



## **Golden Domes and Silver Lanterns: A Muslim Book of Colors Mini-Unit Plan**

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### **Meet the Designer:**

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*Mini-Unit plan created Winter 2017*

### **Introducing the Mini-Unit:**

The design of this mini-unit occurred following the 2016 presidential election and the January 2017 inauguration of Donald Trump. My students expressed fear and confusion about the information they had heard on TV and the radio, and in what they could grasp of adult conversations. Some students shared that their parents cried whenever they thought of the election. Others pointed out incidents when the candidate had said things that were not kind. The post-election period provided a teachable moment to address the questions, concerns, and anxieties that students were expressing in the classroom. A resource for addressing bias at schools is the free booklet available from the Teaching Tolerance website ([www.tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org)), *A Guide for Administrators, Counselors and Teachers: Responding to Hate and Bias at School* (2017).

This mini-unit was created for a kindergarten class of 20 students in a small college town in Western Massachusetts. The overall political climate of the area is liberal. The class includes a variety of English language learners, and some children with special needs such as language disabilities and developmental delays. The students come from families of diverse socio-economic backgrounds, including parents who are professors and doctors and others who live in public housing and have experienced homelessness. The students represent various ethnic and immigrant groups, including African American, Asian, African, Latino, Arab, European, and mixed ethnicity. The children's home languages include English, Spanish, French, Chinese, Arabic, and Quechua. Some students were born and raised in the area, and others have arrived recently from other parts of the United States or other countries.

### **Student Goals:**

- \* To develop a positive sense of self, their families, and their cultures.

- ✿ To increase understanding of other individuals and different cultures.
- ✿ To develop respect and consideration for the perspectives and experiences of others (*Kindergarten Learning Experiences*. Malden, MA: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Ed., April 2008. P48. Pamphlet).

## **Contextualizing the Picture Book:**

**Title:** Golden Domes and Silver Lanterns: A Muslim Book of Colors

**Author:** Hena Khan

**Illustrator:** Mehrdokht Amini

**Publisher:** Chronicle Books LLC, San Francisco, California

**Date of Publication:** 2012

**Genre(s):** Realistic Fiction & Concept Book

### **Summary:**

*Golden Domes and Silver Lanterns* is a picture book about colors.

A little girl describes Islamic religious and cultural symbols using color, poetry, and Arabic words. The text is simple and the double page spread images are rich and engaging. Readers are introduced to Arabic words such as *hijab*, *kofi*, and *Quran*. This book has caused some controversy as it represents aspects of the Islamic religion such as the Quran and the word God. See the following link to learn more about this controversy: <http://www.slj.com/2013/11/censorship/golden-domes-picture-book-causes-stir-at-scholastic-book-fair/>. It is important to keep this critique in mind as we use this text in our teaching. I recommend checking in with the families you serve about its appropriateness for their children. The text makes an important contribution because it introduces young children to Muslim cultural practices.

### **About the authors and illustrator:**

**Author Hena Kahn** is the author of numerous children's books. She is Pakistani-American and lives in Maryland. After becoming a mother, she noticed the lack of books for young children that reflected Muslim experiences. Her books portray Islamic traditions and cultures. More information about Hena Kahn can be found at her website (<https://www.henakhan.com/about-old/>).

**Illustrator Mehrdokht Amini** was born and educated in Iran. She attended Tehran University and earned a degree in graphic design. As inspiration, she uses Islamic art and her experience of growing up in Iran. Additionally, she pays close attention to the text and works to stay true to the author's message. She is the illustrator of over 15 children's books, and lives in England. See her website (<http://www.myart2c.com>) for more information.

**Geographical Region/Time Period:** The book is set in the present time. The setting is undetermined but depicts cosmopolitan streets and historical Arabic architecture.

**Cultural Themes:** Islamic symbols, traditions, and family.

*Golden Domes and Silver Lanterns* can be included in various themes in an early elementary setting such as explorations of your classroom or school community, holidays, colors, and diverse languages.

**Media of Illustrations:** Mehrdokht Amini uses sketching, photography, and Photoshop to create her exquisite illustrations. She explains her process in this link:

<https://kathytemean.wordpress.com/2014/09/13/illustrator-saturday-mehrdokht-amini>

## Books that support further exploration of these themes:

### Acceptance & Diversity

- ✧ Parr, T., (2004). *It's Okay to be Different*. New York: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.

### Arabic / Islamic culture

- ✧ Amery, H., & Cartwright, S., (2004). *The Usborne First Thousand Words in Arabic*. Tulsa: EDC Publishing.  
Children's dictionary.
- ✧ Bunting, E., (2006). *One Green Apple*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co.  
A young girl is new to her school. She speaks very little English and wears a hijab.
- ✧ Parry, F., (1995). *The Day of Ahmed's Secret*. New York: Harper Collins  
A little boy living in Egypt learns to write his name in Arabic.

## Connecting to Family, Community, and Current Events/People:

### Family Literacy Project

Below is a copy of the letter I send home with students during the winter holidays. The letter invites families to share a holiday tradition or ways in which they celebrate. I include poster board or large piece of paper for students and families to make a poster on. Feel free to use the letter below as a starting point for your own letter:

#### *Family Celebrations*

*In December teachers often struggle with the holiday dilemma. In our class we take a social studies approach by looking at what holidays families celebrate and how. Winter holidays often share themes of light. We are asking each family to complete a poster using photographs, drawings or captions to tell us about what you celebrate and how. You can answer the questions below or present your experiences however you choose.*

*Your child will be invited to share their poster with the class and then display their family's poster.*

*You may consider the following questions:*

- ✧ *What does your family celebrate?*
- ✧ *What special symbols or decorations are associated with this holiday?*
- ✧ *Does the holiday involve lights? In what way?*
- ✧ *What special foods, songs or stories are associated with this holiday?*
- ✧ *Do you dress differently or wear any special clothes for the celebration?*

*This is an opportunity for us to learn more about our different cultures and traditions. The students love to share their traditions and learn more about how and what their friends celebrate. If anyone would like to come in to read a holiday story, sing a special song, share a special dish, or play an instrument for the class, please let me know so we can make arrangements.*

## Learning Experiences:

### Learning Experience Design #1: Read Aloud and Create a Geometric Design

#### Goals:

- ✱ To identify and label parts of a book
- ✱ To look closely at illustrations
- ✱ To introduce the book
- ✱ To discuss the book
- ✱ To create a geometric pattern design

The teacher will do a read aloud of the book and discuss different design elements. Below are some possible elements of book design to explore with your students. Some questions are suggested to guide the discussion.

Explore the Doors to the World website more detailed information on the Whole Book Approach technique including articles and videos. This lesson focuses on a Whole Book Approach that highlights the parts of the book including:

- ✱ Front Cover—What is going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What else do you notice? What is the function of the front cover?
- ✱ Author—Note author's name. Why might the author's name be important?
- ✱ Illustrator—Note illustrator's name. Why might we want to know the name of the illustrator?
- ✱ End Papers—What do you notice about these end pages? What colors, shapes, and images do you see? Do they remind you of another thing or place?
- ✱ Glossary—How is this page different from the other pages in the book? This page gives us the meanings of some of the words in the book that are written in Arabic.
- ✱ Back Cover—What do you notice about the back cover of the book?

The advantage of beginning with this lesson is that students don't need to be reading to successfully interpret a book. The teacher can function as the code breaker. The children can draw on their lived experience with this book's construction and its cultural themes. One might introduce the book by asking students: *What is your favorite color? Can you think of something that is that color?* Students begin by looking carefully at the front cover and describing what they see. By looking critically at the illustrations, and participating in listening and speaking, they will increase their comprehension. Using Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) the teacher builds on children's background knowledge and increases their engagement. Students are asked to look carefully at the front cover and think about and discuss:

- ✱ What is going on in this picture?
- ✱ What makes you say that?
- ✱ What more can you find that makes you think that?
- ✱ Can you say more about that?

Other questions one might ask about the front cover or jacket are:

- ✱ What do you think this book might be about?
- ✱ Have you ever seen a building like this? Where? How might Muslim communities use this type of building?

Moving on to looking at end papers, again engage students in looking critically at the design by asking open ended questions:

- ✱ What do you see?
- ✱ Does this remind you of anything? What?

Telling and showing the students the name of the author and illustrator helps them to recognize that this is important information to note. It helps to establish students in being able to know where to look for and find this information. Perhaps they will begin to familiarize themselves with the style of a particular writer's or illustrator's work. It also invites teachers to practice pronouncing names that we may not be accustomed to saying. Teachers can model genuine interest and effort.

The book's glossary provides definitions for the Arabic words in the story. You can introduce students to the purpose of a glossary. These words may be opportunities to increase the students' flexible thinking and explore how an object can be known by different names that mean the same thing.

After finishing the book, this first lesson can end by asking students to turn and talk to a peer about which was their favorite page and why.

### **Math**

Show students the video of an artist creating tile designs on the The Art of Islamic pattern website (<http://artofislamicpattern.com>, the video [Fez Study Tour 2016 Zellij Workshop](#)). This video—filmed in Morocco—explores one of the authentic sites, and illustrates the use and creation, of traditional Arabic tile designs. These designs are found throughout parts of the Arab world and Spain. Provide students with wooden pattern blocks used in various math curriculums such as Math Investigations to create their own tile design. You can also photograph students' designs and have students recreate their block designs using construction paper shapes. Construction paper design squares can be connected together to form a quilt-like arrangement or kept as individual pieces. Students could also work with a partner, each student taking turns making a design and then attempting to copy their partner's design.

## **Learning Experience Design #2: Guest Reader and Showing of Primary Source Objects, Compare and Contrast Traditions**

### **Goals:**

- ✿ To involve parents or community members in the classroom
- ✿ To give students an opportunity to explore primary source objects
- ✿ To provide a safe environment for students to ask questions
- ✿ To provide an opportunity for students to find differences and similarities

If your class has a Muslim family, invite them to be a guest reader in your class. If your class doesn't have any Muslim families, you could reach out to the larger community such as a local mosque, or university. As of the writing of this curriculum, various inter-faith groups are forming to help create cross-cultural dialogues. Provide the guest reader with the book prior to having them read it to the class. If you feel comfortable, you can ask if they would be willing to share any of the objects highlighted in the book. When I did this lesson in my class, the parent guest shared a prayer rug, and a *kufi*. We then watched as the parent showed us how she puts on her *hijab*. Our class was just finishing a unit on names so the parent went around the class and wrote each child's name in Arabic. We kept this as a chart to display with other projects that the students had completed on their names. Students were very interested in comparing how their names looked in the two languages. The presentation ended with a sweet snack of dates, which many of the children had never tasted before. The class discussed the similarities and differences between other holiday and religious practices (e.g., donations to the poor, eating sweets, use of special lights).

A word of caution: I do not recommend placing these cultural objects in dramatic play areas. My concern is with the protocol for handling these objects. The children might not use them respectfully during play. These objects are symbolic of religious traditions and embedded in rich cultural practice, so they should be treated with respect.

### **Social Studies: Compare and Contrast—Holiday Practices**

If you can have a variety of parents visit your classroom, consider comparing traditions. Another option is to read books with students on the diversity of holidays and religions, such as:

- ✿ Kindersley, A. & Kindersley, B., (1997). *Children Just Like Me: Celebrations*. New York: DK Publishing.
- ✿ Buller, L., (2005). *A Faith Like Mine: A Celebration of the World's Religions through the Eyes of Children*. New York: DK Publishing.

Books like these can affirm and expand children's lived holiday experiences.

After reading these texts, the teacher creates a comparison chart that lists various aspects of celebrations such as use of special decorations, special traditions, games or songs, use of lights, and foods.

Students then draw, write or dictate one way they celebrate and one tradition they have.

When completing this activity, I encourage students to try to write about as many traditions and holidays as possible so that not everyone is writing about the same event. These pages can then be made into a class book or displayed on a wall.

Make your own holiday comparisons chart here:

### **Learning Experience Design #3: Read Aloud *Babushka Baba Yaga* and Create Class Book about Colors**

Polacco, P., (1993). *Babushka Baba Yaga*. New York: Philomel Books.

#### **Goals:**

- ✿ To help students foster critical thinking about stereotyping and racism
- ✿ To help students' perception of differences move towards appreciation, fairness and empathy

(Derman-Sparks, L., (1989). *Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children*. Washington DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children)

### **ELA & Social Studies**

Recall with the class the various books and discussions you have engaged in. Explain that we are learning how important it is to recognize that everyone has special ways of showing what they believe in. Everyone has special traditions or practices that may be different from our own. Many of these traditions and practices are ways for someone to be a good person, like donating money to the poor or not eating meat.

Some of these traditions might require a person to dress differently. Sometimes when people dress differently it might make us feel uncomfortable. How does the way someone dresses or looks influence the way we feel or think about that person? When we have strong ideas about whether a person is good or bad because of the color of their skin or the way they dress, we call that a stereotype.

Read the book aloud, stopping often to ask questions about what is going on in the story. After reading the first page, stop to ask students:

- \* What kind of a person do they think the Baba Yaga is? Why?
- \* How does she look? How do they think she feels?

After the Baba Yaga has taken the clothes, ask the students:

- \* Was that okay to do?
- \* Why did she do it?
- \* What else could she have done?

When Baba Yaga is taking care of Victor:

- \* How does Baba Yaga feel?
- \* How does Victor feel about the Baba Yaga?
- \* How does his mother feel?

When Baba Yaga hears the stories the other Babushkas are telling about her:

- \* Why doesn't she say anything?
- \* If you were one of the Babushkas and thought differently about the Baba Yaga, how might you speak up?
- \* In what ways was Baba Yaga being treated fairly? Unfairly?
  
- \* Why does the Baba Yaga leave?
- \* Why did the town and the Babushkas decide to accept Baba Yaga in the end?
- \* What do you think this story is trying to teach us?

After the reading and discussion, bring out two packages. One will be a crumpled paper bag. The crumpled bag can contain a box of special markers or art supplies for the class. The other package will be wrapped in an appealing manner. The appealing package can contain something unappealing, like broken crayons or pencils. Have the students vote on which package the class should open, and explain their reasoning. After opening the package, ask students if they think they made the right choice. What influenced their decision?

### **Summative Learning Experience: Class Color Book**

On the following day reread the book *Golden Domes and Silver Lanterns*. This time pay close attention to the clothes of the characters. What does the *hijab* tell us about the mother? What does the *kufi* tell us? What about the family walking by wearing street clothes? Could they be Muslims? Let students know that not all Muslims will wear a hijab or kufi. Can they think of other religions or cultures that cover their head or wear special

clothes to tell us about what they believe? This might be a good time to reread the multicultural books in Learning Experience #2.

For the final project students will create a class book about colors. They will complete a color sentence like:

Blue is the color of \_\_\_\_\_. Red is the color of \_\_\_\_\_.

Try to follow this pattern to encourage early readers. Each student will create a page about a different color. I like to use the following technique to make the illustrations special: have students draw in Sharpie markers, then color in the drawings with crayons. They can draw more than one object that has their color. They can also include themselves in the drawing. Students may also write about the object they have drawn, for example describing how the object is used. The teacher can scribe the students' words if needed. If you have used this book around a theme of celebrations, the object can be something they use in their celebration tradition. If this lesson is being used with older children, you can have each student create their own book. Another variation would be for students to each create their own book with several pages that include numerous objects of the same color. Students could offer to read or share these books with younger students.

### Other books about colors:

- \* Diaz Strom, M., (2000). *Carmen's Colors*. New York: Lee & Low Books.
- \* Gonzalez, M., (2007). *My Colors, My World/Mis Colores, Mi Mundo*. New York: Children's Book Press.
- \* Thong, R., (2001). *Red is the Dragon*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books LLC.

### Creating Additional Multimodal Opportunities:

*(Please be aware of the Five Fs—Festivals, Food, Fashion, Folklore and Famous people—that often reduce cultural practices to stereotypical explorations.)*

#### Music

*Cairo to Casablanca: An Arabic musical odyssey* [CD]. (1998). Putumayo World Music.

#### Video on You Tube

*Salaam Shalom* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mMscOmJSGys>). Raffi singing with children's choir, a "dancing prayer for the children of the Middle East." Video posted by the non-profit Centre for Child Honouring.

#### Architectural Building Blocks

Guidecraft Tabletop Blocks, Arabian, available on School Outfitters website.

[https://www.schooloutfitters.com/catalog/product\\_info/pfam\\_id/PFAM34579/products\\_id/PRO46010](https://www.schooloutfitters.com/catalog/product_info/pfam_id/PFAM34579/products_id/PRO46010)

## Standards:

### ELA Literacy (Common Core State Standards)

- \* **RLK1** With prompting and support students will ask and answer details in a text.
- \* **RLK5** Students will recognize common types of text.
- \* **RIK6** Name the author and the illustrator of a text and define the role of each in presenting the ideas or information in a text.
- \* **RLK7** With prompting and support students will describe the relationship between the illustrations and the story.

### Math (Common Core State Standards)

- ✱ **KGB5** Students will model shapes in the world by building shapes from components.
- ✱ **KGB6** Students will compose shapes to form larger shapes.

### Social Studies

Students will:

- ✱ draw, write or dictate traditions observed at various holidays (*Kindergarten Learning Experiences*. Malden, MA: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Ed., April 2008, p53).
- ✱ develop positive social identities based on their membership in multiple groups in society (Teaching Tolerance, Anti-Bias Framework, [www.perspective.tolerance.org](http://www.perspective.tolerance.org)).
- ✱ affirm and grow their knowledge and take pride in their cultural identity (Teaching Tolerance, Anti-Bias Framework, [www.perspective.tolerance.org](http://www.perspective.tolerance.org)).
- ✱ develop curiosity, appreciation, and empathetic awareness of cultural differences and similarities (Derman-Sparks, L., (1989). *Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, p57).

## Next Steps for Your Learning:

Here is an additional resource to help you learn more about doing anti-bias education specifically in relation to Arab and Muslim cultures as well as Islam as a religion:

Merrie Najimy, “An Example of Anti-Bias Education in a Primary Classroom: Exploring Arab American Issues”, in Derman-Sparks, L., & Olsen-Edwards, J., (2010). *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves*, pp152-155. Washington DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.