

# Seven Daughters and Seven Sons: the Middle East Through Literature

## Summary

Seven Daughters and Seven Sons is the retelling of a traditional Arabic tale in which a young woman disguises herself as a man and opens up a shop in a distant city in order to help her impoverished family. Her disguise causes her many complications but she eventually succeeds in redeeming the family fortunes and finding her true love. Students will learn aspects of Middle East culture and geography through reading the book.

## Time Frame

2 class periods of 45 minutes each

## Group Size

Individual

## Materials

Seven Daughters and Seven Sons; atlas; dictionary; blank map of the Middle East (Egypt to Iraq)

## Background for Teachers

This novel is based on an Iraqi folktale that has been part of their oral tradition since the eleventh century. The book is written in the first person narrative of the two main characters, Buran and Mahmud. 'Seven Daughters' reveals timeless issues in a Middle East context.

## Intended Learning Outcomes

1. Define vocabulary from 'Seven Daughters and Seven Sons' that relate to the Middle East. 2. Map locations described in the book on map of the Middle East. 3. Describe cultural features of the Middle East. 4. Explain how resources are culturally determined.

## Instructional Procedures

Have students list stories where the main character switches gender identity (Yentl, Tootsi, Ms. Doubtfire, etc.) Ask why these characters switch identity. Explain that Seven Daughters and Seven Sons is another identity story set in the Middle East. Through reading the book they will learn much about the Middle East. Have them answer the questions and do the activities described in the following steps and discuss their answers in class.

Map the following locations by placing a dot at the appropriate location: Baghdad, Alexandria, Cyprus, Sidon (Sayda), Al-Raqqa (Ar Raqqa), Aleppo, Antioch (Antakya), Ladhqiyyah (Latakia), Beirut, Damascus, Tyre (Sur), Tripoli.

Add the following to your map: Tigris River, Euphrates River, Mediterranean Sea

As you read 'Seven Daughters' trace Buran's journey with a red pen drawing an arrow from one city to another.

The following National Geographic link may help you. Click on Asia, then on individual countries (Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt, Cyprus) You may want to print out the map and copy for the members of the class.

Define the following list of vocabulary found in 'Seven Daughters.'

Allah [p. 1]

arabic [p. 1]

suq [p. 4]

hijab [p. 20]

jinns [p. 28]  
kismet [p. 31]  
dinar [p. 33]  
bazaar [p. 35]  
Mohammed [p. 40]  
muezzin [p. 40]  
minarets [p. 40]  
khan [p. 41]  
'alsalamu alaykun' [p. 42]  
mosque [p. 45]  
vizier [p. 61]  
Koran [p. 176]

The following questions are answered in 'Seven Daughters' in regards to religion:

What is the religion of the people in the novel?  
How many times are the people to pray each day?  
What types of food are forbidden in their religion?  
What is their belief about 'fate?' How is this expressed in the book?

What's in a name? Read p. 50 as Buran chooses a new name. Following the pattern in the book, what would your last name be in Arabic?

The following questions are answered in 'Seven Daughters' in regards to cultural traits:

What was the traditional role of women in their society? Were there any exceptions?  
Why was it difficult for poor women to marry respected men?  
Describe market behavior. Do we have anything similar in our culture?  
What were some common leisure activities in their society? How do your leisure activities compare?  
How were guests entertained?

Read the conversation between Buran (Nasir) and Jihha on pages 66-71 and the conversation on pages 90-94. Answer the following questions.

What do these conversations reveal about resources and trade?  
How can a common object in one place be valuable in another?  
How did Buran use this idea?

Closure:

How did Buran's opening statement come true? 'What we imagine to be a blessing can actually be a curse, and what we suppose to be a curse may blossom into a blessing.'

### Extensions

Students may learn about the history of backgammon or chess and play the game

### Bibliography

Cohen, Barbara, Seven Daughters and Seven Sons (Beech Tree Books, 1982) Xpeditions Atlas

### Authors

[Doug Andersen](#)