Restoring Women to World Studies

A Document-Based Question Unit for Grades 9–12

Primary Researchers:

Natalie Arsenault, Outreach Director
Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies

Christopher Rose, Assistant Director
Center for Middle Eastern Studies

Allegra Azulay, Outreach Coordinator
Center for Russian, East European & Eurasian Studies

Rachel Meyer, Outreach Coordinator
South Asia Institute

Hemispheres
The International Outreach Consortium at the University of Texas at Austin

http://www.utexas.edu/cola/orgs/hemispheres/
hemispheres@austin.utexas.edu
# Restoring Women to World Studies: A Document-Based Curriculum Unit for Grades 9–12

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Welcome!

In much of the social studies—especially courses focused on world history, geography, and culture—there has been a long-standing awareness that the experience of women has been left out of the narrative. Recent changes in state, national, and Advanced Placement educational standards have sought to remedy this omission by calling for the inclusion of women’s studies in the social studies curriculum. However, the most widely available resources tend to focus on the experience of women in Western Europe and North America. *Restoring Women to World Studies: A Document-Based Question Curriculum Unit for Grades 9–12* seeks to address these new requirements and the current regional bias in available resources. The unit is based on the 2007 Hemispheres Summer Teachers’ Institute *Restoring Women to World Studies*. That four-day workshop explored the situation of women—historical and contemporary—in Latin America, the Middle East, Russia, East Europe and Eurasia, and South Asia. The training sessions discussed the contributions of notable women to historical and artistic movements, talked about concepts of gender roles and gendered spaces, looked at issues that are driving women’s movements today, and examined the greater context in which all of these take place.

In this unit, we have sought to address the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and National Geography Standards that explicitly deal with gender roles and social structures but also standards that address citizenship, processes of historical change, social movements and cultural differences. In addition, this unit draws on primary source readings and images to strengthen students’ skills in working with primary source materials. Each case study is laid out in a Document-Based Question (DBQ) format so that students can cite, interpret, and evaluate sources; consider point of view; and use historical evidence to develop and support a thesis.

The unit begins with a PowerPoint that introduces the notion of gender as a key social category and patriarchy as an important organizing structure in many societies and cultures. The unit then examines these concepts within case studies from the four regions. Each case study is meant to encourage students to address questions about gender roles in the different societies, either in a particular historical moment or how they evolve over time. In addition to responding to each case study, students can analyze and compare the different primary source documents within the case studies by considering the following questions and their answers:

- How do women in patriarchal societies experience gender norms and ideals?
- How do women in patriarchal societies create change within the established order of society?

It is our hope that, with *Restoring Women to World Studies*, students will be able to better appreciate how gender functions within different societies at different times; understand how it both shapes individual lives and offers individuals opportunities to shape society; see similarities in women’s experiences as well as differences; and appreciate that experiences of gender are influenced by other categories of identity (class, race, ethnicity, etc.) and are not frozen or merely restrictive but changing and challenged by women who respond to traditional understandings of gender roles and hierarchies.

We welcome feedback and comments on the unit and your experience using it in the classroom. Please do not hesitate to contact us at hemispheres@austin.utexas.edu.
This Curriculum Unit Address The Following Standards in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS):

113.22 (Social Studies Grade 6)

(1) History. The student understands that historical events influence contemporary events. The student is expected to: (B) analyze the historical background of selected contemporary societies to evaluate relationships between past conflicts and current conditions.

(2) History. The student understands the contributions of individuals and groups from various cultures to selected historical and contemporary societies. The student is expected to: (A) explain the significance of individuals or groups from selected societies, past and present.

(13) Citizenship. The student understands that the nature of citizenship varies among societies. The student is expected to: (A) describe roles and responsibilities of citizens in selected contemporary societies including the United States; (B) explain how opportunities for citizens to participate in and influence the political process vary among selected contemporary societies; and (C) compare the role of citizens in the United States with the role of citizens from selected democratic and nondemocratic contemporary societies.

(15) Culture. The student understands the similarities and differences within and among cultures in different societies. The student is expected to: (C) analyze the similarities and differences among selected world societies.

(18) Culture. The student understands the relationship that exists between artistic, creative, and literary expressions and the societies that produce them. The student is expected to: (A) explain the relationships that exist between societies and their architecture, art, music, and literature; (C) describe ways in which societal issues influence creative expressions.

113.33 (World History Studies)

(1) History. The student understands traditional historical points of reference in world history. The student is expected to: (A) identify the major eras in world history and describe their defining characteristics; (C) apply absolute and relative chronology through the sequencing of significant individuals, events, and time periods.

(17) Citizenship. The student understands the significance of political choices and decisions made by individuals, groups, and nations throughout history. The student is expected to: (A) evaluate political choices and decisions that individuals, groups, and nations have made in the past, taking into account historical context, and apply this knowledge to the analysis of choices and decisions faced by contemporary societies; and (B) describe the different roles of citizens and noncitizens in historical cultures, especially as the roles pertain to civic participation.

(18) Citizenship. The student understands the historical development of significant legal and political concepts, including ideas about rights, republicanism, constitutionalism, and democracy. The student is expected to: (C) identify examples of political, economic, and social oppression and violations of human rights throughout history, including slavery, the Holocaust, other examples of genocide, and politically-motivated mass murders in Cambodia, China, and the Soviet Union; (D) assess the degree to which human rights and democratic ideals and practices have been advanced throughout the world during the 20th century.

(20) Culture. The student understands the relationship between the arts and the times during which they were created. The student is expected to: (B) analyze examples of how art, architecture, literature, music, and drama reflect the history of cultures in which they are produced.
Standards Alignment

(21) Culture. The student understands the roles of women, children, and families in different historical cultures. The student is expected to: (A) analyze the specific roles of women, children, and families in different historical cultures; and (B) describe the political, economic, and cultural influence of women in different historical cultures.

This Curriculum Unit Addresses the Following Theme
in the Course Description for Advanced Placement World History

4. Systems of social structure and gender structure (comparing major features within and among societies, and assessing change and continuity)

What students are expected to know:
- **Foundations, 8000 BCE–600 CE**: Classical civilizations: social and gender structures
- **1450-1750**: Gender and empire (including the role of women in households and in politics)
- **1750-1914**: Changes in social and gender structure (tension between work patterns and ideas about gender). Major comparisons: Compare the roles and conditions of women in the upper/middle classes with peasantry/working class in western Europe.
- **1914-present**: Social reform and social revolution (changing gender roles; family structures; rise of feminism)
The Arab World

Islam and Feminism in the Age of the Arab Renaissance
The status of women within Islam is a topic that has attracted significant attention in the West, particularly since the events of September 2001. However, media coverage of the plight of women in Afghanistan does not reflect the far more nuanced and diverse series of readings and debates on women and feminism in the Islamic world that have been ongoing since Islam's very beginnings. This case study examines “Islamic feminism,” that is to say, feminism that seeks to use Islam as a justification for women's full participation in society. Feminists point to the Qur'an itself as the basis for the notion that men and women are created equal in the sight of God. Islamic feminists also point to the example set by the wives of the prophet Muhammad, notably Khadija, his first wife, and 'Aisha, his favorite wife at the time of his death.

Khadija was a successful businesswoman significantly older than Muhammad when they were married. Because of her advanced standing in Meccan society, she was able to negotiate the marriage contract on her own terms, essentially gaining both a husband and a business manager through her union with Muhammad. Khadija is also revered as the first person to accept Muhammad's prophethood and become the first convert to Islam. She is regarded as a role model for an independent yet pious woman.

'Aisha bint Abi Bakr was reputed to be Muhammad's favorite wife, in whose arms he died. 'Aisha was the daughter of Abu Bakr, who succeeded Muhammad as the first caliph, or leader of the Islamic community. She is known as “the truthful” because of an incident in which she was accused of inappropriate behavior and eventually proved innocent by a divine revelation. After Muhammad's death, 'Aisha became a key player in the politics of early Medina, and led armies into battle during the fitna (the civil struggle that eventually led to the schism between Sunni and Shi'a). In the final years of her life, she dedicated herself to recording Muhammad's sayings and actions so as to preserve them as an example to be followed by Muslims. Her contributions to the formation of Islamic society are numerous, and she is often cited as an example of a self-assured woman.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a wave of nationalism ran through the countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean. This period of political thinking, cultural reinvigoration, and societal change is known in Arabic as the nahda, or renaissance, because it seemed to herald the promise of the Arab world's return as a political power and cultural and scientific leader. The centuries-old rule of the Ottoman Empire was coming to an end, and, invigorated by the promise of the future, the Arab provinces looked both east and west for role models and inspiration. Scholars—frequently men—participated in educational exchanges and lengthy trips to Europe and sparked debate in countries like Egypt and Syria (which encompassed modern day Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the Palestinian territories) about what kind of society they wanted to become.

Traditionally, Mediterranean societies—including the Middle East—were so-called “client-and-patronage” societies in which social mobility and standing was determined by one's relationship with others. Within each niche on the social ladder, there were traditional roles for men (commerce, statecraft, and religion) and women (education, management of the home, and control of domestic finances). In the age of the nahda, however, many in the Arab world looked to the new world powers—the countries of Europe—for a new model of civil society based on the European principles of equal access to politics, education, and the marketplace, and a number of women began to demand the right to participate in the process.

In many cases, these women used the language of Islam as a justification for their full participation, stating the case that in Islam's earliest days women held important roles in the Islamic community but were later pushed aside by men. Further, they argued, the Qur'an itself backed their position. As might be expected, this provoked considerable debate on the issue. It was frequently the case that the two opposing points of view would be rooted in religion, using the Qur'an and examples from the life of the Prophet Muhammad and the women in his life to argue both for and against the right of women to participate fully in areas of society that had, to that point, been considered the realm of men.
Source 1: Scholar Asma Barlas on the equality of men and women in Islam, 2002

Taqwa’—which defines the essence of moral personality by orienting us toward God—consists...in our willingness to embrace virtue and refrain from evil by exercising our reason, intellect and knowledge. In no context does the Qur’an suggest that men, either in their biological capacity as males, or in their social capacity as fathers, husbands, or interpreters of sacred knowledge, are better able than women to acquire taqwa’ or to practice their din [faith]. Indeed, the Qur’an is rare among Scriptures in teaching that women and men are able equally to acquire taqwa’ (moral personality), as evident from innumerable Ayat [verses]; for example,

For Muslim men and women—
For believing men and women,
For devout men and women,
For true men and women,
For men and women who are
Patient and constant, for men
And women who humble themselves,
For men and women who give
In charity, for men and women
Who fast (and deny themselves).
For men and women who
Guard their chastity, and
For men and women who
Engage much in God's praise—
For them has God prepared
Forgiveness and great reward.
The Qur’an (33:35)


Source 2: Examination of a 13th-century Muslim biographer reconciling the conflict between gender and religious authority

‘Aisha was Muhammad’s favorite wife, and the daughter of Abu Bakr, who became Muhammad’s successor as the first caliph of Islam. The “handmaiden” is Rabi’a al-‘Adawiyya, a ninth century female mystic of great significance, particularly in Shi’ite Islam.

The conflict between gender and religious prestige was emphasized, inadvertently, by the biographer ‘Attar (d. 1229). In his biography of Islamic saints, ‘Attar describes a female mystic named Rabi’a al-‘Adawiyya (d. 801), a woman whom he places among the ranks of men: “[If anyone were to ask me, ‘Why did you mention her among the ranks of men?’ I would reply, ‘[Muhammad], chief of all prophets, used to say [God] does not look on outward appearance.’” ...

Such an perception expresses an ideal nullification of any gender restrictions faced by Muslim female mystics:

If it is permissible to take two-thirds of the religion from ‘Aisha, the truthful, then it is also permissible to receive religious instruction from one of her handmaidens. When a woman [walks] on the path of God like a man, then it is not possible to call her a woman.

Although he categorically states that Allah considers irrelevant the differences between male and female believers, ‘Attar demonstrates that while God may not note such differences, male authors certainly did. In ‘Attar’s estimation, it is not possible to call Rabi’a a woman because she transcends his definition of the female gender ....

Comprehension Exercises:
1. Summarize the viewpoint expressed in source 1. How do you think that a feminist reading this passage from the Qur’an would interpret it?
2. Who was Rabi’a al-‘Adawiyya? Why is she important? Why does ‘Attar place her “among the ranks of men”?
3. What do you think Spellberg means when she says that “while God may not note such differences, male authors certainly did”?
4. Based on your reading of the text, do you think that ‘Attar would have agreed with Asma Barlas’s interpretation of the Qur’an on the subject of men and women? Explain your opinion citing the sources.
Yesterday I read a protest in some newspaper signed by some sisters in Hama (these women had refused suffrage). They were protesting the acquisition of the right to live and to fight and the honor of responsibility and struggle. What can I say?

Millions of women have moaned, aeons of sadness have settled in our hearts like a heavy fog. Generations have longed to participate in humanity along with men. Now the authorities honor us and invite us to practice our humanity. They grant us the honor of duties and responsibilities. So, shall we refuse? What can I say? Some sisters from Hama are refusing the call of the country so as to escape responsibility while shouting “Islam.”

Islam is women’s honor. They escape from our country’s battles out of weakness and resignation, shouting “Islam.” ‘Aisha fought when it became necessary. They are afraid of mixing with men and of what people will suspect. ‘Aisha was suspected once. God honored ‘Aisha with a verse that revealed her innocence and that of all women who dare to be human in a society that insists that women remain colorful mummy/slaves whose existence revolves around the household, make-up and stupid stories....

As for our Hama sisters and the treachery of among the ranks of us, women of this country, this is the treachery of the eyelashes to the eye, of the fingernail to the finger, of the hand to the arm. What can I say? What can half of me say if I choose for the other half to be paralysed when the enemy is all around? ...

Let us pray.

For those who accuse Islam of denigrating them, whereas it is Islam that delivered us from the deserts where we were being buried like cadavers. ...Islam forbade us to be dolls decorating tables and playthings for the god of petrol, and butterflies around the colored lamps of vanities. ...

For those who refuse winter’s toil and summer’s harvest. They have condemned themselves to the suicide of silence and defeatism. Today suicide is the ultimate cowardice because our lives are not ours alone—they belong to our past, to our destiny and to the future of our country, and we are compelled to live.

Source 5: Excerpt from a speech by Huda Shaarawi, president of the Egyptian Feminist Union, opening the Arab Feminist Conference, Cairo, 1944

The advanced nations, after careful examination into the matter, have come to believe in the equality of sexes in all rights even though their religious and secular laws have not reached the level Islam has reached in terms of justice toward the woman. Islam has given her the right to vote for the ruler and has allowed her to give opinions on questions of jurisprudence and religion.

The woman, given by the Creator the right to vote for the successor of the Prophet, is deprived of the right to vote for a deputy in a circuit or district election by a (male) being created by God. At the same time, this right is enjoyed by a man who might have less education and experience than the woman. And she is the mother who has given birth to the man and has raised him and guided him.

The Sharia gave her the right to education, to take part in the hijra (referring to the time of the Prophet Muhammad and his flight from Mecca to Medina), and to fight in the ranks of warriors and has made her equal to the man in all rights and responsibilities, even in the crimes that either sex can commit. However, the man who alone distributes rights, has kept for himself the right to legislate and rule, generously turning over to his partner his own share of responsibilities and sanctions without seeking her opinion about the division.

The woman today demands to regain her share of rights that have been taken from her and gives back to the man the responsibilities and sanctions he has given to her. Gentlemen, this is justice…


Comprehension Exercises:
5. On what basis do Ghada Samman (source 3) and Huda Shaarawi (source 5) claim equal rights for women? Cite examples of the language each uses to support her position.
6. How do you think that Ghada Samman and Huda Shaarawi might respond to ‘Attar (source 2)? Why?
7. Analyze the photo in source 4. How are the women dressed? How might you expect women participating prominently in a nationalist rally to dress?

Yusuf al-Qaradawy is an Egyptian cleric who is important within the Muslim Brotherhood, a political organization that advocates a stronger role for Islam within the Egyptian government, including rewriting the constitution according to the Brotherhood’s conservative interpretation of Islamic law. Dr. Qaradawy is also a popular television personality whose evening talk show on religious themes is one of the most popular television programs in the Middle East.

Islam has always appreciated the femininity of the woman and regarded her as playing a role integral to that of the man, and similarly regarded the man as playing a role integral to that of the woman. Neither is a foe, adversary or a competitor to the other. Rather, each is a help to the other in attaining the relative perfection of his or her person and one’s whole sex. … Men and women are, so to speak, like a can and its lid, a unity that comprises the thing and its counterpart; one does not exist without the other. …

What all this comes to is that the woman is different from the man, for she complements him and he her. A thing does not complement itself. The Qur’an emphasizes that difference: “And the male is not like the female.” [Surah 3:36] They are as unlike as positive and negative. …

On the basis of the instinctive nature of the woman and the need for a healthy and proper atmosphere for her relationship with the man, Islam has set its codes for the woman as well as all the other relevant codes, instructions and rules. To guard her femininity and acknowledge its needs so as not to repress it, is what Islam is after. It tries to create a barrier between the woman and degradation, to protect her from the human wolves and predators who chase her into their lairs, devour her and discard the despoiled remains. …

The encounter of men and women is not prohibited in itself. Quite the contrary, it is allowable or even required if done in pursuit of a noble cause like gaining knowledge or performing good acts in which the joint efforts of both men and women are necessary.

This is the position of Islam on man-woman relations, and their common involvement on charitable and righteous lines is what we call legitimate mixing; yet “intellectual imperialism” has managed to create in our countries people who turn a deaf ear to the ruling of Allah and His Messenger. These people call on us to give the woman free rein to assert herself, promote her personality, enjoy her life and her femininity. They want her to mix with men freely, experience them closely where they would be together and alone, travel with them, go to cinemas or dance till midnight together. She is supposed to find the “right man” from all those she has known. In this way, it is said, life is supposed to be more secure and have greater stability in the face adversity.

These people who may well be thinking of themselves as unblemished seraphs, tell us not to worry about the man or woman as a result of this “decent” communication, innocent friendship and upright contact. The frequency of their contact will pacify desire. The two sexes will supposedly find satisfaction in the mere look, conversation or, in the extreme, dancing together, which is only a form of elevating artistic impression. Sensual pleasure would have no place. It is a clean vent for energy, nothing more. This is said to be what the advanced West did after they rid themselves of complexes and privation.

Comprehension Exercises:

8. Briefly summarize Yusuf al-Qaradawi’s stance on the status of women. How is it similar to the position advocated by Asma Barlas (source 1), Ghada Samman (source 3) and Huda Shaarawi (source 5)? How is it different?

9. How do you think Huda Shaarawi and Ghada Samman might respond to Dr. Qaradawi?

10. Based on your analysis of all of the sources, what, if any, are the points on which the authors agree? On what points do they differ?

11. Based on your response to question 8, how easy or difficult do you think it might be to formulate a “definitive” answer about “what Islam says” on the status of women? Explain your answer citing evidence from the sources where necessary.
About Hemispheres

Created in 1996, Hemispheres is the international outreach consortium at the University of Texas at Austin. Hemispheres utilizes University resources to promote and assist with world studies education for K–12 and postsecondary schools, businesses, civic and non-profit organizations, the media, governmental agencies, and the general public.

Comprised of UT’s four federally funded National Resource Centers (NRCs) dedicated to the study and teaching of Latin America; the Middle East; Russia, East Europe & Eurasia; and South Asia, Hemispheres offers a variety of free and low-cost services to these groups and more. Each center coordinates its own outreach programming, including management of its lending library, speakers bureau, public lectures, and conferences, all of which are reinforced by collaborative promotion of our resources to an ever-widening audience in the educational community and beyond.

Hemispheres fulfills its mission through: coordination of pre-service and in-service training and resource workshops for educators; promotion of outreach resources and activities via exhibits at appropriate state- and nation-wide educator conferences; participation in public outreach events as organized by the consortium as well as by other organizations; and consultation on appropriate methods for implementing world studies content in school, business, and community initiatives.

For more information, visit the Hemispheres Web site at:
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or e-mail: hemispheres@austin.utexas.edu