Figures

### Flag

green background, with in white letters the Muslim creed in Arabic:  
"There is no god but God: Muhammad is the Messenger of God."



### Emblem

a date palm, representing vitality and growth, and two crossed swords, symbolizing justice and strength rooted in faith.

### Terrain

varied; fairly barren and harsh, with salt flats, gravel plains and sand deserts; a few man-made lakes but no permanent streams; in the south, the *Rub Al-Khali* (Empty Quarter), the largest sand desert in the world; in the southwest, mountain ranges of over 9,000 feet.

### Climate

June through August, over 110 degrees Fahrenheit midday in the desert; humidity in coastal regions up to 100 percent; elsewhere, mild; possible winter temperatures in the northern and central regions dropping below freezing; rainfall, from none at all for up to 10 years in the *Rub Al-Khali*, to 20 inches a year in the mountains of Asir Province.

### Population

as of the 2004 census, 22.7 million, including about 6 million expatriates.

### Religion

Islam, which is the basis of the legal system and of government.

### Language

Arabic; English widely spoken in urban areas.

### National Day

September 23, commemorating the foundation of the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932.

### Government

Islamic state based on principles prescribed by the Qur'an (Islam's Holy Book) and the *Shari'ah* (Islamic law); Provincial Council System, Consultative Council (*Majlis Al-Shura*), and Council of Ministers.

### Time

Greenwich Mean Time plus three (GMT+3) = Eastern Standard Time plus eight (seven during Daylight Savings Time).

### Calendar

Islamic (*Hijrah*), dating from emigration of the Prophet Muhammad from Makkah to Madinah; weekend, Thursday and Friday.

### Holidays

closure of all offices and schools on *Eid Al-Fitr*, the feast of the breaking of the fast, from the evening of the last day of *Ramadan* through the third day of *Shawwal*; and *Eid Al-Adha*, the culmination of the Hajj, from the tenth through twelfth of *Dhu Al-Hajjah*.

### Currency

Saudi Riyal (SR) pegged to U.S. dollar (\$1=SR3.745); bank notes, in Arabic and English, in denominations of 1, 5, 10, 50, 100 and 500 riyals; coins in denominations of 5, 10, 25, 50 and 100 halalahs, with 100 halalahs equal to one riyal; metric system in use.

Source: [www.saudiembassy.net](http://www.saudiembassy.net)

**The Five Pillars of Islam,  
Five Basic Beliefs and Practices That Uphold Islam**

1. tashahhud : The profession of belief that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his final prophet;
2. salat : Five times a day at appointed time Muslims face Makkah (Mecca) and pray;
3. zakat : Giving alms to those in need;
4. sawm : From sunup until sundown during the month of Ramadan, Muslims fast for self-purification;
5. hajj : Each Muslim who is able to is to undertake a pilgrimage to Makkah (Mecca)

**Islam** – The name of the religion

**Muslim** – One who follows the religion of Islam

**mosque** – house of worship

**minaret** – towers that are a part of a mosque, traditionally where the call to prayer is given by the muezzin.



## Comparing the U.S. and Saudi Arabia

	<b>United States</b>	<b>Saudi Arabia</b>
<i>total:</i>	9,826,630 sq km	1,960,582 sq km
<i>land:</i>	9,161,923 sq km	1,960,582 sq km
<i>water:</i>	664,707 sq km	0 sq km
population	300,000,000 (Oct. 2006)	27,019,731
ethnic groups	white 81.7%, black 12.9%, Asian 4.2%, Amerindian and Alaska native 1%, native Hawaiian and other Pacific islander 0.2% (2003 est.)	Arab 90%; Afro-Asian 10%
religions	Protestant 52%, Roman Catholic 24%, Mormon 2%, Jewish 1%, Muslim 1%, other 10%, none 10% (2002 est.)	Muslim 100%
government type	Constitution-based federal republic; strong democratic tradition	monarchy
constitution	17 September 1787, effective 4 March 1789	governed according to Shari'a law; the Basic Law that articulate the government's rights and responsibilities was introduced in 1993
arable land	18.01%	1.67%
agriculture – products	wheat, corn, other grains, fruits, vegetables, cotton; beef, pork, poultry, dairy products; fish; forest products	wheat, barley, tomatoes, melons, dates, citrus; mutton, chickens, eggs, milk
industries	leading industrial power in the world, highly diversified and technologically advanced; petroleum, steel, motor vehicles, aerospace, telecommunications, chemicals, electronics, food processing, consumer goods, lumber, mining	crude oil production, petroleum refining. basic petrochemicals; ammonia, industrial gases, sodium hydroxide, cement, fertilizer, plastics, metals, commercial ship repair, commercial aircraft repair, construction
oil production	7.6 million barrels a day	9.475 million barrels a day
oil consumption	20.73 million barrels a day	1.775 million barrels a day
telephones	268 million (2003)	3,695,100 (2004)
main line use		
telephones – mobile cellular	219.4 (2005)	9,175,800 (2004)

Source: CIA Factbook



## **Additional Resources**

### **Books**

Husain, Yasmeen and Nestor B. Bande, Bayan Gardens School Colors of Saudi Arabia: Childrens' Artwork for Saudi National Day, Bayan Gardens School, Prince Faisal Bin Fahd Road (28<sup>th</sup> Street), Al Khobar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

### **Online Sources**

CIA Factbook

<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>

The Embassy of Saudi Arabia

[www.saudiembassy.net](http://www.saudiembassy.net)

Free Islam ClipArt

<http://www.wisegorilla.com/images/islamic/islam.html>

Free Koran

<http://www.freekoran.com/>

Fulla a Girl's Dream Doll

<http://www.fulla.us/?gclid=COfxioSrv4kCFRscSQoduSBAMw>

The Gallery of Safeya Binzagr

[http://www.daratsb.com/main\\_e1.htm](http://www.daratsb.com/main_e1.htm)

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Saudi Arabia

[www.mofa.gov.sa](http://www.mofa.gov.sa)

Saudi Aramco World 1995, *The Children's Kingdom*, Ni'mah Ishma'il Nawwab

<http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/200408/the.children.s.kingdom-.compilation..htm>

Saudi Aramco World Photo Archive (search Children's Kingdom)

<http://www.photoarchive.saudiaramcoworld.com>