

## Gender Roles in Jewish and Muslim Cultures

What are traditional and evolving gender roles in the Jewish and Muslim cultures and how are those roles defined by religion?

For the complete activity with media resources, visit:

<http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/activity/gender-roles-jewish-and-muslim-cultures/>

### ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

Students examine the concepts of gender roles, cultural convergence, and cultural divergence in the context of Jewish and Muslim religious cultures.

### DIRECTIONS

#### 1. Activate students' prior knowledge of and perceptions about gender roles.

Write the words “gender roles” on the board and ask students to think about—without sharing at this time—the images that come to mind when they think about those words. After a few minutes, ask students to share their impressions. Model a response by sharing one or two of your own mental images of gender roles—traditional and non-traditional. After allowing some time for sharing of images, ask: *Where do you think your images of gender roles come from? Are your images ones that you consider traditional gender role images or non-traditional?*

Then, ask students to share, as they are comfortable, how those images are or are not reflections of their cultures—their familial, religious, or ethnic cultures. A student may respond that his or her image of a traditional woman/mother caring for children fits with what they have been taught in their religion or family. On the other hand, an image of a father as the main child caretaker may be counter-cultural, or non-traditional, for another student.

#### 2. Introduce the concepts of cultural convergence and cultural divergence.

Display the definitions of cultural convergence and cultural divergence on the Project Share website for students to read. Ask students if they are familiar with these terms. Invite them to share examples that come to mind of cultural convergence and cultural divergence.

While on the Project Share website, discuss the questions on the Map: Cultural Convergence – The Spread of the English Language page. Then read through the example on the Cultural Divergence: The Amish in America page and work through the Interactive Exercise. Ask students again to share examples of cultural convergence or cultural divergence, now that they have examined the concepts more thoroughly.

#### 3. Examine Jewish and Muslim religious cultures and their traditional beliefs related to gender roles.

Tell students that the largest religious groups living in Jerusalem today are Jewish and Muslim. Explain that students will be researching how these religions view gender roles in their traditions. Emphasize that in all religions,

Christianity included, there is a wide spectrum of how people practice their religion, from those who are deeply traditional to those who practice their religion but “look” very secular, or Western.

Show the Muslim Quarter video clip from the film *Jerusalem*. Tell students that this clip features a Muslim teenager who doesn’t conform to the stereotype of a Palestinian Muslim because she doesn’t wear the hijab (head scarf), apart from when she enters a mosque. After viewing the clip, ask for and discuss students’ reactions. Ask: *Why do you think Farah puts on the hijab when she goes to the mosque?* (Answers will vary, but may include that she doesn’t want to cause trouble for her family or that she feels it would be disrespectful if she didn’t wear it in the mosque.) Ask students to discuss how this film clip does or does not change any stereotypes they might have.

Share the vocabulary definitions of “religion” and “culture” and ask students to discuss how these words are different. Ask: *In what ways do people tend to confuse religious traditions with cultural traditions?* (Try to draw out examples from students’ personal lives. For example, a family might have a Christmas or Hanukkah tradition that stems from their family or ethnic culture, but is not based on the tenets of their religion.) Tell students that, as they research Jewish and Muslim beliefs about gender roles, they may encounter beliefs that are culturally based, but not necessarily rising from or required by their religions. Also, make sure students understand that within religions there may be quite different beliefs about gender roles. For example, Orthodox Jews may feel quite differently about the importance of head coverings on women than do non-Orthodox Jews—Jews who call themselves Conservative Jews or Reform Jews.

Depending on your access to student computers, have students work individually, in pairs, or in small groups to access and read the information on the provided websites about gender roles in Jewish and Muslim cultures. Ask students to take notes on the key points they find about gender roles, including recording any questions that arise.

After students have had sufficient time to do their research, have the groups briefly summarize their findings. Then, lead the class in a discussion about their findings. Use the following or similar questions to spur the discussion:

- What, if anything, did you discover in your research that surprised you or was new to you?
- In what ways are gender roles influenced by religious beliefs and traditions?
- In what ways do beliefs vary within religions about gender roles?
- How are gender roles maintained or identified by clothing norms?
- What examples did you find, if any, of gender role assignment that is based on a group’s culture rather than its religion?

Ask students to discuss how cultural convergence and cultural divergence are illustrated either in their research or in their understanding of current events and issues related to gender roles in modern Jewish and/or Muslim cultures. Ask: *What examples can you provide of how traditional Jewish or Muslim gender roles have changed? To what might you attribute such changes?* (Responses might include a religious culture’s exposure to technology or media that impacts how young women feel about wearing traditional female attire, or a modern family’s need to abandon a woman’s traditional role as a homemaker for economic reasons.)

#### **4. Introduce Costa’s three levels of questions.**

Distribute the Costa’s Levels of Questioning handout and discuss with students each level and the examples provided—factual, interpretive, and reflective/open-ended. Ask: *How will responses differ among the three levels of questions? Why is it important to ask questions at Levels 2 and 3? What types of information do you get from Levels 2 and 3 that you don’t get from Level 1 questions?* Emphasize that Level 2 and 3 answers have levels of accuracy.

#### **5. Develop questions about Jewish and Muslim gender roles.**

Have students review their notes on gender roles and develop at least three questions for each level of questioning. Have them write their questions on sticky notes, using one note per question. Attach large sheets of poster paper (“big papers”) on the walls around the classroom—one or two for each level of questioning, depending on your class size. Ask students to post their sticky note questions on the appropriate big papers.

When all questions have been posted, have students circulate around the posters writing short responses to the

questions. Encourage students to respond to as many of the questions as possible, making sure there are at least two responses for all questions. Students may also respond to each other's answers, igniting a discussion thread. If the big papers get too full, put up more and move questions so there is room for responses to all of them. Ensure that students have enough time to respond as they wish—formulating responses may take some time, so don't rush the activity.

## **6. Discuss student questions and responses about Jewish and Muslim gender roles.**

When all students have had a chance to add responses to the questions, have them circulate among the big papers again, reading the responses of their classmates. Lead students in a discussion of their reactions to the questions and responses generated by the activity.

## **7. Write personal reflections on the activity.**

Close the activity by asking students to write a short composition (300-500 words) reflecting on the responses to a Level 3 question or questions. Let them know this will be their assessment for the activity, and distribute the Reflective Writing Rubric for them to consult as they write their reflections.

### **TIP**

Because the topic of gender roles can be a “hot button” issue for students at this age, you may wish to establish some discussion/conversation rules prior to beginning the activity. The rules may include such things as no teasing about ideas or comments, no judging, etc. It is often helpful to establish the rules with students, asking them to identify and vet the rules the class will use.

### **MODIFICATION**

If technology is available, Step 5 may also be done in the digital realm using a discussion board in a take-home assignment.

### **MODIFICATION**

If you do not have access to computers that will allow students to work individually or in small groups during class time, allow students to complete the research portion of this activity outside of class—at home, at the public library, in the school library during a free period, or another location.

### **TIP**

If your classroom does not have computer access, print out the information from the provided websites and have students use the printouts to conduct their research in Step 3. Additional means of research, such as books and articles, may also be used.

### **TIP**

Preview the Jewish and Muslim gender roles websites prior to beginning this activity with students. Determine whether you want to use all of the resources. However, be sure to use more than one so students get a broader perspective.

### **MODIFICATION**

To increase student accountability in Step 3, assign each group the research questions before they start their research and have each group share their answers with the class.

## **INFORMAL ASSESSMENT**

Use the Reflective Writing Rubric to evaluate students' reflective writing pieces. Observe students' levels of participation in class discussions and the “big papers” activity.

## EXTENDING THE LEARNING

- Have each student identify a primary question that interests him or her about gender roles—either gender roles in general or as they relate to traditional and non-traditional gender roles in Jewish and Muslim religious cultures—and write a research paper or essay about that question/topic.
- Have students access the Women of the Wall website ([womenofthewall.org.il](http://womenofthewall.org.il)). Tell students that, as stated on the website, Women of the Wall “is a group of Jewish women from around the world who strive to achieve the right, as women, to wear prayer shawls, pray and read from the Torah collectively and out loud at the Western Wall (Kotel) in Jerusalem, Israel.” Ask students to work in groups to conduct research either on Women of the Wall specifically, perhaps looking for news articles about the groups’ activities, or on how women in other cultures are working to change the legal, religious, or cultural restrictions that are placed on them. Have students report on their research by writing an article, creating a poster, or making a class presentation.

## OBJECTIVES

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### SUBJECTS & DISCIPLINES

#### Geography

- Human Geography

#### Language Arts

- Writing (composition)

#### Religion

- Islam
- Judaism

#### Social Studies

- Anthropology
- Human behavior

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Explain the expectations related to gender roles in the Jewish and Muslim cultures as they are represented in the population of Jerusalem
- Recognize the ways in which gender roles are influenced by religious beliefs and traditions
- Describe the differences between religion and culture
- Distinguish between cultural convergence and cultural divergence, and determine the extent to which these processes are or are not factors in the definition of gender roles in the Jewish and Muslim religious cultures

### TEACHING APPROACH

- Inquiry-based learning
- Learning-for-use

### TEACHING METHODS

- Reflection
- Research
- Writing

## SKILLS SUMMARY

This activity targets the following skills:

### 21st Century Skills

#### Information, Media, and Technology Skills

- Information Literacy

#### Learning and Innovation Skills

- Communication and Collaboration
- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

### 21st Century Themes

- Global Awareness

### Critical Thinking Skills

- Analyzing
- Applying
- Creating
- Evaluating
- Understanding

### Geographic Skills

- Acquiring Geographic Information
- Analyzing Geographic Information
- Answering Geographic Questions
- Asking Geographic Questions

## CONNECTIONS TO NATIONAL STANDARDS

### National Geography Standards

- Standard 10: The characteristics, distribution, and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics

### National Educational Technology Standards for Students (NETS<sup>®</sup>S)

- Standard 2: Communication and Collaboration
- Standard 3: Research and Information Fluency
- Standard 4: Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making

## PREPARATION

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### WHAT YOU'LL NEED

#### Materials You Provide

- Large sheets of paper
- Sticky notes

#### Required Technology

- Internet Access: Required
- Tech Setup: 1 computer per learner, 1 computer per small group

#### Physical Space

- Classroom
- Computer lab

### Grouping

- Large-group instruction
- Small-group instruction

### Resources Provided: Websites

- Project Share: Cultural Convergence and Cultural Divergence
- Judaism 101: The Role of Women
- My Jewish Learning: Orthodox Women & Religious Leadership
- American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise: Jewish Virtual Library: Women in Judaism: Dress
- My Jewish Learning: Hair Coverings for Married Women
- PBS: Global Connections: What factors determine the changing roles of women in the Middle East and Islamic societies?
- Safra Project: Sexuality, Gender, and Islam
- Patheos Library: Islam: Gender and Sexuality
- Corvallis Etiquette: Etiquette and Gender Differences
- NPR: Religion: Understanding the Veil in Islam, Western Societies
- BBC News: In graphics: Muslim Veils

### Resources Provided: Handouts & Worksheets

- Costa's Levels of Questioning
- Reflective Writing

### Resources Provided: Audio & Video

- Muslim Quarter

## BACKGROUND & VOCABULARY

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The term “gender roles” refers to a set of norms that are considered to be appropriate for a specific sex within a specific culture. These accepted social and behavioral norms often vary by culture—whether that culture is defined by religion, ethnicity, family structure, or another construct. Gender roles evolve over time in many cultures, often as a result of cultural divergence, as cultures increasingly share technology and organizational structures in a modern world united by improved transportation and communication.

### PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

- Basic familiarity with Jewish and Muslim religions is helpful
- Basic understanding of the concept of gender roles

### RECOMMENDED PRIOR ACTIVITIES

- None

### VOCABULARY

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
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<b>cultural convergence</b>	<i>noun</i>	contact and interaction of one culture with another; the tendency for cultures to become more alike as they increasingly share technology and organizational structures in a modern world united by improved transportation and communication.
<b>cultural divergence</b>	<i>noun</i>	the restriction of a culture from outside cultural influences; the likelihood or tendency for cultures to become increasingly dissimilar with the passing of time.
<b>culture</b>	<i>noun</i>	learned behavior of people, including their languages, belief systems, social structures, institutions, and material goods.
<b>religion</b>	<i>noun</i>	a system of spiritual or supernatural belief.

## FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

### Websites

- National Geographic Education: Hijab: Veiled In Controversy



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