

Arabs in Hollywood

Grade Level:

- Middle or high school

Relevant Subjects:

- Social Studies (Arabs, stereotypes)
- Language Arts (text analysis)

Objectives:

- Students will think critically about how Arabs and Arab Americans are represented in the media
- Students will practice the skills and questions to analyze media representations of Arabs and Arab Americans, as well as others.

Essential Question:

- How do the mainstream media and Hollywood portray Arabs and Arab Americans?

Lesson 1: Planet of the Arabs

Based on *Embracing their Origins, Sharing their Stories*, www.Albustanseeds.org

Materials:

- Internet access to watch Planet of the Arabs (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ml1ZNEjEarw>)
- Copies of homework questions

Pre-Viewing Discussion:

- Have students brainstorm different times they have seen representations of Arabs in films, TV shows, the news, and literature.
- Write their responses on the board and, together, summarize the themes you notice emerging in this list.

Viewing the Video:

- Show the 9 minute film, Planet of the Arabs. Introduce it by telling the students that this is a montage of clips from popular American films and TV shows and it is meant to capture common representations of Arabs in the American media. As they watch the film, students should pay careful attention to the kinds of messages that are being communicated to

audiences about Arabs. You may want to ask them to take notes on the film so they are prepared for the conversation afterwards.

Post-Viewing Discussion:

- When the movie is over, have the students journal for 5 minutes around the following question: *If these film clips were the only exposure you ever got to Arabs, what would you think of Arabs as people? Why?*
- Discuss:
 - What were some characteristics of the Arabs you saw in these? What examples from these clips support what you are saying? What was stated outright about Arabs and the Arab world? What was merely implied about Arabs and the Arab World?
 - In general, were Arabs portrayed positively or negatively in these clips?
 - Why do you think these films and TV shows all portray Arabs in this way? Do you think this is how most people see Arabs? Have you ever encountered anyone with these views about Arabs?
 - What do you think is the effect of these portrayals of Arabs in the mainstream media? How do these kinds of portrayals influence people in the US?
 - Do any of these movie clips look familiar to you? Do you think of those films/TV shows in the same way after seeing Planet of the Arabs?

Homework:

- Pass out the attached homework assignment

Lesson 2: Reel Bad Arabs (For high school students, could be adapted for 8th grade)

Based on study guide from Media Education Foundation,
http://www.mediaed.org/assets/products/412/studyguide_412.pdf

Materials:

- Internet access to watch Reel Bad Arabs (<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-223210418534585840>, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ko_N4BcalPY, <http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/reel-bad-arabs/>)
- 5 computers (for groups to watch different film clips)
- Copies of discussion questions for each groups

Pre-viewing Activity:

- Review the class discussion about Planet of the Arabs and how Arabs are portrayed in American media.
- Divide students into small groups to discuss the following question: Why do you think Arabs are represented so negatively in Hollywood films? Ask them to come up with at least two reasons. Have the groups share their answers with the class.
- Explain that they are going to be watching a documentary called Reel Bad Arabs by Dr. Jack Shaheen. Watch the introduction to the film together (0:00-3:18). Ask students to take five minutes to write down their reactions and predict what the rest of the film will be like. Have students share their thoughts.

Viewing Activity:

- Explain that Reel Bad Arabs is divided into six different sections. You are going to separate the class into five groups and each group will be responsible for one section of the film. We will watch the last section together at the end.
- Each group will receive a packet with instructions for a pre-viewing discussion, the viewing of the film, the post-viewing discussion, and then the presentation.
- The five groups are as follows:
 1. Myths of Arabland
 2. The Arab Threat: Mideast Politics and Hollywood
 3. Terror Inc: Demonizing Palestinians and Muslims
 4. The Only Good Arab...
 5. Islamophobia
- As each group does the assignment, the teacher should walk around and support the students.

Student Presentations:

- Once the students are prepared, they will present their sections to the class
- During presentations, students will take notes on the presentations on the note-taking sheet below. Instruct students to write down the main ideas and one question for the presenters.
- After each presentation, have a couple of students ask their questions

Watching the Final Section:

- Following the presentations, ask the students what they think of the ideas in Real Bad Arabs. Do they agree with Dr. Shaheen that Arabs are “the most maligned group in the history of Hollywood”? What other groups of people have also been depicted negatively in Hollywood? What are some consequences of negative media representations?
- Ask students how Hollywood could challenge some of the stereotypes that have emerged?
- Watch the end of the film, Getting Real, 37:34-the end.
- Discussion questions:
 1. What images come to your mind when you think of Arab men, women, and children? Are those images different after having seen this film?
 2. What do you think of Dr. Shaheen’s argument that comedy can challenge stereotypes? Can comedy also be used to reinforce stereotypes?
 3. Do you share Dr. Shaheen’s optimism about future portrayals of Arabs? Why or why not?
 4. Dr. Shaheen encourages us not to remain silent when confronted by prejudicial stereotypes. Have you ever spoken up in a situation such as that? What was the experience like? What challenges do people who refuse to remain silent face? How can those challenges be met?

Additional Assignments:

- If you’d like to give students additional assignments, the Media Education Foundation Study Guide to Reel Bad Arabs has excellent assignment ideas

Media Research

Instructions:

Find a mainstream American newspaper or magazine article, scene from a film or television show, television or print advertisement, or song that includes a portrayal of Arabs or Arab Americans. Answer the following questions about your “text” and come to class prepared to share your findings with your peers.

1. Using as much detail as possible, describe the story of what is happening in your text.

2. Who is telling this story? Where is the statement or image coming from? In other words, what is the point of view that you are hearing/seeing/reading?

3. Who is the intended audience for this text? In other words, who do you think is likely to read/watch/listen to this text?

4. What do you think this text would make the audience think or believe about Arabs? Does it reflect any of the stereotypes of Arabs that you've previously identified in class? If so, which ones?

5. How is this message about Arabs being conveyed? Describe the particular words, images, sounds, or other parts of your text that communicate this message about Arabs.

6. Overall, do you think this portrayal of Arabs is positive or negative? What makes this the case?

7. How do you think this kind of portrayal of Arabs might affect American society?

Reel Bad Arabs, Part 1:
Myths of Arabland

Instructions:

1. As a group, discuss the pre-viewing question. Write down your answers in the space below.
2. Watch Part 1: Myths of Arabland, 3:21-13:48 at <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-223210418534585840>. Take notes in the space below.
3. As a group, read and discuss the post-viewing discussion questions. Write down your answers
4. Using the Presenting to the Class guiding questions, put together a 7-10 minute presentation about your section of Reel Bad Arabs. You should include a summary of the clip, review the main ideas, and provide supporting examples.

Previewing Question:

1. When you think of the phrase "Arabland," what sort of images come to mind? Where do you think those images come from?

Viewing Notes: Use the space below to take notes while you watch the film. Think about the main ideas and how you will present the information to the rest of the class.

The Myth of Arabland: Post Viewing Discussion Questions

1. Aladdin is an animated film aimed primarily at children. Do you agree that we should take the images and representations of a film like this seriously? Why or why not? Can you think of other children's films that include stereotypical representations of groups of people?

2. How is it possible that Hollywood can simultaneously depict Arabs as incompetent and as a dangerous threat? Why do you think this contradiction occurs?

3. Why do you think Hollywood inserts demeaning images of Arabs into films that have nothing to do with the Middle East?

4. When you think of Arab women, what sorts of images come to mind? Where do you think those images come from?

The Myths of Arabland: Presenting to the Class

1. What is/are the main idea (s) in Myths of Arabland?

2. List three examples from the clip that support the main idea (s)

3. How will you present the information to the class? Who will do which part?

4. Other Notes:

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Reel Bad Arabs, Part 2
The Arab Threat: Mideast Politics and Hollywood

Instructions:

1. As a group, discuss the pre-viewing question. Write down your answer
2. Watch Part 2: The Arab Threat, 13:48-18:28 at <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-223210418534585840>. Take notes in the space below.
3. As a group, read and discuss the post-viewing discussion questions. Write down your answers
4. Using the Presenting to the Class guiding questions, put together a 7-10 minute presentation about your section of Reel Bad Arabs. You should include a summary of the clip, review the main ideas, and provide supporting examples.

Previewing Question:

1. Do you think politics and current events could impact how Arabs are portrayed in Hollywood? How so?

Viewing Notes: Use the space below to take notes while you watch the film. Think about the main ideas and how you will present the information to the rest of the class.

**The Arab Threat: Mideast Politics and Hollywood
Post Viewing Discussion Questions**

1. Dr. Shaheen says that politics and film go hand in hand. What do you think he means by this? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

2. What are some examples of films that you think were influenced by real world political events or that carry political messages?

3. Though usually identified with Jewish people, the word "Semitic" actually refers to both Jewish and Arab peoples. What parallels do you see between anti-Semitism directed at Jews and anti-Semitism directed at Arabs?

4. Do you believe that films have the power to reinforce or challenge stereotypes and group animosities?

**The Arab Threat: Mideast Politics and Hollywood
Presenting to the Class**

1. What is/are the main idea (s) in The Arab Threat: Mideast Politics and Hollywood?

2. List three examples from the clip that support the main idea (s)

3. How will you present the information to the class? Who will do which part?

4. Other Notes:

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Faint, illegible text covering the majority of the page, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side.

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**Reel Bad Arabs, Part 3:
Terror Inc: Demonizing Palestinians and Muslims**

Instructions:

1. As a group, discuss the pre-viewing question. Write down your answers in the space below.
2. Watch Part 3: Terror Inc: Demonizing Palestinians and Muslims, 18:28-26:04 at <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-223210418534585840>. Take notes in the space below.
3. As a group, read and discuss the post-viewing discussion questions. Write down your answers
4. Using the Presenting to the Class guiding questions, put together a 7-10 minute presentation about your section of Reel Bad Arabs. You should include a summary of the clip, review the main ideas, and provide supporting examples.

Previewing Question:

1. In your experience, how are Israelis represented in American films? What about Palestinians?

Viewing Notes: Use the space below to take notes while you watch the film. Think about the main ideas and how you will present the information to the rest of the class.

**Terror Inc: Demonizing Palestinians and Muslims
Post Viewing Discussion Questions**

1. Why do you think Hollywood never seems to question Washington's official stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

2. How might Hollywood films influence public opinion on Israel and Palestine? Does the fact that these are fictional films designed as entertainment matter in terms of their potential to influence real-world public opinion?

3. Why do images of Palestinian suffering seem to be systematically excluded from the movies?

4. Discrimination against Jewish people is real. How can one stand up against violence against Jews and simultaneously hold Israel accountable for the violence the state commits against Palestinians?

**Terror Inc: Demonizing Palestinians and Muslims
Presenting to the Class**

1. What is/are the main idea (s) in Terror Inc?

2. List three examples from the clip that support the main idea (s)

3. How will you present the information to the class? Who will do which part?

4. Other Notes:

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Reel Bad Arabs, Part 4:
The Only Good Arab

Instructions:

1. As a group, discuss the pre-viewing question. Write down your answers in the space below.
2. Watch Part 4: The Only Good Arab, 26:04-31:19, at <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-223210418534585840>. Take notes in the space below.
3. As a group, read and discuss the post-viewing discussion questions. Write down your answers
4. Using the Presenting to the Class guiding questions, put together a 7-10 minute presentation about your section of Reel Bad Arabs. You should include a summary of the clip, review the main ideas, and provide supporting examples.

Previewing Question:

1. Can you think of any good Arabs in Hollywood movies? Who?

Viewing Notes: Use the space below to take notes while you watch the film. Think about the main ideas and how you will present the information to the rest of the class.

The Only Good Arab
Post Viewing Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Hollywood film producers are so willing to cooperate with the Department of Defense?

2. After seeing the clips from Rules of Engagement, do you agree with Dr. Shaheen's statement that this is a racist film? Why or why not?

3. Why is the murder of Arab people considered entertaining?

4. How do you think these films might shape perceptions of the US in the Arab world, especially among young people?

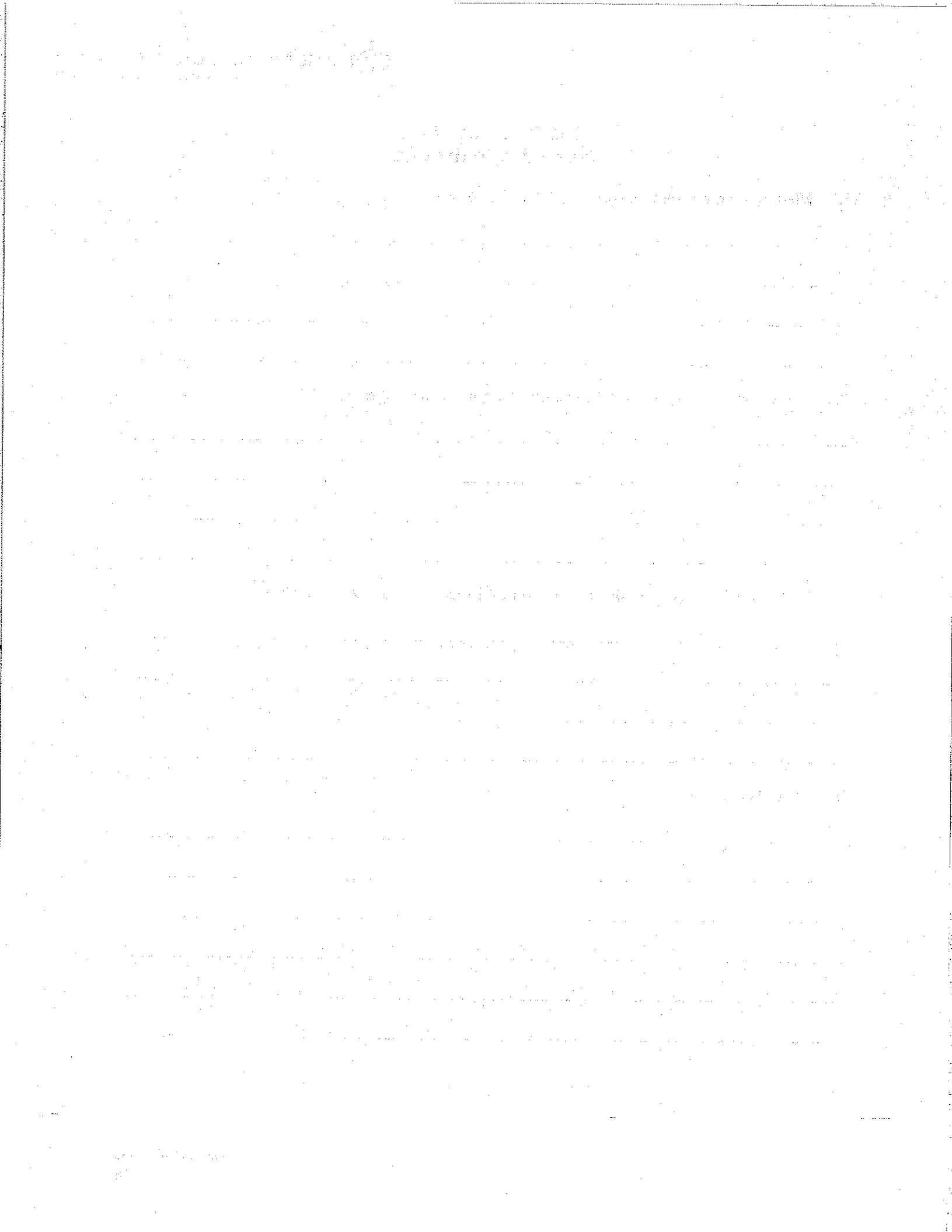
The Only Good Arab
Presenting to the Class

1. What is/are the main idea (s) in The Only Good Arab?

2. List three examples from the clip that support the main idea (s)

3. How will you present the information to the class? Who will do which part?

4. Other Notes:



Reel Bad Arabs, Part 5: Islamophobia

Instructions:

1. As a group, discuss the pre-viewing question. Write down your answers in the space below.
2. Watch Part 5: Islamophobia, 31:19-37:34. Take notes in the space below.
3. As a group, read and discuss the post-viewing discussion questions. Write down your answers
4. Using the Presenting to the Class guiding questions, put together a 7-10 minute presentation about your section of Reel Bad Arabs. You should include a summary of the clip, review the main ideas, and provide supporting examples.

Previewing Question:

1. What do you know about Islamophobia?

Viewing Notes: Use the space below to take notes while you watch the film. Think about the main ideas and how you will present the information to the rest of the class.



Islamophobia Post Viewing Discussion Questions

1. Do you agree with Dr. Shaheen's contention that the Iraq war was made easier by a century of demeaning stereotypes? What do you think he means by 'easier'?

2. What are your thoughts on racial profiling? What would you say to someone who pointed out that Timothy McVeigh looked like the stereotypical wholesome All-American boy? Would it have made sense after he bombed the federal building, therefore, to demand that white men should be randomly stopped by police and searched? Why or why not?

3. Can you think of other stereotypes that are invisible to us but influence how we see the world?

4. Do you think films have the power to influence how we see the world? Why or why not?

Islamophobia
Presenting to the Class

1. What is/are the main idea (s) in Islamophobia?

2. List three examples from the clip that support the main idea (s)

3. How will you present the information to the class? Who will do which part?

4. Other Notes:

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Presentations

Instructions: During each presentation, take notes in the area below. Write 1 question to ask the presenters.

Part 1: Myths of Arabland

My Question: _____

Part 2: The Arab Threat: Mideast Politics and Hollywood

My Question: _____

Part 3: Terror Inc: Demonizing Palestinians and Muslims

My Question: _____

Part 4: The Only Good Arab

My Question: _____

Part 5: Islamophobia

My Question: _____

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