

## Lesson Plan: Yuval Ron Ensemble

### Overview:

This lesson has been written specifically to prepare Waltham county 8<sup>th</sup> grade Social Studies students for the October 2005 musical performance of the Yuval Ron Ensemble, a group comprised of Jewish, Muslim, and Christian musicians from the Middle East who work to identify and fuse their common musical heritage while promoting music as a potential language for peace and conflict resolution. The major goals for the academic lessons preceding the performance are a) to provide the students with a working knowledge of the three Abrahamic religions, b) to model and practice the process of identifying commonalities between groups often seen as dissimilar and even opposed, and c) to develop the students' understanding of the arts as a potential language of conflict mediation.

### Goals:

#### *Content:*

- The broad similarities and differences between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam
- Strategies for conflict resolution
- The positive impact of cultures in dialogue with each other

#### *Skills:*

- Working in small groups
- Finding commonalities in groups that seem opposed
- Reflecting about new ways to talk about conflict/peace

### Materials:

Copies of homework articles (see attached)

Blackboard and chalk

Large pieces of paper for Peace Poster (poster board is even better)

Markers/colored pencils/construction paper

### Time:

This lesson is designed for two class periods but could quite easily use three.

### Frameworks:

The following frameworks for World History I and World History II may be covered.

**WHI.1** On a map of the Middle East, Europe, Africa, and Asia, identify where Islam began and trace the course of its expansion to 1500 AD.

**WHI.2** Describe significant aspects of Islamic belief.

- A. the life and teachings of Muhammad
- B. the significance of the Qur'an as the primary source of Islamic belief
- C. Islam's historical relationship to Judaism and Christianity
- D. the relationship between government and religion in Muslim societies

**WHIL.39** Explain the background for the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948, and the subsequent military and political conflicts between Israel and the Arab world.

- A. the growth of Zionism, and 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century immigration by Eastern European Jews to Palestine
- B. anti-Semitism and the Holocaust
- C. the UN vote in 1947 to partition the western part of the Palestine Mandate into two independent countries
- D. the rejection of surrounding Arab countries of the UN decision and the invasion of Israel by Arab countries
- E. the 1967 and 1973 wars between Israel and neighboring Arab states
- F. the attempts to secure peace between Palestinians and Israelis

The following Concepts and Skills for grades 8-12 may be covered.

- 8. Show connections, causal and otherwise, between particular historical events and ideas and larger social, economic, and political trends and developments.
- 9. Distinguish intended from unintended consequences.
- 10. Distinguish historical fact from opinion.
- 11. Using historical maps, locate the boundaries of the major empires of world history at the height of their powers.

## Lesson Outline

### Day 1:

- *Introduction to conflict resolution* (15 minutes)

Introduce the concepts of conflict and conflict resolution. Ask students to volunteer examples of conflicts they have heard about or experienced. Examples should range from the mundane (fighting with parents) to the expansive (war). Once students name a few different types of conflicts, reflect about how conflicts are often resolved. Specific examples are helpful. Help direct the students to the idea that conflicts are often resolved when the parties in dispute can identify what they have in common, or what potential outcomes are in both parties' interest.

An example might be: A teenager and parent are fighting over curfew. The teenager wants it to be at midnight, the parent wants 11:30. Each party examines what she *really* wants. The teenager wants to be able to ride home at the same time as her friends. The parent wants the teenager to get home safely. When the parent realizes that the other teenagers will all be driving home at midnight, she realizes that it is actually safer for her child to come home with a group than it is for her to come home by herself. Thus the parent changes the teenager's curfew to midnight, and both parties are happy with the outcome. The conflict is resolved.

- *Practice Finding What We Have in Common: Word Games* (10 minutes)

Now that students have realized that finding commonalities is an important way to resolve conflict, they can practice it! This portion of the lesson is designed to help students find commonalities in objects or qualities that otherwise seem unconnected. The teacher presents five analogies, one at a time (verbally and written on the blackboard), and gives students 45 seconds to write down whatever words/thoughts come to mind in their notebooks. The exercise goes something like this:

Teacher: "How is love like sunflower seeds?" (Students respond for 45 seconds).

Teacher: "How is peace like a red umbrella?" (Students respond for 45 seconds).

Teacher: "How is truth like a cockroach?" (Students respond for 45 seconds).

Teacher: "How is a pickle like faith?" (Students respond for 45 seconds).

Teacher: "How is a hockey-puck like hope?" (Students respond for 45 seconds).

It is important that the students write what immediately comes to mind and that they are encouraged to make tangential connections. The fast pace of the activity is designed to elicit rapid-fire connections. Once this portion of the exercise is complete, the teacher and students revisit each of the analogies in order, and the teacher (or a student volunteer) writes the connecting ideas on the board.

- *Examples in our own world: Pair reflection* (15 minutes)

Students are now ready to start thinking in more concrete terms about how people or things that are very different can have a great deal in common and even influence each other or fuse. Because the United States has such a "melting pot" of influences, there are



plentiful examples from our own culture of seemingly dissimilar foods, sports, and types of music influencing each other.

Some easy examples for discussion are:

Food (Tex-Mex, Pan-Asian)

Sports (kite-surfing)

Music (Christina Aguilera)

Divide the students into pairs and ask them to think of other examples of fusion (Thai chicken pizza!) that they think are even better than the original. They should come up with at least five examples to share with the room.

*A Historical Example: The Golden Age of Spain (10 minutes)*

Just like different types of music or food can influence or fuse with each other with positive results, so can various religious groups. One example that Yuval Ron will speak about during the musical performance is that of the Golden Age of Spain. Introduce students to the basic facts about the Golden Age (see web resources) and explain how Christianity, Judaism, and Islam helped each other thrive, especially artistically, during this time. Be sure to acknowledge that scholars disagree about the actual level of tolerance during this period (especially as it was followed by a period of terrible religious persecution). Ask students to volunteer other examples of how these religions might have influenced each other in different times or places.

**Homework:**

Assign students to read the information packet on Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, (including the timeline) underlining similarities among the religions.

## Day 2

- *Identify common/disparate elements* (10 minutes)

Assign the students into groups of three. Ask them to each compile a list of the commonalities they found among the religions. Have them write those common elements on the board. Reflect about any surprise at the vast shared heritage of three faiths that are often perceived as so different.

- *Reflecting about fusion: artistic examples* (10 minutes)

Explain that there are many people working for peaceful resolutions to the many wars fought over religion (in particular the ongoing conflict in the Middle East) who believe that one way to resolve the conflicts is to focus upon those common elements and to use them to create a new language. Yuval Ron is a relevant example, as he has created a group that is working to find a new musical language together. Emphasize that Yuval Ron and his Christian/Jewish/Muslim ensemble have not only identified their common heritage, but also they constantly work to fuse the best of each of their traditions together. Thus what the students will hear in the performance is often new music with very old roots.

Another example of this sort of fusion happens in the visual arts. Present the students with the copy of the Allah calligraphy image as an example of art that crosses a cultural and linguistic divide. (This is just the sort of fusion that the students will attempt to model in their own peace posters.)

- *Small group activity: Peace Poster* (25 minutes)

Now the students are given the opportunity to try to create a language of peace of their own. Divide the class into groups of three and distribute rolls of paper and other art supplies to each team. Each team has 20 minutes to create a Peace Poster, which must include references to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and may focus on the Middle East. You may want to draw a few well-known symbols on the board for the students to use. Symbols of Judaism could include the Star of David or a Menorah; symbols of Christianity could include a cross or the outline of a fish; and a symbol of Islam could be a black cube that represents the Ka'ba (the sacred building that functions as the center of Muslim pilgrimage). Also show students how to write "Peace" in Hebrew and Arabic (see resources). Each poster should a) emphasize the shared heritage and commonalities of the faiths, and b) make some attempt to fuse the traditions in a creative and artistic way.

Leave five minutes at the end of class to present the posters and to reflect on how each group was able to find commonality and fuse traditions.

### **Assessment:**

Opportunities for informal assessment are ample. The students' reactions and contributions to discussion, their ability to work in pairs or larger groups, and their understanding of the content can all be evaluated on an informal and continual basis. The Peace Poster, however, provides an opportunity for more formal assessment, especially as it combines each of the three stated goals of the lesson (see Overview). During the poster



project, students will have to utilize the content they have learned about the three religions, identify commonalities among those traditions (and creatively assert them), and employ art as a possible language for talking about peace. The ultimate test of both the students' progress toward these goals *and* the lesson's overall effectiveness is whether the students, through the posters, are able to communicate across the traditions in a new and common language.

**Attached Resources:**

Homework articles  
Allah art image  
“Peace” in Hebrew and Arabic

**Helpful Websites:**

The World Religions Index: <http://wri.leaderu.com/>

Information about Judaism: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/heritage/>

Information about Christianity: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/>

Information about Islam: <http://www.pbs.org/islam/>

Information on the Golden Age of Spain:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/history/spain/spain3.shtml>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden\\_age\\_of\\_Jewish\\_culture\\_in\\_Spain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_age_of_Jewish_culture_in_Spain)

**Texts for Further Research:**

Mansfield, Peter. *A History of the Middle East*

Shelemay, Kay Kaufman. *Soundscapes: Exploring Music in a Changing World.*

**About the Author:**

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