



Golden Thread Productions

ReOrient

Theatre Festival & Forum Exploring the Middle East

Study Guide

November 1–18, 2012
NOH Space & Z Space
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Foreword:

This study guide has been prepared as a tool for educators with information that can be shared with students prior to the presentation of the *ReOrient Theatre Festival's* series of short plays, and can also serve as a springboard for post-show discussion and activities. High School students from a variety of disciplines will be viewing this play: Performing Arts, English Language Arts, and History-Social Science. As such, we encourage you to review the entirety of this guide, not only to identify areas of focus that most clearly parallel your curriculum but also to be open to other ideas, areas of discussion, and activities that will broaden your students' perceptions of the work. We hope the materials in these pages will inspire you to augment what is contained with contributions of your own with the goal of challenging and inspiring your students.

If your high school students are attending a performance of *ReOrient Theatre Festival* and are participating in the post-performance discussion, along with utilizing all of the materials in this guide, they are engaging in the following California's Content Standards, as set forth by the State Board of Education:

Visual and Performing Arts (Theatre) Grades 9 – 12

Artistic Perception – 1.1 and 1.3 Creative Expression – 2.2 Aesthetic Valuing – 4.2

History-Social Science

World History, Culture, and Geography: The Modern World – 10.5, 10.6, 10.7, 10.9 United States History and Geography: Continuity and Change in the Twentieth Century – 11.9 Principles of American Democracy – 12.6

English Language Arts

Listening and Speaking – Grades 9 and 10 – 1.11, 1.13 Literary Response and Analysis – Grades 9 and 10 – 3.4, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 3.10 Listening and Speaking – Grades 11 and 12 – 2.3 Literary Response and Analysis – Grades 11 and 12 – 3.3

Please note:

The play *Stalemate* contains strong language and sexually suggestive gestures, intended to elicit a critical response to seemingly harmless acts of misogyny and violence.

This guide has been created and assembled by: Lucinda Kidder, Torange Yeghiazarian, and Laine Forman.© Golden Thread Productions, 2012

Introduction

The Middle East is continually in the news today as an important region in global politics and economics. While the media often portrays the Middle East as a turbulent state of affairs, there are millions of ordinary people whose hopes and concerns match those of people throughout the world.

The short plays presented in ReOrient 2012 address this universality. Throughout these stories, there is a wide assortment of characters faced with choices and situations familiar to us all: loss of a loved one, bureaucratic bumbling, unfounded hostility, vulnerability, questioning authority. Some are set in the Middle East, some in the United States; all involve situations which, while not unique to the area, reflect the tensions and dilemmas facing those who identify with the culture of the Middle East.

ReOrient Series A

War and Peace

By Tawfiq al-Hakim

Characters: Politica (or Diplomacy), *an elegant lady*
 Peace, *a good-looking man, kindly and well-mannered*
 War, *Politica's husband, ill-tempered and suspicious*
Setting: Politica's boudoir/ dressing room; no specific time

The Story: The characters are Peace, Politica (or Diplomacy), and War. Politica is married to War, but seems to genuinely be in love with Peace, her importunate suitor.

Politica is entertaining Peace as she is putting on her make-up. He passionately urges her to leave her boor of a husband and run away with him. Politica promises that because she and her husband are engaged in playing a game called *Yadass* which involves forfeits, she can make him lose, and his forfeit will be to grant her a divorce so she can marry Peace. If one of the players hands something to the other, and the other does not say "It's in my mind," then the first person calls out *Yadass* and wins the forfeit. Peace panics when War arrives unexpectedly and hides in Politica's closet. As predicted, War is so furious that Peace has been courting his wife that he forgets to say "It's in my mind" when she hands him the key to the closet, telling him that Peace is hidden there. But instead of asking for a divorce, Politica simply requests a pearl necklace. Peace feels so relieved to escape having been torn limb from limb that he flees before War can come back.

Tawfiq Al-Hakim (1898-1987) is considered one of Egypt's first and finest playwrights. His produced plays, novels, and short stories combined symbolism, reality and imagination, and often focused on fundamental philosophical and moral questions.

Written in 1944, *War and Peace* takes the form of a “morality play” in which the characters represent abstract ideas or qualities. Medieval European drama often used this structure as a means of teaching the Bible to illiterate audiences. Modern concepts of morality are more complex, and one must examine underlying context to decipher the abstract ideas represented. The use of such symbolism enables a playwright to address ideas and themes that are common to many different political systems and situations.

Questions for discussion:

1. How would you describe the characters known as Politica? Peace? War? How are these stock characters used to help understand the ideas being presented? Do you agree with their portrayal?
2. What means does Politica use to get what she wants? What do you think her ultimate goal is? How does this relate to politics throughout time?
3. What is the role of the *Yadass* game? Do you see any parallels with what goes on in Politica’s boudoir to the way in which political figures or countries deal with each other today? What kinds of ‘games’ do we play in politics?

Classroom activity: Have each student take on the role of an iconic/symbolic character (eg. Poverty. Rich Man, Do-gooder, etc.) and decide on a subject/situation in which these characters might be involved (eg. An ‘Occupy’ protest about unequal incomes; a Congressional hearing on homelessness; a neighborhood meeting about improving the landscaping, etc). See how the situations develop as each actor weighs in as their distinct symbolic character. Discuss the process and results.

The Birds Flew In

By Yussef El Guindi

Character: Nadia, *a grieving mother*

Setting: Unspecified: possibly a funeral home. Modern day United States.

The Story: A mother speaks about her son who was killed in war, describing his decision to enlist and how she had tried to talk him out of it. She must come to terms with her own role in laying the groundwork for his eventually fatal choice.

El Guindi is a contemporary Egyptian-American playwright based in Seattle. His work has been widely recognized and staged throughout the US and abroad.

The Birds Flew In is a monologue delivered by a grieving mother on the occasion of her son’s funeral. As you experience this play, pay close attention to your first impressions about the situation and note when your perceptions began to shift.

Questions for discussion:

1. What was your first impression of why Sami died? Did anything surprise you about this first perception?
2. What extra burdens did Sami have to bear that might have thrust him in the direction he took? Does this happen to children of immigrant parents regularly? What are some challenges immigrant children might face in your community? What are your feelings about the mother's concern that her son not grow up to be 'a sissy'?
3. What does it mean to be a 'hero'? Describe notions of heroism.
4. Has anyone you know had to make a decision to fight in a war? What difference do you think it would make if enlistment were required (as it is in Israel, for example), rather than voluntary (as it is in the US)?

2012

By Farzam Farrokhi

Characters: Person 1, *a Muslim**
 Person 2, *a Christian**
 Person 3, *a Jew**

Setting: A café Time: Year 2012

The Story: Three characters sit at a table discussing their surroundings and their different smart phones. This is their first meeting after quite a long time apart. They each receive a call, apparently from the same person, and following the call, agree that it is time to do what they came together to do.

Farzam Farrokhi is a Bay Area Iranian-American playwright. 2012 is his first play. This very short abstract play gives you very little information about the characters, so close attention must be paid to the sparse dialogue. In the stage directions, the playwright emphasizes that all three characters act as if they are in complete harmony, agreeing with each other on everything. They speak about the way in which "all of us have predicted this day and our people knew it."

We can assume that each of the three represents a specific world-view, and that they are meeting by pre-arrangement on a very significant day to perform a very important action.

Questions for discussion:

1. What do the three characters represent? In what ways are they similar? When are their differences present?
2. Who is the 'madam' they each speak to on their phones?
3. This play can be interpreted as an End of the World depiction. What does it suggest about the reasons for the world ending? Who is ultimately responsible for it happening?
3. How do you feel about such predictions? What does this say about the three major religions represented in the play?

4. What other end of the world predictions have you heard? Can you name some religious or cultural predictions on this topic? How do they differ?

Religion in the Middle East

The Middle East is the birthplace of all three major monotheistic religions- Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. Concentrations of these communities may be found throughout the Middle East today. Middle Eastern countries are overwhelmingly Muslim, although at more than 200,000,000 Indonesia which is outside the Middle East boasts the highest number of Muslims on the planet. Israel's population is 77% Jewish, 16% Muslim, and 2% Christian. Iran is home to the largest Jewish community in the Middle East outside Israel. Lebanon has the largest population of Christians with 39% to 60% Muslim. Syria also has a substantial Christian presence (10%).

All three religions share a common heritage as "People of the Book," meaning the Old Testament Biblical writings play a fundamental role in each, and each religion traces its roots to Abraham. They diverge through their understanding of the subsequent relationship of humankind and the One God each proclaims.

In addition, all three hold individuals morally accountable for bad deeds and demand that believers perform charitable actions toward others. Prayer is the duty of each believer as the primary means of worshipping God.

End of the World Predictions

Descriptions of the end of the world can be found in all three of these Abrahamic religions, which view time as having a start -- at the time of creation -- and an end -- typically in some form of apocalypse involving chaotic events and great loss of life. All three of these religions share a belief in an afterlife, sometimes called Heaven or Paradise. They also believe in the resurrection of the dead, though whether in the physical sense or in the spirit is a subject of disagreement.

Many sects in Christianity speak of "the End of Days" which precedes the "second coming of Christ," in which there is a final battle between the forces of God and Satan. In Islam, "the Day of Resurrection" (Yawm al-Qiyāmah) or "Day of Judgment" (Yawm ad-Din) is thought to be God's final assessment of humanity as it exists. In Judaism, the Messiah (*Mashiach*) is a human priest or king from the Davidic Line, who revives the dead and ushers in a messianic age when everything is peaceful.

Fun Facts on various non-Abrahamic religious notions on the 'end of the world':

- Ásatrú, a modern revival of the pre-Christian Nordic religion, believe in the concept of *Ragnarok*: a kind of final battle between the gods and the giants.
- Baha'i faith believe that the *end times* is not the physical end of the planet, but rather the birth of a Kingdom of God on earth.
- In Janism, the world is without a beginning or ending; creation and destruction are always going on.

- In Rastafari belief, people achieve immortality in Heaven or Eden, which is a place in Africa.
- Many Wiccans believe in reincarnation, which is eternal, due to the cyclical nature of the universe.
- In Hindu and Buddhist cosmology, there are numerous stages composing *Maha Yuga*, which occurs every 4.3 billion years.
- Modern scientific theory calls the *Lambda-CDM* (Cold Dark Matter) model where everything begins with the *Big Bang* and ends in the *Big Crunch*. The age of the universe is 13.7 billion years, and scientists estimate that the Earth has reached about half of its life span; in about 5 billion years, the Sun will become a red giant, and enlarge to encompass the orbit of the earth.

<http://www.history.com/topics/the-end-of-the-world>

<http://originalwavelength.blogspot.com/2012/03/different-religions-see-end-of-world.html>

The Letter

By Mona Mansour and Tala Manassah

Characters: Kamal, *a physics professor at a major American university*
Alia, *his adult daughter*

Setting: A theatre

The story: Professor Kamal appears onstage alongside his daughter to explain the letter he is writing to the Chancellor of the university where he teaches. The letter is in response to the university's reaction to withdraw an honorary degree to Pulitzer Prize-winning and Jewish playwright Tony Kushner after Kushner criticized Israel's policy towards Palestinians. The newspaper article reporting on the trustee's remarks drew the conclusion that "for him, Palestinians are not human." Throughout the play, Kamal attempts to prove that he, as a Palestinian American, is most definitely human.

In *The Letter*, playwrights Mansour and Manassah, pull you, the audience member, into the discussion of what it means to be a human being by using the technique called "breaking the fourth wall." In doing so, they invite you to weigh your own response to the accusation.

Kamal searches his mental encyclopedia to find the answer to the question, identifying such sources of knowledge as science, philosophy, and poetry. His daughter Alia serves as the voice of the skeptic, pointing out that "Our struggle is not like other people's."

Questions for discussion:

1. Alia concludes that "It [the definition of a human] was a ridiculous thing to try to prove." Do you agree? Why is it important/not important? How might this relate to our understanding of 'human rights?'
2. Was the real aim of the play to prove what it means to be human? What do you think the author intended?
3. How is this question reflected in the ways in which groups of people are described in the media or in other public forums?

Palestinian Identity

Of the total Palestinian population worldwide, estimated at between 9 to 11 million people, roughly half live outside of their homeland. Robin Cohen in his book *Global Diasporas* (1997), explains that for Palestinians, and others like Armenians, Jews, and some African populations, the term 'diaspora' has "acquired a more sinister and brutal meaning", signifying "a collective trauma, a banishment, where one dreamed of home but lived in exile. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_diaspora

Distinguished cultural critic and prominent Palestinian spokesman in the US, Edward W. Said (1925- 2003) notes, "Not a day passes without some mention of Palestinians in the press. Yet with all that has been written about them, they remain virtually unknown. Portrayed as either murderous terrorists or pitiful refugees, the Palestinians have become prisoners of these images, more a pretext for a call to arms than a flesh and blood people."



One of the most influential poets of the 20th century, Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008) has written extensively about the Palestinian experience post-1948. On May 1, 1965 when the young Darwish read his poem "*Bitaqat huwiyya*" [Identity Card] to a crowd in a Nazareth movie house, there was a tumultuous reaction. Within days the poem had spread throughout the country and the Arab world; it remains the anthem of Palestinian identity.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahmoud_Darwish

Online resources

http://www.historyguy.com/israeli-palestinian_conflict.html

<http://www.ifamericansknew.org/history/>

<http://www.mideastweb.org/nutshell.htm>.

http://www.zionism-israel.com/his/Israel_timeline_1993_present.htm (up to 2009)

<http://www.fmep.org/reports/special-reports/crossroads-of-conflict-israeli-palestinian-relations-face-an-uncertain-future>, 2000. *Reports issued at the time of the Camp David agreement.*

<http://www.hrw.org/en/middle-east/n-africa>

Stalemate

By Silva Semercian

Characters: Scene 1 – Jim, Ryan, *two salesmen in a music shop*
Scene 2 – Jack, Simon, *two young men, loitering*
Scene 3 – Soldier 1, Soldier 2

Settings: Scene 1 – a London music shop
Scene 2 – a sidewalk outside the front window of a women's store, possibly in London
Scene 3 – a bombed-out shop in Iraq (Baghdad)

The Story: Scene 1 (*Hi-fi Choice*) – Retail clerks Jim and Ryan discuss a browsing woman customer's odds of actually buying anything in the store. Although she is unknown to the men, they construct an entire fictitious life story for her based on her apparent South Asian ethnicity. They argue over who will make the sale when it becomes clear she is interested in a purchase.

Scene 2 (*Window Dressing*) – Jack and Simon hang outside a dress shop window where a black female employee is setting up a display. They trade lewd remarks about her, observing that they think she may be Nigerian. She ignores them completely. Jack takes out some cash and waves it at her – he thinks that he sees a positive reaction from her to this.

Scene 3 (*Burnouts*) – Two soldiers from different army units are in a stand-off in the middle of a bombed-out shop in Baghdad. Each threatens to kill the other. The scene ends before we know if they have done so.

Stalemate is a series of mini-battles between three different sets of men. We meet the first set in a hi-fi shop in London; the second on the street outside a shop window, location unspecified; and the third in a bombed-out shop in Baghdad. Underneath the rapid-fire dialogue between characters who may be brothers or just best friends runs a heavy current of misogyny and violence. We audience members are privy to blatant displays of *machismo* in these conversations which may (should?) make us feel supremely uncomfortable.

Silva Semerciyan is an Armenian-American playwright currently living in England. She was awarded the William Saroyan prize in 2010 and the 2012 Sandpit Arts Bulbul prize, and is part of the Studio Writers' Group at the Royal Court Theatre.

Questions for discussion:

1. What is the relationship between machismo-ism and war? Do you see any links between the attitude of these men toward women and the ways in which invasion of a country by a superior power is justified? What are they?

2. The women in these scenes are 'understood' characters, rather than being seen on the stage. How do you visualize them? Is your image of the women affected by the comments of the men as your only source of information?
3. Can the image of the 'violation' of a country through invasion be similarly affected by the way in which it is described in the media or by the government of the invading country?
4. Only one of these scenes takes place in an actual 'war zone.' Is there a similar feeling (tone) that you feel in all three scenes? Why do you think the playwright put the war scene last?

In the Days that Follow

By Jen Silverman

Characters: Iman, *Lebanese woman, early 40s. Elegant, graceful, and ironic*
 Orh, *Israeli woman, 22. Tough and confident, androgynous, with a childlike earnestness at times.*
 Jake, *American man, 20s. Enthusiastic, sweet, and a little naïve.*

Setting: Boston, Massachusetts; now

The Story: Orh and Jake live in the same apartment building; she has just moved to Boston in order to meet Iman Khaled, a noted Lebanese poet who is in town for some time on a fellowship and whose work Orh hopes to translate into Hebrew. Jake is attracted to Orh, but mystified by her somewhat rough manner. Orh puts her translation proposal to Iman after a public reading; Iman rejects her when she finds out that Orh is Israeli. At first crushed, Orh's determination revives, and she invites the poet to her home. Despite Iman's intense distrust, she does come to the apartment, and the two women discover a bond of experience and feeling through poetry they cannot ignore.

Jen Silverman's play follows an intensely personal path that leads from bitter antagonism through curiosity and finally to deep attraction. Neither the noted Lebanese poet nor the young Israeli woman who wishes to translate her work into Hebrew feel they can let go of the wounds inflicted by their two countries. Yet the depth of their understanding of each other as poets and human beings erodes this and brings about life-changing decisions.

Questions for discussion:

1. Consider the history of Israeli-Lebanese relations over the past fifty years as outlined in this guide. What events/attitudes have shaped Iman's reaction to Orh's desire to translate her poetry into Hebrew?
2. What role does personal experience, or consideration of individuals on a case by case basis, play in this story?

3. How does art, or in this case poetry, serve to bring people together? What role does poetry provide for identifying commonalities between people? What are the barriers to this function for poetry?

Letter name	Phonetic value	Phoenician	Modern Hebrew	Modern Arabic
aleph	ʾ	𐤀	א	أ
beth	b	𐤁	ב	ب
gimel	g	𐤂	ג	ج
daleth	d	𐤃	ד	د
he	h	𐤄	ה	ه
waw	w	𐤅	ו	و
zayin	z	𐤆	ז	ز
heth	ḥ	𐤇	ח	ح
teth	ṭ	𐤈	ט	ط
yod	y	𐤉	י	ي
kaph	k	𐤊	כ	ك
lamed	l	𐤋	ל	ل
mem	m	𐤌	מ	م
nun	n	𐤍	נ	ن
samekh	s	𐤎	ס	س
ayin	ʿ	𐤏	ע	ع
pe	p	𐤐	פ	پ
sade	s	𐤑	צ	س
qoph	q	𐤒	ק	ق
reš	r	𐤓	ר	ر
šin	sh/s	𐤔	ש	ش
taw	t	𐤕	ת	ت

Language and Poetry in the Middle East

The predominant languages of the Middle East are Arabic, Persian, Hebrew and Turkish, although there are many more unique languages and dialects spoken in the region. Arabic and Hebrew are considered Semitic languages and share a common root to Aramaic which dates back to Phoenician (1000 BC) centered in today's Lebanon and Sumero-Akkadian cuneiform (3,000 BC) in today's Iraq.

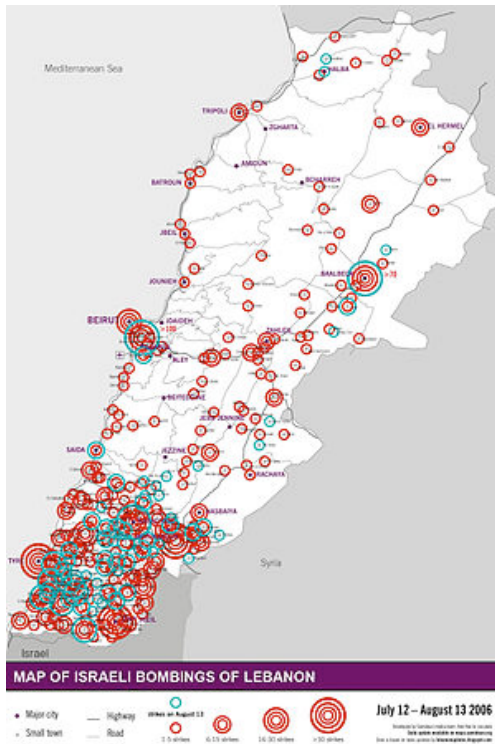
Poetry is considered the cornerstone of Arabic art and expression. From historical manuscripts to epic tales, Arabic thought and ideas have been communicated in poetic form. Frequently performed and learned aurally, Arabic poetry dates back to pre-Islam and continues to thrive today.



Naomi Shihab Nye (b. 1952) is one of the best known Arab-American poets of our time. Known for poetry that lends a fresh perspective to ordinary events, people, and objects, Nye has said that, for her, “the primary source of poetry has always been local life, random characters met on the streets, our own ancestry sifting down to us through small essential daily tasks.” In her first full-length collection, *Different Ways to Pray* (1980), Nye explores the differences between, and shared experiences of, cultures from California to Texas, from South America to Mexico. In “Grandfather’s Heaven,” a child declares: “Grandma liked me even though my daddy was a Moslem.” As Tanner observed, “with her acceptance of different ‘ways to pray’ is also Nye’s growing awareness that living in the world can sometimes be difficult.”

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/naomi-shihab-nye>

The 2006 Lebanon War



In the Days that Follow makes reference to the events of the 2006 Lebanon War, a 34-day military conflict in Lebanon, northern Israel and the Golan Heights. The principal parties were Hezbollah paramilitary forces and the Israeli military. The conflict started on 12 July 2006, and continued until a United Nations-brokered ceasefire went into effect in the morning on 14 August 2006, though it formally ended on 8 September 2006 when Israel lifted its naval blockade of Lebanon. During the campaign Israel's Air Force flew more than 12,000 combat missions, its Navy fired 2,500 shells, and its Army fired over 100,000 shells. Large parts of the Lebanese civilian infrastructure were destroyed, including 400 miles (640 km) of roads, 73 bridges, and 31 other targets such as Beirut's Rafic Hariri International Airport, ports, water and sewage treatment plants, electrical facilities, 25 fuel stations, 900 commercial

structures, up to 350 schools and two hospitals, and 15,000 homes. Some 130,000 more homes were damaged. After the ceasefire, some parts of southern Lebanon remained uninhabitable due to Israeli unexploded cluster bomblets.

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006_Lebanon_War)

Stuck

By Amir Al-Azraki

Character: An Iraqi man, 35, carrying a suitcase

Setting: Borderlandia

The Story: The Iraqi traveler goes from one airport to the next, trying to gain admittance to various countries, hoping to find refuge from the chaos of war. Despite having valid papers, passport, visas, he finds his way barred for a multitude of reasons. He must resort to returning to his violence-torn homeland.

In the best tradition of nightmarish satire, *Stuck* follows the pinball path of an Iraqi traveler who holds conversations with his passport as he attempts to enter a variety of countries, none of which will accept him. The dark humor is enhanced by the hip hop-style delivery of the lines.

Amir Al-Azraki is a lecturer of English drama at the University of Basra. He received his BA in English from the University of Basra, his MA in English literature from Baghdad University, and his PhD in Theatre Studies from York University in Toronto, Canada. In the last four years Al-Azraki has been working on his dissertation “The Representation of Political Violence in Contemporary English and Arabic Plays About Iraq.”

Note: Rap and hip-hop music styles have become widespread among Middle Eastern youth and have become the language of protest on the streets, emphasizing the break with traditional culture and the older generations.

Questions for discussion:

1. Though this is obviously not a realistic play, what elements of it might be true?
2. How does the hip hop delivery of the lines interfere or enhance your understanding of the situation?

Classroom activity: Have students research contemporary Middle Eastern pop for descriptions of the role of the culture of hip hop and rap in the new politics of the Arab Spring.

Some resources:

“Arab youth revel in pop revolution”, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6666725.stm>
“middle eastern music arabic pop” on YouTube



Hip-Hop and the Arab Spring

“Top Five Arab Spring Hip-Hop Songs”

June 22nd, 2011 <http://www.thenewsignificance.com/2011/06/22/top-five-arab-spring-hip-hop-songs/>

Since December, musicians have been responding to — and provoking — the protests in countries like Egypt and Tunisia, and much of the music being made about these movements is hip-hop. Some of these songs have played a direct role in popular uprisings, while others have helped galvanize international support. Songs are rapped in both English and Arabic, and international collaborations have helped to spread the music over the Internet, via Facebook and YouTube.

<http://www.thenewsignificance.com/2011/06/22/top-five-arab-spring-hip-hop-songs/>

“How rap music fueled the Arab Spring uprisings”

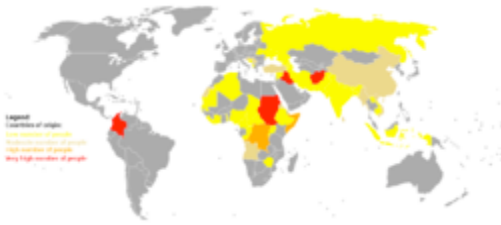
A bazaar in Libya's rebel capital of Benghazi might not appear to be the most obvious place to find a would-be Jay-Z. But 18-year-old Boge and many others like him are pushing the boundaries of freedom of expression across the Middle East. The rappers have even been credited with helping to spark the so-called Arab Spring uprisings that deposed three long-serving dictators and rocked several other regimes.

Boge, who says he learned English from rap, is following in the footsteps of his hip-hop heroes KRS-One, Nas and Ice Cube. "Our families are dying but yeah we're still tough, Gadhafi is trying to assassinate us," he rhymes during an impromptu performance amid vendors selling flags, shirts and hats in revolutionary colors at a market in the eastern Libyan city where the revolt against Moammar Gadhafi began. http://worldblog.nbcnews.com/_news/2011/09/15/7758131-how-rap-music-fueled-the-arab-spring-uprisings?lite

Rap Revolution (phoniemusic.com, 2011)

Featuring Arabic rap music inspired by and reflective of The Arab Spring

Refugee Nations



Origin countries of refugees (2007)



Destination countries of refugees (2007)

Most Americans take the freedom to travel and the right to carry a passport for granted. For thousands of refugees and asylum-seekers, however this is not the case. Whether caused by war, natural disaster or political persecution, displacement strips the individual of her most fundamental rights leaving her at the mercy of the immigration policies of host countries.

In the 1960's and 70's, thousands of Vietnamese, Cambodians and Laotians fled to the US in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. Similarly today, Afghans and Iraqis make up the majority of refugees and asylum-seekers. Of the 2,000,000 asylum seekers in 2011, nearly 300,000 sought refuge in the US.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Refugee>

Orhan

By Elizabeth Benedict

Character: Orhan, *a young man, a second-generation immigrant*
Police officer

Setting: A London jail cell block, deep underground

The Story: Orhan has been arrested and is being kept in a very dark and disturbing place. A policeman sits outside his cell, unresponsive to his desperate pleas for understanding that he feels he was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, having innocently followed a man to his home only to be caught in the middle of a raid on what could have been a terrorist organization. Now Orhan begs the policeman to believe that he himself is British – of Jamaican origin, but nonetheless born and bred in London. The monologue is punctuated by ominous sounds whose sources we never learn.

Elizabeth Benedict is a Bay Area actor, novelist, and most recently, playwright.

In the course of this monologue, a young man, imprisoned after being picked up in unsavory circumstances, demonstrates the vulnerability of a person linked to an undesirable ethnic or cultural community by his ancestry, not his place of birth. His need to identify with the ruling class seems to overcome his good sense.

Questions for discussion:

1. Were you surprised by Orhan's attitude toward immigrants? Do you feel sympathy for Orhan? Would his situation have been different if he wasn't identified as from an immigrant community?
3. During British colonial rule in countries like India, many Indians accepted the British opinion of them as inferior and strove to become more like the British. Do you think similar feelings arise wherever there is an obvious imbalance of power? Can you think of examples in your own community?
3. Post the September 11th attacks, George W. Bush passed the Patriot Act in the US, in which individuals suspected of terrorist-related activities, not necessarily linked to terrorist groups, can be subjected to search. Have you heard of the Patriot Act? How do you think this act might have affected immigrant communities?

The Voice Room

By Reza Soroor

Character: A man, *working as an undercover informer for the government*

Setting: An apartment

The Story: The informer, masquerading as a fabric seller, is instructed to spy on and give false information to a group of insurgents. Over the course of twelve recorded reports to his government handlers that he makes in a room in his apartment, he details his actions and interactions with the activists and their wives and children. By the time of his final report, he has become completely disillusioned and plans to join forces with the government opposition, though he has little doubt that he will likely be killed if he can be found.

Through this series of 'reports' we see a minor government official – a spy – evolve from being a loyal operative to turning against the oppressive regime that had employed him. We can imagine this happening in any number of hard-core dictatorships around the world, but is it such a stretch to visualize this also occurring in a supposedly free country?

Reza Soroor lives and works in Tehran, Iran. He began his theatre career in 1999 with the play, *Saye Roshan* (chiaroscuro). His plays frequently address social issues including the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq war. Soroor's translations and critical writings on theatre have been published extensively.

Questions for discussion:

1. One of the issues the Occupy movement most passionately addressed was the ways in which the reactions to the threat of terrorism have eroded our freedom from unwarranted investigations. How does this play explore that sentiment? Do you feel that surveillance of the lives of private individuals is justified by the threat of possible danger?
2. In your opinion, what was the turning point for the Man? What caused him to turn against the task he had been given?
3. Consider how you would react if you were in the Man's shoes – would you feel the honoring of your conscience would be worth the risk of being caught by the authorities to face imprisonment or death?



A State of (In)Security

Iran is a diverse country, consisting of people of many ethnic and religious backgrounds. It is the 18th largest country in the world by area and has a population of 75 million, over 70% of which is under the age of 35. Strategically located between the Persian Gulf and Central Asia, Iran's neighbors are Iraq to the west and Afghanistan and Pakistan to the East.

In December 1979, after toppling the monarch, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (the Shah), Iranians approved a theocratic constitution, whereby Ayatollah Khomeini became Supreme Leader of the country.

Although both nationalists and Marxists joined with Islamic traditionalists to overthrow the Shah, tens of thousands of the "opposition" were killed and executed by the Islamic regime afterward, and the revolution ultimately resulted in an Islamic Republic. While the revolution boasts numerous positive outcomes, for the last thirty years a severe security structure has imposed itself on the everyday lives of the people. The Islamic Republic bans alcohol consumption, public displays of affection between men and women, and requires mandatory veiling by women. These practices have effectively forced many Iranians to live a dual life: an indoor life according to their personal preferences of conduct, and a public life according to the government's.

The security forces tightened their grip in the aftermath of the 2009 disputed elections. Activists, artists and journalists were hunted down, imprisoned or eliminated. Many disappeared without a trace.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iran>

City of Grubs

By Naomi Wallace

Character: Roland, *forties, an Arab-Jew, an electrician*
The Dead Body, *a white man, fifties*

Setting: A sleazy motel room in Camden, New Jersey

The Story: An electrician, Roland was called to fix the TV in a motel room; he comes across a corpse – and the TV- in the bathtub. Roland talks to the dead man as he deals with the situation, discovering that the suicide was a wealthy, successful man. As he works on the dripping TV, he tells the corpse about his own terrible losses as an Algerian immigrant to the US when one of his children was drowned because of mistaken identity. His wife committed suicide herself soon after. He concludes that he can't fix the TV – or life.

This play is infused with dark humor and great humanity. Roland, a man who has suffered intense tragedy in his own life, rails at the businessman who chose to commit suicide and thus throw away what to Roland is the most precious thing in the world.

Naomi Wallace was born in Kentucky. Her work has received the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, the Kesselring Prize, the Fellowship of Southern Writers Drama Award, and an Obie. She is also a recipient of the MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship. Wallace is the 2012 winner of the Horton Foote Prize for most promising new American play, *The Liquid Plain*.

Questions for discussion:

1. Roland is an Arab Jew. Did you know that it was possible for such a designation? What does being an Arab actually mean?
2. What is the significance of the story Roland tells of the rare Blue Butterfly that was sighted in a junk-filled New Jersey park?

Map of the Middle East



Language in the Middle East

The predominant languages of the Middle East are Arabic, Persian, Hebrew and Turkish, although there are many more unique languages and dialects spoken in the region. In many areas in the Middle East, the local dialect is mixed with one or more foreign languages. For example in Lebanon, French and English are often mixed with the local Arabic dialect.

Though there is considerable diversity of dialects in spoken Arabic, the written language is fairly standard with the differences falling into historical periods rather than geographical areas. Farsi or Persian uses the same alphabet and writing conventions as Arabic but is an entirely separate language. Turkish is written using a Latin alphabet introduced in 1928 by Atatürk to replace the Arabic-based Ottoman Turkish alphabet. Hebrew uses an entirely different alphabet based on the ancient Assyrian letter forms.
<http://middleeastcouncilnc.org/home/MECC-languages.php>

Resource Guide

The following are suggestions for background material dealing with contemporary Arab, Turkish, Iranian, Armenian and Middle Eastern American theater. A basic understanding of the Middle East and its cultures is important as context for many of the issues and situations posed in these plays.

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About Golden Thread Productions

Founded in 1996, Golden Thread Productions is dedicated to exploring Middle Eastern cultures and identities as expressed around the globe. We present alternative perspectives of the Middle East by developing and producing theatrical work that is aesthetically varied and politically and viscerally engaging, while supporting countless Middle Eastern artists in all phases of their careers. Our mission is to make the Middle East a potent presence on the American stage and also to make theatre a treasured cultural experience within Middle Eastern communities. We build cultural bridges by engaging the community in an active dialogue and facilitating collaborations among artists of diverse backgrounds with the aim of creating a world where the common human experience supersedes cultural and political differences.

Education at Golden Thread Productions

By providing theatre education rooted in Middle Eastern arts and literature, Golden Thread's Education Program addresses the parallel needs of Middle Eastern youth and families for self-affirming performing arts programming as well as the broad community's need for a deeper understanding of the richness of Middle Eastern arts. Additionally, the program equips arts educators with much needed overview of the region and its culture. Golden Thread's multifaceted Education Program has the following main elements:

Theatre Curriculum inspired by Middle Eastern Arts & Literature: An innovative theatre education curriculum rooted in Middle Eastern arts and literature with training programs for teaching artists focused on Middle Eastern history, arts and literature taught by university professors and master artists.

Teaching Residencies: Theatre classes and workshops that use both traditional and contemporary Middle Eastern literature and the arts as resource to lead classes in performance skills and writing at host schools and cultural organizations. Class content and activities is informed by the teachers' own diverse immigrant background and facilitated by multi-lingual skills.

The Fairytale Players: Inspired by popular performance traditions in the Middle East the Fairytale Players employ epic story-telling, physical theatre and circus arts techniques in creating performances based on stories from the Middle East.

Student Matinee Performances of Main Stage Productions: To enrich students' understanding of main stage productions, Golden Thread offers special matinee performances supported by study guides that connect various aspects of the play to elements of California Education Standards. Study guides contain detailed information about each play, giving historical, cultural, geographical background, as well as pre- and post- show activities to deepen the audience's understanding of the play.

For more information on partnering with our Education Programs, please email education@goldenthread.org.

www.goldenthread.org