

Open Sesame! – Islamic Stories Along The Silk Road

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Introduction

“Open Sesame” - These words from Ali Baba and The Forty Thieves provided me with countless adventures when I was a child. Most students today have no idea what these words refer to and no context in which to place them. As I was wondering how I might approach a study of Islamic Thought and Culture for first graders, my students and I were discussing Christopher Columbus’ voyage in 1492. A student asked, “Why did he want to go to Asia?” and an idea was formed. I thought it would be interesting to look at Islamic stories framed by a journey on the Silk Road. As we pull in to caravansaries along our journey, we can gather on carpets and pillows and hear the stories that travelers told to one another. We will look at the story elements of character, setting, plot, problem and solution and author’s purpose just as we do for those stories in our standard curriculum. Students will ask and answer questions both orally and in writing. We will also discuss historical concepts such as similarities and differences between the present and the past and the economic concepts of needs and wants and trade to explain why the Silk Road even existed. Many of my questions will come up organically as we read our stories and as they spark the children’s imaginations.

I see this unit as a way to impart background knowledge to students on Islam and the Silk Road as an enrichment to teaching our first grade curricular concepts. As students progress through their education, they can draw on this background knowledge to enhance their understanding of world history, culture and literature. We will also see that although these stories have an eastern or Islamic flavor, they are, in fact, universal.

While we will not have any overt discussions of religious dogma, a general understanding of Islam is necessary to answer the “why” questions that students will ask. We can identify some of the culture and traditions found in the books that can also be observed in the present day in our neighborhoods, in our schools and in current events. We can also compare and contrast the stories with similar tales from the western tradition.

Ultimately, at the end of the unit, I want students to understand that even though outwardly people, buildings, and things may look very different, just like Nasrettin Hodja shows, you can’t judge a person by his coat. The culture and values that are depicted in these stories have similarities to our culture and stories here in the west. These stories are “classics” because they do transcend time and space and can provide guidance in the 21st century and beyond.

Background

I teach first grade in a K – 5 elementary school consisting of almost 1200 students. My class consists of 22 students, eleven boys and eleven girls of various races and ethnic backgrounds. Twelve students are on free or reduced lunch. Most students are not well traveled and have very little experience with the world outside of their communities.

Students learn all academic subjects in the first grade classroom. This allows for incorporating different standards from different subjects into one lesson. It is not uncommon to have Social Studies standards addressed in a Language Arts lesson and vice versa.

Language Arts blocks are usually 120 minutes and include both whole group and small group instruction as well as, phonics, grammar, guided reading, fluency, comprehension, writing and multiple chances to demonstrate student understanding.

Academically, students' reading achievement ranges from a pre-primer level to students who read at a third grade level or beyond. Student writing consists of those who write only letter strings to those who write on topic for four plus sentences including proper conventions (capitals, spacing, and punctuation) and correct spelling of short vowel words and appropriate first grade word wall words.

I envision this unit happening for a minimum of seven days at the end of the school year. We can review Language Arts comprehension concepts such as characters, setting, problem and solution, making predictions, author's purpose, compare and contrast, sequencing and plot. Each stop on our journey, as well as having a different story and setting along the Silk Road, will highlight one or more comprehension strategy.

While I currently have no Muslim students in my classroom, there are quite a few students of that faith in the school and girls in headscarves, women in the burka and men in skullcaps can be seen walking our hallways. Teaching a unit using Islamic traditional stories will provide all students an opportunity to hear stories that are not currently told in our curriculum and may help in bridging some cultural gaps in our schools.

First grade students still have a magical way of thinking and attribute many things they do not understand to God. When, during our weather unit, students are asked where rain comes from, many will say that "God" or "Jesus" makes it rain. In my experience, most students have a concept of God as the creator of everything; even students of a non-religious bent do not have science or reason to fall back on and will accept that there is some guy in the sky who makes everything happen. When there are students from non-Christian religions such as Judaism or Hinduism, most first graders do not understand that they hold different beliefs because, at six and seven years old, students are still in their "egotistical" stage of development and do not understand that others may think

differently than they do. Most students in my class would find it inconceivable that my Hindu student does not believe in the same god as they do. We may talk about different celebrations such as Hanukkah, Diwali, Ramadan and Christmas but we never discuss the religious aspects of the celebration only the family and community aspects.

Bringing a study of Islam to students this young is very difficult. I could take the historical route and talk about Abraham, Moses and the Jews, Jesus and the Christians and then Muhammad and Islam but this is so far outside of our first grade curriculum that I am sure that it would be troubling to my administration. The answer, for me, is to have a general understanding of Islamic thought and culture, enough to explain situations and customs and answer questions that will be brought up by a first grader during our study of stories told or set in the Islamic areas along the Silk Road.

Concepts

Islam

We need to start with what exactly is Islam? Islam is one of the three world religions that trace its roots back to Abraham, the other two being Judaism and Christianity. As we learned in our seminar, according to Muslim tradition, Allah asked Abraham to sacrifice his first born, Ishmael. Abraham obeyed but God instructed him to replace Ishmael with a ram. Eventually Abraham's wife, Sarah, was worried about her son Isaac's birthright and asked Abraham to send Ishmael and his mother Hagar into the Arabian desert. Abraham agreed after God told him that he would raise a great people from Ishmael. Hagar and Ishmael wandered in the desert until, out of food and water, they lay down to die. The spring Zamzam, sprung up from where Ishmael lay and this was where the city of Mecca was founded. Many years passed and in the year 560 CE Muhammad was born.

Islam was brought to the world through Muhammad, The Messenger Of God. Muhammad was an orphan who worked for his uncle's caravan until he met a successful businesswoman, whom he married. Muhammad would meditate in the hills above Mecca and it was here that he was given the word of God as related by the Archangel Gabriel. He recited what he was told and his followers collected these recitations in the Koran.

Islam uses the Koran as the basis for its theology. The Hadith is also important to the cultural aspects of Islam. The Hadith collects sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad and is a tool for understanding the Koran and how one should live one's life.

There are five basic tenets of Islam and these are called the Five Pillars of Islam and these pillars may be referenced in our stories. According to www.thefivepillarsofislam.net they are:

1. Belief in Allah, the one and only true God.
2. To pray (salah) 5 times a day facing the Kaaba in Mecca.

3. Pay Zakat (charity) 2.5% of earning.
4. Fasting (fasting sunrise to sunset) on the 9th month of the Islamic year.
5. Haj, pilgrimage to Mecca a least once in a lifetime.¹

The aspects of Islamic culture that we shall encounter the most in our journey are the importance of charity and hospitality and the renunciation of greed. Through the illustrations and descriptions in our storybooks, we shall also touch on dress, art and architecture.

Charity to the poor and hospitality to strangers is very important in Islamic culture. I have experienced kindness and hospitality first hand in both travels in an Islamic country and in visiting a mosque in Delaware. As the Koran states:

Show kindness to parents and kindred, to orphans and the destitute, to near and distant neighbors, to those who keep company with you, to the traveler in, need and to the slaves you own.²

Hospitality in the Islamic world played a part for many travelers from the historical Marco Polo to the modern Rory Stewart and his travels in Afghanistan. We shall encounter this tradition in many of our stories.

Other aspects of Islamic culture we will encounter in our stories are the obligations to widowed and orphaned family members and polygyny, marriage to more than one woman.

Greed is seen as an evil thing. The Koran states:

“Never let those who hoard the wealth that God has bestowed upon them out of His bounty think it good for them: indeed it is an evil thing for them. The riches they have hoarded will become their fetters on the Day of Resurrection.”³

In first grade many of our stories are richly illustrated. As we read, we will encounter depictions of Islamic culture. Students will be curious as to the manner of dress that many of the characters wear. The veil and loose fitting clothes of Scheherazade, the storyteller of 1001 Arabian Nights, and other female characters as well as the turbans and robes of Sinbad and Nasreddin Hodja, the Turkish wise man may be strange to many students.

According to The Muslim Women’s League, “The exact rules defining women’s dress have been determined based on interpretation of (Koran) verses and incorporation of

concepts established in hadith.”⁴ Various interpretations, as well as ethnic traditions, can account for the differences in dress within the Islamic tradition.

Again, hadith and also legend play a role in men’s appearance. “White is thought by some Muslims to be the holiest turban color, based on legends that the prophet Mohammed wore a white turban.”⁵ Beards are popular because the Prophet wore a beard.

As our caravan moves east, the art and architecture will take on an Islamic flavor. Unlike in Islamic tradition, our books will be illustrated with pictures of people and animals. The buildings that we will see will have geometric ornamentation much different than what we are used to. Storybooks may also have this ornamentation on covers, end pages and margins. We will be using web resources such as Google Earth and www.360Panoramic.com to see buildings and landscapes throughout our journey so students will see both illustrated historic images and current photographic images.

Silk Road

The Silk Road was a trade network that stretched from Constantinople/Istanbul in the west to the Chinese city of Luoyang in the east. Trade goods such as fabrics, gold, silver gems, spices, glass and perfumes were not the only things that moved along this network, stories, ideas and religions including Islam also spread. The 7th and 8th centuries saw the expansion of the Umayyid Caliphate east into Central Asia as well as the ascendancy of the Tang dynasty in China. With the emergence of these two empires, a resurgence of trade and travel along the Silk Road commenced.

The creation of an immense Muslim multinational network was to encourage not only the exchange of products, but the circulation of science, techniques, ideas, and texts...⁶

In 1196, Genghis Khan created the Mongol Empire and from 1260-1368 the “Pax Mongolica” reigned and trade flourished. In 1264 Kublai Khan founded the Yuan Dynasty in China which, in 1368, was overthrown by the Ming Dynasty which ended the eastern part of the Silk Road trade. In 1369, Timur consolidated and controlled the Silk Road trade in Central Asia. In 1453, the Turks conquered Constantinople and closed the Silk Road to Christians. We will be taking liberties with the timeline, visiting cities and hearing stories in a geographic progression but also moving forward and backward in time.

Cities that we will visit along our route include Istanbul, Baghdad, Persia, Samarkand and Kashgar. Cities farther east in China may be saved for a later unit.

The main mode of travel was in caravans. Caravans consisted of dozens to thousands of animals, usually camels, packed with trade goods and the necessities of travel.

Caravans went from oasis town to oasis town, sometimes travelling many days without shelter or water. When caravans would arrive at an oasis, many times they would recuperate in a caravanserai. The caravanserai fit in well with the Islamic tradition of hospitality to travelers.

In the thirteenth century, the Seljuk Empire in Turkey and Persia built a system of caravanserais throughout the empire. They offered three days of free food and lodging. They even included free medical care!⁷

Strategies

Comprehension

In first grade Language Arts, we are learning to read. Throughout the year, we will have learned various strategies to promote comprehension of what we have read. These comprehension strategies can be used for both student reading and listening. For the most part, the stories that we will study will be read to the students as the words that are used are not easily decodable for the average first grade reader.

Comprehension strategies that we will use for every story are character and setting. Who is the story about and where does it take place? Students will note details about characters and setting. What do they look like? How do they dress? Students will draw their own interpretations of characters and settings based upon descriptions in the text. Students will make connections to their world and to their lives by noting whether the characters and settings remind them of anything. As the unit continues characters and settings will be compared to one another.

As these stories will be unfamiliar to the students, we will also stop during reading and make predictions as to what will happen next. Students may have an opportunity to write and illustrate a different ending for a story or a further adventure for a character.

Students will also show comprehension by retelling stories. Retelling can be achieved in various ways, such as sequencing pictures or writing sentences telling what happened in the beginning, the middle and the end of the story. Students may also orally retell stories or act out the plot of a story.

Most of our stories have a lesson or moral. Students will be asked to identify a lesson, moral or main idea in the stories. Does this lesson pertain to life today?

Students will also be asked to identify problems that characters encounter and the solutions to those problems. Students may be asked to provide an alternate solution to a problem.

Students will also discuss cause and effect. When something happens, why did it happen and what effect does it have in the plot?

Although specific comprehension questions may not be explicitly mentioned in each lesson, informal assessment will dictate which questions get asked and at what frequency.

Islam

While we will not be debating religious dogma, we will have a discussion of how Islamic traditions play into the plots of the stories. Are aspects of the Five Pillars found in our stories? Does the tradition of hospitality have an important part? When we look at the illustrations, how do they compare with the illustrations we see in comparable western literature? Are the characters actions and emotions recognizable or are they inherently foreign to us? Ultimately, do these “Islamic” stories transcend their time and place and provide lessons for western first graders in the 21st century or are they stuck within the culture and time they were created for. Each stop on our tour will feature some sort of photograph evoking a sense of place for the reading. Of course, these photographs are modern but they will still give an exotic atmosphere for the lessons. Ultimately, our unit will end with a reading of Listen to the Wind by Greg Mortenson and Susan L. Roth. While Korphe, Pakistan is not on the Silk Road, this book will give students a chance to identify with other elementary age children and to realize that not only are our cultures’ stories similar but our people are, as well.

Silk Road

Traveling along the Silk Road is how we are going to transition from story to story. We will begin our unit in Istanbul with a Nasreddin Hodja story and then continue east. As part of our unit, we will be looking at architecture from our host cities to set a mood for our stories. Websites such as http://www.360tr.com/34_istanbul/topkapi/# and <http://www.360cities.net/image/obruk-han-anatolia-turkey#-328.66,-16.47,110.0> will give my students a world in which to place these stories.

We will use Google Earth and current pictures from sites such as www.panoramio.com to compare and contrast architecture from the past with that of the present. How did cities change over time? What in the decoration and architecture is “Islamic”?

We will discuss the reasons for the Silk Road. How were goods conveyed from one market to another? Were the things traded needs or wants? How were goods obtained? What goods would be good to trade? How did trading occur? How did caravansaries make travel easier? Were goods the only things traded? What else may have been exchanged? Tales about Sinbad, Ali Baba and other merchants will enable us to explicitly

tie economics in with our stories. As we discuss the similarities between stories, both eastern and western, students will see that goods were not the only things to travel on the Silk Road.

Classroom Activities

Lesson One: Setting the Stage

Vocabulary: Allah, Bactrian camel, caravan, caravanserai, culture, goods, Islam, Moslem, silk, trade

Opening: Tell the students that we will be going on a long journey, both back in time and to strange and wondrous lands. On this journey we will hear stories and meet characters that have fascinated people for ages. We will be joining a caravan leaving the city of Istanbul in what is now the country of Turkey and heading east to Kashgar on the western border of China. We will be meeting a caravan from Xi'an in China and trading our goods for silk and other items.

Instruction: This would be a good time to read We're Riding on a Caravan by Laurie Krebs and Helen Cann. This book describes the experiences of a caravan traveling the eastern portion of the Silk Road from the city of Xi'an in eastern China to Kashgar in the west. In the story, the caravan stops at various towns along the route and trades for the goods that the town is known for.

Caravans were made up of many groups of both private merchants and government officials. The travelers hired professional camel drivers, baggage handlers, camp tenders and other workers, all of whom typically worked only one relatively short stretch of the entire route... Depending on the terrain, they might go as few as ten miles or as many as fifty miles in a day.⁸

Students should decide what goods they should bring on our journey. What items would people want 800 years ago? As we have studied needs and wants during Economics, students should decide on whether we should bring necessities or luxuries. Students should remember that our journey will be long and difficult. Our items should not be very fragile, should not spoil easily and should be beautiful, useful or unusual so people will want them and pay a lot for them. Descriptions of typical Silk Road trade goods can be found in Kathy Ceceri's book The Silk Road: Explore the World's Most Famous Trade Route. For expediency, students should select items from our time that are easily transported and do not rely on our technology to use. Have students give their reasons for choosing the items.

You should also discuss how you will carry your items. Remind students that we are in the past and the automobile has not been invented. For our purposes we need an animal that can carry a lot of weight, does not need much water and can travel through many

different kinds of terrain. The camel is perfect for our needs. There are two kinds of camels: dromedary, with one hump, and Bactrian, with two humps.

Some historians say it was camels that made the Silk Road possible. A camel can travel more than 2 miles an hour. That's as fast as a horse or ox pulling a wagon. But a camel doesn't need a wagon. It can carry 300 – 500 pounds on its back."⁹

Watch a video of Bactrian camels and get more information at National Geographic Kids.

Caravans on the Silk Road stayed in caravanserai:

Typically, caravanserai were built within a square or rectangular wall to give protection from attack as well as from the elements, excessive heat and cold, rain and snow, dust storms and hail. They were entered by a single, easily defended gate that was wide enough and high enough to permit fully laden camels to pass through. The central courtyard was open to the sky and lined with stalls for beasts of burden and rooms to accommodate travellers together with their merchandise. Well-organised caravanserai provided washing facilities, cooked food and fodder for animals, and sometimes small shops. In Muslim areas – which, by the 8th century AD, already meant most of the Silk Road – there were rooms for prayer, orientated towards Mecca.¹⁰

There are many photos of caravanserai in various states of repair available on the Internet including: <http://www.360cities.net/image/obruk-han-anatolia-turkey#-328.66,-16.47,110.0> and <http://www.goreme.com/caravanserais.php>.

In order to keep track of where we have been we will need a map. Blank maps of Asia are readily available for printing on the Internet and you can doctor these maps by adapting the map activity from page 4 of Marco Polo for Kids by Janis Herbert. Students can print the map on white paper, stain it with strong tea and, after it dries, crumple and re-crumple the pages to make an ancient scroll-like map. We can trace our journey on the map adding a map key with features such as deserts, mountains and, of course, cities.

Assessment: How could caravans help cultures to get to know each other? Besides goods, what else did caravans carry? Do you think caravans caused people to change in any ways?

Lesson Two: Istanbul

Vocabulary: mosque, turban

Opening: Start the lesson by zooming into Istanbul on Google Earth. Istanbul is the former capital of the Roman Empire and Byzantine Empire founded by the Roman Emperor Constantine in 330 CE known as Constantinople. Istanbul straddles the European and Asian continents. In 1453, the Turks under Sultan Mehmet II (The Conqueror) captured the city and it became the capital of the Ottoman Empire. Spend a few minutes looking at online pictures from the Sultanhamet area, which includes the Hagia Sophia (a Byzantine church turned mosque turned museum) and the Blue Mosque. You can take an interactive tour of the Hagia Sophia via:

http://www.360tr.com/34_istanbul/ayasofya/english/ and the Blue Mosque via:

<http://www.360cities.net/image/blue-mosque#0.00,0.00,70.0> Discuss similarities and differences between the architecture of Istanbul and your community.

Instruction: This is a good day to bring up Islam as students will see Arabic writing on the walls of the mosques and will notice that the architecture is different than what they are used to. They may also see people dressed differently than in their communities. By answering questions and guiding the conversation you can discuss the Five Pillars of Islam and how they inform daily living of Muslims throughout the world. One of the mosques can be compared to where students may go to worship. What is the same, what is different? The idea that Allah and the Hebrew and Christian god are the same deity can be explored.

For this spot on our tour I will read The Hungry Coat by Demi although there are many other stories available. The Hungry Coat is a story about the Turkish folk legend Nasreddin Hodja, in this case called: Nasrettin Hoca, a wise man and imam who doled out wisdom and common sense in 13th and 14th century Turkey through humorous tales of his adventures. Students will identify the main character and setting of the story and will discuss the problem that Nasrettin encounters. When Nasrettin leaves his friend's house after being ignored, have students pair up and share what they think he will do next. Call on a few pairs to get an idea of their answers and then continue the reading. After concluding the reading, students will discuss Nasrettin's clever solution to the problem. Why did Nasrettin go home, bathe and change into a magnificent coat? Why did Nasrettin return to his friends and then begin "feeding" his coat? For further discussion: what is the lesson that Nasrettin illustrates for us? How can we apply his lesson in our lives? In Islam, as noted earlier, Muslims should show charity to the destitute. Were Nasrettin's friends showing charity? Is this story a particularly Islamic story? If the illustrations were changed to people in modern day dress in a modern Western city, would the story still make sense? Does the character Nasrettin remind students of any other character in popular culture?

Assessment: Have students retell the story and fill in a graphic organizer with character, setting, problem and solution.

Lesson 3: Baghdad

Vocabulary: Caliph, merchant, porter, Maharajah

Opening: Before Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi war, Baghdad conjured up visions of crowded markets, genies in lamps and flying carpets. This day will bring us back to that time when Baghdad was the center of the Islamic world. Unfortunately, due to the violence in Iraq, appropriate images are hard to find on the Internet, instead we will use images from our picture books. To give students a little background knowledge there is a short video found on Discovery Education that describes the Silk Road and then how other goods traveled by ship.

<http://player.discoveryeducation.com/index.cfm?guidAssetId=E90653C4-08E3-46F0-AF05-254BB71A47BD&blnFromSearch=1&productcode=US>

Instruction: The story we will read is that of Sinbad the Sailor from the classic A Thousand and One Nights. Our version is Sinbad's Secret retold and richly illustrated by Ludmilla Zeman. A more complete chronicle of Sinbad's seven voyages can be found in The Arabian Nights: Their Best Known Tales edited by Kate Douglas Wiggin and Nora Smith. It might be best to set the stage for Sinbad's tale with the opening scene from Best Known Tales as this gives the reason for Sinbad recounting his adventures to the porter Hindbad (called Sinbad in Zeman).

Hindbad is employed to carry a heavy load from one end of Baghdad to the other. It is hot and he must rest and does so in a very pleasant place that is not among his usual haunts. He notices a mansion where a feast is taking place. He asks who the house belongs to and hears it is the famous voyager, Sinbad's. He appeals to Heaven to know why Sinbad is fortunate and he is wretched. Sinbad hears his appeal and invites the porter to feast with him and listen to his adventures. He wants the porter to know that he has suffered much for his wealth.

As we are reading take special note of the illustrations. The illustrations on the margins of the pages are vegetal patterns of an eastern bent. The text illustrations, especially as they refer to Baghdad, show a city far different than what we are used to. What do students notice about the buildings? They should see minarets, domes and crescent moons denoting many mosques meaning that Baghdad is an Islamic city and Sinbad a Moslem. As we discuss Sinbad's character, we can explore whether the stories are strictly Islamic or more universal.

We can also view a story about Sinbad's interaction with the mythical creature, the rokh at Discovery Education:

<http://player.discoveryeducation.com/index.cfm?guidAssetId=C4AA8AB8-D13F-4CAD-8B78-42AE2A72FBE4&blnFromSearch=1&productcode=US#>.

Assessments:

- For each tale that Sinbad relates, students should identify the setting and retell what happened in the beginning, middle and end of each voyage.
- Have students write about and illustrate a favorite scene from a voyage.

- Sinbad is a sailor but our trip is happening over land. Have children explain the advantages and disadvantages of land travel as compared to sea travel as related by Sinbad.

Lesson 4: Persia

Vocabulary: bazaar

Opening: Our journey now takes us into Persia. Persia, present day Iran, had many perils for travelers including deserts, high mountains and bandits. Besides caravanerai, caravans also visited many bazaars along the way. Many bazaars were open air markets and now many are covered. We can see a covered bazaar in Isfahan, Iran at:

<http://www.360cities.net/image/bazaar-of-isfahan#359.01,-4.85,70.0> There is another picture from Aleppo, Syria that has many more people in it.

<http://www.360cities.net/image/aleppo-syria-bazar-souq-2006#167.03,12.34,82.2>

Bazaars were important because they provided regular sites where people could buy, sell and trade goods.

When traders stopped at oasis towns, they would lay out their wares along the side of the road to trade. This informal trading led to regular marketplaces in specific places at specific times. When markets got too big, they were divided into separate bazaars. Each bazaar specialized in different kinds of goods.¹¹

Instruction: Today we will read Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves. There are various versions of the tale that we can read and the Usborne Young Reading series has one that is at an appropriate reading level for many first grade readers but is simplified and leaves out some of the “Islamic” aspects of the story. What I will do is read a more faithful and complex version and, if I can get enough copies of the Usborne version, I will use that one for small reading groups.

Ali Baba is a poor woodcutter who encounters a group of thieves in the desert. The thieves do not rob in the local area but, instead, prey upon caravans farther a field, perhaps on the Silk Road. Unbeknownst to the thieves he hears the password, the legendary “Open Sesame”, to enter their secret lair. Ali Baba ventures in and takes a little bit of gold. Ali Baba’s greedy brother, Cassim, finds out about the treasure and attempts to steal some for himself. Things do not go well and he gets hacked into four pieces. When Ali Baba returns to the lair, he discovers the body (and takes a bit more treasure). Ali Baba, with help from Cassim’s widow and her slave Morgianna, is cleverly able to keep the death a secret. The leader of the thieves eventually figures out who has been helping himself to their treasure and sets in motion a plan to kill Ali Baba. Ali Baba, who is now married to both his first wife and his brother’s widow, is saved by the quick

thinking Morgianna. Morgianna saves Ali Baba two times, earning her her freedom and a marriage with Ali Baba's oldest son.

Of all our stories, "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" has the most Islamic elements. Cassim and Ali Baba started out with the same inheritance but Cassim married a woman who had inherited a fortune. When Cassim died, their combined wealth passed to his widow. Islam changed Arab tribal practice and women could inherit wealth "...the women of the Ummah were, for the first time, given the right to inherit the property of their husbands and to keep their dowry".¹² When Cassim is killed, they must sew him back together, put him in a shroud, and take him to the mosque where the imam will perform the funeral. This ritual shows that Cassim and Ali Baba are Muslim. Ali Baba has more than one wife. The Koran states "... you may marry other women who seem good to you: two, three, or four of them."¹³ Islamic hospitality plays a special role in this story as, two times, Ali Baba unwittingly hosts the leader of the thieves in his house. Greed is unrewarded. During reading, students should be asked at multiple stages to predict what they think will happen next. Does this story have a moral? The fates of the characters would lead one to suspect that greedy people will suffer ignoble ends and those who are not are rewarded. The thieves hoard their treasure, in direct violation of Koranic teaching, and end up losing their lives but those who are clever and "using their good fortune with moderation, lived in great honour and splendour".¹⁴

Assessment: In our curriculum we read a modified version of the Greek myth "King Midas and the Golden Touch". I will ask students to compare the characters Cassim and King Midas and reflect upon the perils of greed. A version of the myth can be found at: <http://atschool.eduweb.co.uk/carolrb/greek/midas.html>.

Lesson 5: Samarkand

Vocabulary: Beg, conjuror

Opening: Samarkand, in present day Uzbekistan, had long been a major crossroads for trade and had even been conquered by the Greek general Alexander the Great during his conquests of Central Asia in the 320's BCE. Genghis Khan destroyed the city in 1220 CE. Timur, known as Tamerlane in the West, rebuilt the city in 1370 and made it his capital. As his power increased, he tried to restore the Mongol Empire to its previous glory. A merciless warrior, Timur was also a great patron of the arts. He was said to have commissioned a transcription of the Koran that was so tiny it fit on a signet ring and also one so massive it had to be carried in a wheelbarrow. Many of the buildings he commissioned in Samarkand stand today. You can get a view of Samarkand via Google Earth and see some of Timur's architecture by choosing a panoramic view from: <http://www.world-heritage-tour.org/asia/central-asia/uzbekistan/samarkand/map.html>

The book Stories from the Silk Road retold by Cherry Gilchrest features a narrative about "The Splendors of Samarkand" that can be read to the children. The Peace Corps has a presence in Uzbekistan and there is a short video showing some family life that was put together by a volunteer. This video can be shown to add some current flavor to the lesson. There is also a retelling of an Uzbek folktale that we will use in our instruction.

Instruction: In this lesson we will compare and contrast two similar stories about a ruler in Uzbekistan who is rather bored with his lot in life. The first story is called “The Khan’s Robe” and was translated by Peace Corps volunteer Marilyn Peterson and her students in the city of Bakrane in Uzbekistan from the oral tradition of her students’ families. It is read aloud online. The second story is called “A Rainbow in Silk” and follows the “The Splendors of Samarkand” in the Gilchrest collection. I would listen to the story first so students will be able to have their own ideas as to what the characters look like. As usual, we will identify the characters, setting and plot. We should pay particular notice to the Khan and how he acts and what happens to him at the end of the story. Next, we will read the illustrated story. Using a Venn diagram, we can compare and contrast elements of the two stories. Besides varying plot points and specific details, the most important difference is how the two rulers behave at the end of the story. The Khan loves his new robe but will only allow members of the Royal family to wear clothing made from the same fabric. The Beg loves his new robe and allows all his citizens to wear clothing from its fabric. The Khan soon gets turned into a peacock. The story of the Beg ends happily. Another difference is, in “The Khan’s Robe”, it says you can see descendants of the Khan still “strutting” in town, meaning peacocks and, in “A Rainbow of Silk”, you can see Uzbeks to this day wearing silk.

This story has no elements of Islam in it but does show the autocratic rule of many Khans.

Extension: Does the story remind you of any fairy tales you have heard? Compare and contrast the story elements from “The Emperor’s New Clothes”.

Assessment: At the end of “The Khan’s Robe”, the Khan turned into a peacock. At the end of “A Rainbow in Silk” the Beg is sitting on his throne. Do you think the Beg later turned into a peacock? Why or why not?

Lesson 6: Kashgar

Opening: The last stop on our tour. Here we will unload our camels, trade for silk and other goods, rest and return to Istanbul and the West. The market in this Muslim city of Kashgar is a Sunday market because Friday and Saturday are reserved for prayers. In Gilchrest’s Stories from the Silk Road there is a description of the Kashgar market on pages 48 and 49. Read that account and look at pictures from:

<http://www.360cities.net/area/kashgar>. There are pictures of two markets, the old city and a mosque, the largest in China. The history of Kashgar has seen it conquered by the Chinese, Arabs, Genghis Khan and the Mongols, Timur and the Chinese again. Today it is in an autonomous region of China.

Instruction: We will read “The Magic Saddlebag” from the Gilchrest collection. It is the story of three brothers who live in the Hindu Kush, a major mountain system in Central Asia which features many peaks over 20,000 feet. The brothers are orphans who, once they have grown, have decided to go and seek their fortune in the world they have heard about from the caravan drivers who pass through their village. One day, an old mule driver tells them,

“Yes lads go seek your fortunes. But always have your eyes and ears open for the signs God sends you along the way. And remember, take what you are given, and no more. Be ready to help others and you will be helped, too.”¹⁵

Two brothers, Masud and Hamid, are shown their fortunes in dreams and return home. The third, Wali, wonders if God has forgotten him but “he remembered everyone has a different path and a different fate.”¹⁶ Eventually, he finds an empty saddlebag and curses his luck wishing it had food in it. Of course, the saddlebag soon fills with food. He then asks for new clothes. His needs fulfilled he is about to wish for his “wants” when he remembered the advice from the old mule driver and decided not to be greedy.

Wali continues his adventures and many times spends the night in a stranger’s house. The Islamic tradition of hospitality to travelers is seen here. Unfortunately, many hosts, after being helped by Wali and the magical properties of the saddlebag, try to take the bag from Wali. Eventually, Wali rescues a young woman who was sent away by her stepmother. He gets his reward in her hand in marriage and “because they asked (the saddlebag) for just enough and no more, it went on serving them until the end of their days.”¹⁷

Students should again identify all the plot elements. We can discuss the hospitality to travelers and why students think it would be important in the rugged land where the story takes place. We can compare this story with Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves. Again we can see that moderation is rewarded. The three brothers are content not to be greedy and make good lives for themselves. Those characters who are greedy are not rewarded. Assessment: Imagine you have found the magic saddlebag. Think about what the old mule driver said. What would you wish for?

Lesson 7: Wrap up - Today

Opening: We have read many stories that have their genesis on the Silk Road. These stories are all traditional tales with no original author told for entertainment around cooking fires and in markets and bazaars. Like many stories, some have a moral or lesson to impart, some plainly seen and some not so. We can take these morals and apply them to our lives but I would like to explicitly tie in these stories and culture to today. To do that I am going to read Listen to the Wind by Greg Mortenson and Susan L. Roth.

Instruction: I am going to remind the students that stories we have read are fictional and were created many hundreds of years ago. Today I will read a nonfiction account of someone who went to Central Asia, very near to the Silk Road and what he found and what he did.

The story shows the Islamic tradition of hospitality in practice. Greg Mortenson showed up in the poor village of Korphe in Pakistan and they welcomed him. It also shows the Islamic tradition of charity as Greg comes back and builds a school for the children in Korphe. We will compare the experiences of the children in Korphe with the

children in our class. They read, we read. They write, we write. They add, we add. They helped build their school. What do we do?

Assessment: Greg Mortenson is one person who made a difference in the lives of many people. How can you make a difference?

Extension: The Peace Corps Coverdell World Wide School program matches teachers with volunteers all over the world. I will ask to be matched with a person who works in a Central Asian country so my students can get a first hand view of what life is like there.

Other Ideas

I am lucky enough to have a Smart Board in my classroom and plan on making Smart Board lessons that will tie in to the economic aspect of the unit. Pictures of goods can be applied to the smart board and loaded onto a virtual camel so when we get to our markets and bazaars we can exchange items instead of just discussing trade. Students can research each area to learn about the trade goods they offered. Some products, such as silk, spices, teas and fruits can be brought in, subject to school rules, so students can see, feel and taste them.

There are at least 999 more stories that can be used. You can compare the Disney version of Aladdin to the original tale found in 1001 Arabian Nights. You can compare the western fairy tale Cinderella to the Persian version by Shirley Climo. Stories can be adapted for reader's theatre and plays put on to increase understanding and student engagement.

This unit is not intended to be static but just a starting off point, to be embellished (like many tales) over the years to provide both a rewarding learning experience for my students and a rewarding, creative teaching experience for me.

Appendices

Appendix A

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

Reading Standards for Literature

Key Ideas and Details:

1. Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.
2. Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.
3. Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.W

Craft and Structure:

4. Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses.

6. Identify who is telling the story at various points in a text

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:

7. Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events.
9. Compare and contrast the adventures and experiences of characters in stories.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity:

10. With prompting and support, read prose and poetry of appropriate complexity for grade 1.

Writing standards

Text Types and Purposes:

1. Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or name the book they are writing about, state an opinion, supply a reason for the opinion, and provide some sense of closure.
3. Write narratives in which they recount two or more appropriately sequenced events, include some details regarding what happened, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide some sense of closure.

Speaking and Listening Standards

Comprehension and Collaboration:

1. Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 1 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.
 - a. Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion).
 - b. Build on others' talk in conversations by responding to the comments of others through multiple exchanges.
 - c. Ask questions to clear up any confusion about the topics and texts under discussion
2. Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.
3. Describe people, places, things, and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly.

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas:

4. Describe people, places, things, and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly.
6. Produce complete sentences when appropriate to task and situation.

Conventions of Standard English

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

6. Use words and phrases acquired through conversations, reading and being read to, and responding to texts, including using frequently occurring conjunctions to signal simple relationships (e.g., *because*).

Appendix B

Delaware Social Studies Standards

Geography Standard One: Students will develop a personal geographic framework, or "mental map," and understand the uses of maps and other geo-graphics.

K-3a: Students will understand the nature and uses of maps, globes, and other geo-graphics.

Economics Standard Two: Students will examine the interaction of individuals, families, communities, businesses, and governments in a market economy [Macroeconomics].

K-3a: Students will understand how barter, money, and other media are employed to facilitate the exchange of resources, goods, and services.

Economics Standard Three: Students will understand different types of economic systems and how they change [Economic systems].

K-3a: Students will identify human wants and the various resources and strategies which have been used to satisfy them over time.

Economics Standard Four: Students will examine the patterns and results of international trade [International trade].

K-3a: Students will understand that the exchange of goods and services around the world creates economic interdependence between people in different places.

History Standard One: Students will employ chronological concepts in analyzing historical phenomena [Chronology].

K-3a: Students will use clocks, calendars, schedules, and written records to record or locate events in time.

History Standard Four: Students will develop historical knowledge of major events and phenomena in world, United States, and Delaware history [Content].

K-3a: Students will develop an understanding of the similarities between families now and in the past, including:

- Daily life today and in other times
- Cultural origins of customs and beliefs around the world

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Curriculum Unit Title

Open Sesame – Islamic Stories Along The Silk Road

Author

David R. Ostheimer

KEY LEARNING, ENDURING UNDERSTANDING, ETC.

The world is a diverse place with many different cultures. When we look at the experiences of another culture, especially as related in literature, we can see that we have many things in common.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S) for the UNIT

How is the Islamic culture that is depicted in stories set on the Silk Road similar to our culture? How is it different? Do the historic stories we read have any relevance for us in the 21st century?

CONCEPT A

Caravans brought more than just trade goods.

CONCEPT B

The values found in our stories are universal.

CONCEPT C

As cultures interact, they become similar.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS A

Why were caravans important for the exchange of ideas between cultures?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS B

Are "Islamic" stories from the past relevant to our lives today?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS C

How are the stories we have heard similar to stories you already know?

VOCABULARY A

caravan, culture, Islam, goods

VOCABULARY B

greed, hospitality, moderation

VOCABULARY C

compare and contrast

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/MATERIAL/TEXT/FILM/RESOURCES

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Was the Silk Road ever a coherent path? The term was coined by a German explorer, Ferdinand von Richthofen, during the late 19th century. He used it to refer to a loose network of pre-modern overland trade routes, which at their major points of activity during the Roman-Han and Mongol periods, stretched from the Mediterranean to East Asia. In Islamic times the lingua franca became Persian. There has been a lot of interest lately in Buddhism in Central Asia, mostly because of the destruction of Buddhist statues by the Taleban in Bamiyan. How strong was Buddhism in what is now Afghanistan and when did it die out? Well, Silk Road towns were certainly multicultural. Whether it makes sense to project our modern values regarding that term onto pre-modern Asia, I couldn't say.