

ING Tips for Teachers

Beginning with the first Gulf War, and escalating again after 9/11, there has been an increase in bias, teasing and harassment of students of Middle Eastern, South Asian, or Muslim background. Please find below suggested tips for addressing the issue and preventing potential problems that impact all students and the general school environment.

I. The Potential Impact of Personal Views on Current Events in the Middle East and South Asia or Relating to Muslims

As an educator, it is important to be aware of the potential impact of current events relating to the war on terrorism, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and events in the Middle East on one's perception or interaction with students of Middle Eastern, Arab, South Asian or Muslim origin. Additionally, one's personal views may affect one's academic responsibility to be objective and neutral in his or her role as an educator.

Resources

If a teacher's knowledge of Middle Eastern culture or the Islamic faith is based mostly on what he or she has seen or heard on television or through other media sources, then it is important to consider seeking more detailed or accurate information from objective or primary sources. We recommend the following resources.

Readings on Islam and Muslims

- *Who Speaks For Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think*, John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed
- *Understanding Islam and the Muslims: The Muslim Family and Islam and World Peace*, T.J. Winter and John A. Williams
- *The Vision of Islam (Visions of Reality. Understanding Religions)*, Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick
- *The Muslim Next Door: The Qur'an, the Media, and That Veil Thing*, Sumbul Ali-Karamali

Readings on Portrayals of Arabs and Muslims in Popular Culture

- *The TV Arab*, Jack Shaheen
- *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, Jack Shaheen
- *Guilty: Hollywood's Verdict on Arabs After 9/11*, Jack Shaheen

Hosting a Guest Speaker

If teachers or administrators are unfamiliar with Middle Easterners, South Asians or Muslims and may have misconceptions about their beliefs and practices, we recommend either inviting a guest speaker into the classroom or to a staff discussion or workshop.

ING sponsors local knowledgeable speakers from the Islamic Speakers Bureau (ISB) which is a program of ING. ING has affiliates across the country that provide ISB speakers who are trained and certified to provide education about American Muslims and their faith and can answer your questions or address your concerns. To schedule an on-site presentation, simply complete the online form at www.ing.org/speakers/request.asp or email ING at scheduler@ing.org.

ING also hosts the Interfaith Speakers Bureau (IFSB) program which provides panels of speakers from the five major world religions to address topics of relevance in the classroom. The IFSB is limited to the San Francisco Bay Area, but will be available in other locales in the near future. To request an IFSB presentation, simply complete the online form at <http://www.ing.org/ifsb/panelrequest.asp>

Neutrality in Teaching

Irrespective of a teacher's views towards the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan or other U.S. policies relating to the war on terrorism, they should allow for questions and differences of opinion in the classroom, which must be grounded in civil discourse and mutual respect. A teacher's role is not to promote a particular viewpoint but rather to provide the intellectual environment and learning process for students to come to their own conclusions about issues. Inviting guest speakers to the classroom is an engaging opportunity to include varied perspectives.

II. Understanding Concerns and Problems of Students of Middle Eastern, South Asian, or Muslim Background during Times of Conflict

Students of Middle Eastern, South Asian, or Muslim background may feel or exhibit the following feelings or symptoms due to current events involving regions of the Middle East, South Asia and the Muslim world. Merely being aware of these feelings may help in interaction with these students and potentially guide discussions on current events in the classroom and provide him or her with the best possible learning environment under the circumstances.

1. Students may feel generally overwhelmed by current events. Many students of Middle Eastern, South Asian or Muslim background may feel personally conflicted when individuals or groups of their own ethnic or religious background perpetrate acts of violence or cause harm to the United States.
2. Students may feel anxious about coming to school because of fear of teasing or harassment.
3. Students from recent or even second-generation immigrants from Middle Eastern, South Asian or Muslim countries may come from a family where current events eclipse all

other concerns when the child is at home. If there is ongoing conflict overseas, many families communicate frequently by phone with relatives at all hours of the night, causing some relief but often much anxiety.

4. Students may have relatives who died as a result of current wars or current events, and may have a hard time discussing their loss due to a fear of being connected with the “enemy.” It is important to choose appropriate words of comfort when consoling them.

5. Students may be suffering from social withdrawal, isolation, fear, depression and lack of sleep in reaction to current events.

6. Students are generally embarrassed about appearing to be different than others and may be very reluctant to express personal views on the situation or any issues involving Muslims.

7. Students may be afraid that their teacher or principal may punish them academically for their views or simply due to their ethnic or religious background.

8. Students and parents of Middle Eastern, South Asian or Muslim background may assume or expect that teachers, staff and administrators will treat them unfairly due to reports of discrimination that have become commonplace after 9/11.

9. Students may feel embarrassed, humiliated, or degraded by statements or responses to current events by peers, teachers, and the school or government officials.

10. Students may think that their own feelings and views do not matter to peers, teachers, and school officials and may develop feelings of alienation because of current events.

11. Students may be afraid of physical violence against them from fellow students. Following the steps in Section III below will hopefully ensure that this does not happen, and that if it does, the student will feel safe reporting the incident. Strict follow up and clear consequences will serve to assure other students that this is not acceptable behavior.

III. Suggestions for Preventing Potential Harassment of Students of Middle Eastern, South Asian or Muslim Background

1. Remind your students that school is a place of safety for everyone in it, and that help and protection for all students is a right that they are entitled to.

2. Inform your students that the school does not support or allow harassment, threats, or so-called joking about a current situation directed at any student, teacher or school employee.

3. Let your students know that if they feel uncomfortable and fearful during school hours, they can voice their feelings to teachers, counselors or other school officials.
4. Remember that students are both perceptive and impressionable. By promoting an atmosphere of understanding and tolerance in the classroom, you are preventing problems from arising.
5. Be supportive in words and deeds of a collective, inclusive, and positive feeling in the classroom and school. Avoid discussions that refer to “us” and “them,” when discussing events or regions that may impact students of Middle Eastern, Arab, South Asian or Muslim background.
6. In all verbal communication, body language and behavior be careful not to cause any student or teacher to feel isolated or singled out due to their ethnic or religious background.
7. Avoid asking students of Middle Eastern, South Asian or Muslim background to publicly comment on current events or suggest that they are the classroom “expert” on the current crisis or situation.
8. Do not expect any student, particularly those of above mentioned backgrounds to openly denounce any attacks/incidents or endorse the U.S. government’s actions in order to be “acceptable” to the rest of the class. The First and Fourth Amendments upholds freedom of speech and privacy.
9. Encourage public discussion about religious/ethnic beliefs and practices and how they differ from those who misuse them to support terrorist activity. Provide public and repeated vocal support and respect for all human life.
10. Remind students about the principles of justice and equality that our country was founded on and the importance of recognizing the rights of all Americans, irrespective of their race, religion, or national origin.