

Which Way Home?

Exploring the Relationship Between Migration and Identity Through Personal Narrative

Unit Plan by Keith Calix

Day One
Lesson Objective(s) or Essential Question(s)
<p>Students will...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● explore the definition of “home” and will consider the factors that influence their respective definitions. ● interrogate their own stereotypes of Iraq and Muslim-majority countries. ● apply this definition of “home” to a video about journalist Zahra Ahmad and will examine how Zahra’s trip to Iraq exposed her own biases and single stories of Iraq. ● read and analyze Zahra’s Ahmad’s, “Journey Home - Welcome Home Committee,” and take a formative reflection quiz assessing their understanding of the text. Specifically, they will be asked to examine how Zahra’s trip to Iraq exposed her own biases and single stories of Iraq.
Warm-up / Do Now
<p>Teacher posts a Padlet/slide with the following questions (students are instructed to answer at least three of the opening questions):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What words, images or phrases come to mind when you think of “home”? 2. How might you define “home”? 3. What factors influence how you define home (e.g., location, people, language, culture, safety, rights, etc.)? 4. Are there stereotypes or single stories associated with your ‘home’? If so, what are they? How do they make you feel? <p>Teacher then identifies two responses per question to share and discuss with the class. Teacher calls on students to share their responses and clarify outstanding questions.</p> <p>As the lesson continues, students track their responses to questions posed by the teacher in the document, “Student Work Packet.” Day 1 engages pages 1-9 of the packet.</p>
Focus text(s) / resource(s) for today’s lesson

Student work packet for the full unit:

- [Which Way Home? Student Resources \[.pdf\]](#)
- [Which Way Home? Student Resources \[.docx\]](#)

Additional resources:

[Meet the Journalist: Zahra Ahmad on Returning Home to Iraq](#)

[TEACHING TOLERANCE](#): “Debunking Misconceptions About Muslims and Islam”

[TEACHING TOLERANCE](#): Graph 1: U.S. Muslims’ Beliefs

[The Journey Home: The Welcome Home Committee](#)

Lesson / Activities

Teacher reads: As you may already be aware, “single stories” (based on author [Chimamanda Adichie’s TedTalk](#)) refer to narratives, often false perceptions, that we form about individuals, groups and/or countries. Often, these false narratives inform how we judge and/or mistreat others. These stories are often incomplete.

Recall our opening activity. Many of us have, at one point or another, heard of a stereotype or single story associated with our “home”.

Today we will take a deeper dive into the danger of single stories and the impact they have on identity. Specifically, we will take a closer look at our own biases’ towards and stereotypes of Muslim communities and the impact they may have. We will also look at the role that migration plays in identity formation and how it may or may not influence how we address these perceived stereotypes.

1. Let’s take a look at some of the images that appear in a Google Image Search of “Muslim.”
 - **Teacher asks** : What words come to mind as you look at the images below or when you think of the word “Muslim?” Image slideshow: [\[.pdf\]](#) [\[.docx\]](#)
 - **Teacher projects** the words on the screen as students share.



(Source: Vanity Fair)



(Source: Open Society Foundation)



(Source: AP News)



(Source: BBC News)

Teacher then says: Let's take a moment to interrogate the words we generated.

Teacher then asks:

1. Are these positive or negative associations?
2. Why do you think those particular words came to mind? What impact do you think they have on Muslim communities?
3. What do the aforementioned photos **not** show about Muslim identities?

Let's take a closer look at the relationship between the media and the portrayal of Muslims.

2. Teacher says: After we watch the following clip, be prepared to discuss the following:

- According to the clip, what is the relationship between the U.S. Department of Defense and Hollywood? How might the U.S. Department of Defense influence how Muslims are portrayed in Hollywood?
- How might the mainstream and historical portrayal of Muslims in Hollywood impact the stereotypes we have of the Muslim community?
- According to the clip, what are advocates like al Hasan calling for?

3. Teacher plays: [Why Hollywood misrepresents Muslim communities](#)

Teacher Says: Now, let's take a look at some of the stereotypes that a group of Muslim women identified during this [ELLE interview](#). **After the video, teacher asks students to share out responses to the following questions:**

- What words/stereotypes did the Muslim women identify?
- How do those words/stereotypes impact the women in the video?

5. Teacher then shares: Now, let's analyze some of these stereotypes a bit closer in order to dispel some of these misconceptions.

Class reads: *Teaching Tolerance:* [Debunking Misconceptions About Muslims and Islam](#)

Teacher asks class: Based on your reading, what stereotype/misunderstanding from class was addressed/debunked in the article?

6. Teacher then says: To cultivate a more nuanced understanding of the Muslim community, let's take a closer look at some findings from the Pew Research Center, that is posted on the *Teaching Tolerance* website: ["Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream" \(2007\)](#).

Students look at the data and answer the accompanying questions that are listed at the bottom of the data sheet.

Teacher then asks:

1. Why do you think there are differences in religious commitment among Muslims who were born in the U.S. and Muslims living in the U.S. who were born in other countries?
2. Hypothesize: How might migration impact one's religious/cultural associations?

7. Teacher then says: Now, we will take a closer look at the experience of journalist Zahra Ahmad.

Be prepared to discuss the following questions after the video:

1. How did 9/11 impact Zahra's experience as a Muslim-American?
2. How did those images/perceptions impact how Zahra was treated? How did that impact Zahra's sense of "home"?
3. Why did Zahra visit Iraq in 2019?
4. What stereotypes/"single stories" does Zahra expose by visiting Iraq? Cite the specific examples she provides that challenge the mainstream paradigm of the "Muslim world" in the United States.

Teacher plays: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CcZ2XTmJV1Q>

8. Teacher then says: Now, let's learn more about Zahra's trip back to her native Iraq.

Teacher leads class in close read of the following article by Zahra Ahmad for *MLive*:

<https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/journey-home-welcome-home-committee>

As students read, the teacher can push student understanding by asking the following questions:

1. In the opening scene, why is Zahra surprised by what she sees in Iraq?
 - a. *Answer: "Baghdad was greener than I'd imagined it to be. A trail of green bushes, grass and date trees guided us out of the airport."*
2. What is the impact of the following sentence on the reader: "Between the restaurants, electronics and clothing stores were rubble where a business may have once stood."
 - a. *Answer: While Zahra is surprised to see businesses like those back in the United States, the juxtaposition of "electronics and clothing stores" with "rubble" highlights a clear contrast between her life at home and life in Iraq: the impact of the Iraq War can still be felt today.*
3. What is the purpose of the following passage: "The store in Iraq reminded me of the corner store I'd grown up around in Lansing... Some nights I'd wake up to the sound of a train passing by or a gun being shot off a few blocks away."?
 - a. *Answer: Zahra uses it to establish a connection with her life back in Lansing, Michigan and what she sees in Iraq.*
4. According to the author, what was "weighing her down"?
 - a. *Answer: "All my life people have told me what it means to be a woman from the Middle East. In America the media portray women from the Middle East as oppressed by Islam and subservient to men. Succeeding as a woman, according to traditional-thinking Iraqis, means dressing modestly, getting married young, bearing children and speaking softly...I'm not married, I don't want children in the next five years, I'm an outspoken journalist who takes risks and I'll never be subservient."*
5. According to the author, how are Iraqi women challenging stereotypes placed on them?
 - a. *Answer: risk-taking, through their strength, through their faith and through their drive.*
6. What challenges do the gender gap pose for Iraqi women?
 - a. *Answer: Limited job opportunities and limited "freedom".*
7. Why does the author wonder if her Baba (father) wanted a boy instead of her?
 - a. *Answer: Because a boy would not have to endure the barriers society puts on women.*
8. According to the author, what role do Babas (fathers) have in shifting Iraq's narrative around womens' rights?
 - a. *Answer: Fathers can push to have a more progressive mindset and support their daughter's decisions.*

Closing and Homework (if any)

<p>Reflection/Formative:</p>

Students answer the following questions in complete sentences:

In the video we watched, journalist Zahra Ahmad suggests that immigrants and/or children of immigrants should visit their country of origin, in part, because it will inform their understanding of "home". Do you agree or disagree? Why? In your reflection, cite at least one piece of evidence from the video and/or article about Zahra's experience.

Day 2

Lesson Objective(s) or Essential Question(s)

Students will revisit their definition of "home" and explore the impact that migration can have on identity formation.

Students will revisit their own stereotypes of the Muslim community. Have their perceptions shifted based on their reading of Zahra Ahmad's "Journey Home - Welcome Home Committee"?

Students will engage in a close reading of Zahra Ahmad's "Journey Home - Your Blood Runs Through Me". Students will annotate as they analyze how Zahra's trip to Iraq exposed her own biases and single stories of Iraq. In addition, they will explore how migration has impacted Zahra's relationship with her "home"?

Students will be introduced to the concept and components of a personal essay.

Students will explore a personal essay provided by the teacher about their relationship with "home."

Warm-up/Do Now

<p>Students will answer the following questions on Padlet, out loud, or using the virtual chat function:</p>

Teacher says: Let's revisit our definition of "home" based on our learning from class.

1. How do you define "home"?
2. How might migration (movement from one place to another) impact one's sense of identity/understanding of "home"? When answering this question, consider Zahra's experience as a Muslim and Iraqi-American away from Iraq.
3. How did reconnecting with an aspect of her "home" (Iraq) impact Zahra's understanding of herself and sense of connection to her family?

As the lesson continues, students track their responses to questions posed by the teacher in the document, "[Student Work Packet](#)." Day 2 engages pages 10-15 of the packet.

Focus text(s) / resource(s) for today's lesson

Student work packet for the full unit:

- [Which Way Home? Student Resources \[.pdf\]](#)
- [Which Way Home? Student Resources \[.docx\]](#)

Additional Resources:

<https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/journey-home-your-blood-runs-through-me>

[Example personal essay about "home" \[.pdf\]](#)

[Example personal essay about "home" \[.docx\]](#)

Lesson / Activities

1. **Teacher says:** Last class, we took a closer look at how migration impacted journalist Zahra Ahmad's understanding of herself, as well as the "single stories" she came to internalize about her native-Iraq. What were some of the "single stories"/stereotypes of Iraq that she was able to debunk during her 2019 visit to Iraq?

Students break into groups of four to revisit the article and identify at least three "single stories" that are "debunked" in the text.

Potential responses:

1. Iraq is more than just a "desert"
 - a. "Baghdad was greener than I'd imagined it to be. A trail of green bushes, grass and date trees guided us out of the airport."
2. Familiarity with "home" back in Lansing, Michigan,
 - a. The presence of "technology stores," "corner stores", the "acceptance of Baba's family"
3. Iraqi women are strong, brave, have faith, are driven and are actively working for

gender equality.

4. Iraq has been on the forefront of granting women rights
 - a. "Including the right to vote"
5. Supportive babas (fathers) can help change the narrative of women in Iraq

If students need a scaffold, the teacher can provide the set of claims and students can identify the evidence in the text that supports each claim.

2. Now let's think about our reflections from last class. **Teacher asks:** How did Zahra's visit to her "home" impact her understanding of Iraq? Of herself?

Teacher calls on students to share their reflections. Teacher pushes students to cite evidence to support their claims.

3. Teacher says: Now we will engage in a close reading of Zahra Ahmad's "[Journey Home - Your Blood Runs Through Me](#)".

As students read, the teacher can push student understanding by asking the following questions:

1. How does journalist Zahra Ahmad's perspective of the power of religion differ from the portrayal of the Muslim faith portrayed in many U.S. media sources, especially after 9/11?
 - a. *Answer: In the U.S., the portrayal of Islam is typically associated with violence, however, according to Zahra:*
 - i. *"Religion, for so many people, generates hope in some of the darkest situations. I am an observer of the Quran's power....Islam has guided my family through troubled pasts, and it's currently guiding them through an uncertain future."*
2. In the text Zahra writes:
 - a. "Baba (Zahra's father) flew back to Michigan the next day. Baba's lung had been drained and a biopsy showed Baba, too, had stage four mesothelioma. **"I visited Imam Musa," Baba told me as he got ready for bed one night. "I felt so good."**
 - i. What is the purpose of the **second sentence** listed above?
 1. *Answer: It provides a specific example of how religion can provide "hope in some of the darkest situations." Unlike the mainstream portrayal of religion as a way to sow division, religion, in this example, brings humans closer together.*
3. In the text, the author makes particular note of the strength and resilience of Iraqis that is often not portrayed in popular media. What examples are provided to support her characterization of Iraqi "strength" and resilience?

Answer:

- a. *Iraqis are rebuilding their country after the Iraq War.*
- b. *Iraqi women are leading the charge to push for gender equality.*
- c. *Iraqi men are increasingly supporting women and encouraging tolerance.*
4. How did the trip back to Iraq shape Zahra's sense of identity and connection to her home?
 - a. *Answer: The trip reinforced the author's pride in her identity, despite the negative images in the U.S. that have historically misrepresented and otherized her "home" and sense of community. She notes: "I was born to an Iraqi-Irani revolutionary named Mohammad Ahmad Sibte and an Iraqi embodiment of courage named Lamiya Adil Mahdi. The blood running through my veins can be traced back to the cradle of civilization."*
5. **Teacher says:** Now, we will take a closer look at a "personal essay."

Teacher shares: "A **personal essay** is a piece of writing that serves to describe an important lesson gathered from a writer's life experiences. The **essay** often describes a significant event from a first-person perspective, and can be done in various writing styles, like a formal **essay** or as creative nonfiction." Source: MasterClass.com

Teacher Asks Class:

1. Consider the articles that we read by Zahra Ahmad: [Journey Home - Welcome Home Committee](#) and [Journey Home - Your Blood Runs Through Me](#)". Are those examples of personal essays? Why or why not?
2. Why might the personal essay be an effective format to reflect on identity and/or impactful experiences?
3. Have you ever written a personal essay before?
4. What questions or reservations do you have about writing a personal essay?

6. Teacher Reads: To better understand the components and impact of a personal essay, we will take a closer look at a sample personal essay written by the teacher: Example personal essay about "home"

[Example personal essay about "home" \[pdf\]](#)
[Example personal essay about "home" \[.docx\]](#)

Class reads personal essay together.

Note: To better connect and share with students, the instructor can write their own personal essay about home to share with students.

Teacher Asks:

1. Based on this example, what are the important elements of a personal essay?
2. When writing a personal essay what should we keep in mind?

3. What outstanding questions do you have about writing a personal essay?
Closing and Homework (if any)
<p>Formative Reflection</p> <p>Students reflect on the questions below in written form, and share with the teacher:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on the previous two classes, how do you define “home?” • What has shaped your definition and relationship to “home?” <p>Teacher says: Next class, you will write a personal essay about your relationship with “home.”</p>

Day 3
Lesson Objective(s) or Essential Question(s)
<p>Students will plan their personal narrative essays.</p> <p>Students will conference with the teacher and will receive feedback on their outlines.</p> <p>Students may begin writing their personal narratives.</p>
Warm-up/Do Now
<p>Teacher Reads and presents a slide that says: Read the following prompt and identify any questions you have about the task:</p> <p>In her piece <i>The Journey Home: The Welcome Home Committee</i>, journalist Zahra Ahmad’s aunt observes: <i>“There’s something deep inside your [Zahra’s] eyes. You seem lost, like you’re not fulfilled. That something is missing, like you’re caging yourself in. It shows that you’ve been through a lot and it’s trapped you. There is something weighing you down.”</i></p> <p>In a personal essay, respond to this observation by reflecting on your own relationship with your “home.” Your essay should address the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you define home? Have you ever felt disconnected from your home? • Why (e.g., perhaps you felt disconnected to an aspect of your culture, perhaps your community was misrepresented on the news, etc.)? • How did you respond/What have you learned from that experience?

As the lesson continues, students track their responses to questions posed by the teacher in the document, “Student Work [Packet](#).” Day 3 engages pages 16-17 of the packet.

Focus text(s) / resource(s) for today’s lesson

Student work packet for the full unit:

- [Which Way Home? Student Resources \[.pdf\]](#)
- [Which Way Home? Student Resources \[.docx\]](#)

Additional resources:

[Journey Home - Welcome Home Committee](#)
[Journey Home - Your Blood Runs Through Me”](#)
[Personal Essay About Home Outline Document](#)

Lesson / Activities

1. Teacher will first address student questions about the prompt.
2. Students will then outline their personal essays using the Personal Essay About Home Outline Document.
 - [Personal Essay About Home Outline Document \[.pdf\]](#)
 - [Personal Essay About Home Outline Document \[.docx\]](#)
3. Teacher will conference with students as they outline their writing and will provide feedback on student thinking and/or ideas.

Once their outlines have been approved, students will finalize their personal essays, which should address the prompt above.

Closing and Homework

Homework: Students complete their personal essay drafts. **Click [here](#) and [here](#) to view examples of student work packets produced by students from E.L. Haynes High School who engaged with this unit in spring 2021.**

Examples of Student Work Document 1

- [Examples of Student Work Document 1 \[.pdf\]](#)
- [Examples of Student Work Document 1 \[.docx\]](#)

Examples of Student Work Document 2

- [Examples of Student Work Document 2 \[.pdf\]](#)
- [Examples of Student Work Document 2 \[.docx\]](#)

Day 4

Lesson Objective(s) or Essential Question(s)

Students will be able to...

- respond to teacher feedback and complete their personal narratives in response to the following prompt: In her piece *The Journey Home: The Welcome Home Committee* journalist Zahra Ahmad’s aunt observes: "There's something deep inside your [Zahra’s] eyes. You seem lost, like you're not fulfilled. That something is missing, like you're caging yourself in. It shows that you've been through a lot and it's trapped you. There is something weighing you down." In a personal essay or series of poems, respond to this observation by reflecting on your own relationship with your “home”. How do you define home? Have you ever felt disconnected from your home? Why (e.g., perhaps you felt disconnected to an aspect of your culture, perhaps your community was misrepresented on the news, etc.)? How did you respond/What have you learned from that experience?

Warm-up/Do Now

Teacher Reads: Review your personal essay, as well as the feedback you received from the teacher.

Identify any questions you have about the feedback you received.

Focus text(s) / resource(s) for today’s lesson

Example personal essay about “home” -

- [Example personal essay about “home” \[.pdf\]](#)
- [Example personal essay about “home” \[.docx\]](#)

Personal Essay About Home Outline Document -

- [Personal Essay About Home Outline Document \[.pdf\]](#)
- [Personal Essay About Home Outline Document \[.docx\]](#)

Lesson / Activities

Students will conference with the teacher and will receive feedback on their outline and draft.

Students will respond to feedback on their personal narratives from the teacher and will finalize their writing.

Teacher will ask for volunteers to read their personal narratives with the class.

Closing and Homework (if any)

Students share their feedback on the unit using this [google form](#) (please make a copy before sharing with students). [Click here](#) for an example of responses from 43 students at E.L. Haynes High School who engaged with this unit in spring 2021.