



THE
TRIALS
OF
SPRING

LESSON PLAN

Women, War, and Social Change in the Arab Spring

OVERVIEW

In 2011, a series of uprisings swept the Arab world—and women were on the frontlines. But as the jubilation of revolution gave way to the convoluted process of governing—and in Libya, Syria and Yemen, the violence and chaos of war—women largely disappeared from their countries’ stories, at least as reported in the mainstream media. This lesson plan introduces students to this history, the region, and a group of remarkable women whose lives were changed forever by the uprisings in ways large and small. Each student will become a resident “expert” on one of six countries, and will use their expertise to examine the goals of war and the links between women’s activism and social change.

Grades: 11-12, college



LEARNING GOALS

CONTENT

- Global Studies: Arab Spring and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region
- Historical and contemporary purposes and definitions of war, rebellion, and revolution
- Gender roles, women's rights, discrimination, and social change

SKILLS

- Internet research
- Comparison, evaluation, and analysis of sources
- Reading (news, opinion, and informational text)
- Writing (short informational summaries, note taking, and a free write)
- Speaking (small & large group discussion and short class presentation)
- Listening (learning from a video and from lecture; group discussions)
- Critical thinking (exploring complex questions without single "right" answers)

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Classroom Internet access (to view videos) or a Screening DVD (to request a copy, visit <http://www.trialsofspring.com/host-a-screening>)
- Research Handouts:
 - 1 Research Worksheet
 - 1 General Viewing Worksheet
 - 6 Developing Expertise Worksheets
- Student Internet access (for research)
- Your own background information notes

This lesson plan was developed by Faith Rogow, Ph.D., InsightersEducation.com, based on work by Haydee Rodriguez, a California-based National Board Certified Teacher in Social Studies. Produced by the non-profit organization Peace is Loud, outreach partner for The Trials of Spring. Design by Ed Morgan.

THE LESSON:

Note: Descriptions include scripts intended to model inquiry-based instruction. These scripts are intended as guides; there is no need to read them aloud word-for-word. Integrate the content into your own instruction style.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ask students: I'm going to say a word and I'm going to give you thirty seconds to draw the first image(s) that come to mind. Ready? The word is "war." After thirty seconds, ask everyone to hold up their drawings and look at what their classmates drew.

DISCUSS:

- What do everyone's images have in common?
- Why do you think those images/themes are the most common?
- Given that most of you haven't actually been in a war zone, where do you think your ideas about war come from? *(The likely answer is "movies" or perhaps a parent who has been in combat. If you have students who immigrated from countries at war, you might [gently] invite them to share any insights about how real-life experiences compare to movie depictions.)*
- What are the major purposes of war?



2. THE “ARAB SPRING”

The Arab Spring uprisings and subsequent conflicts have dominated world news since 2011. Invite students to share everything they know about the Arab Spring and make a list of what they say. Be sure they can identify geographically where the conflicts are taking place. Use their answers to “What are the major purposes of war?” to explore the goals of the Arab Spring protests. Invite them to explore the distinctions between “war”, “rebellion,” and “revolution.”

(At some point, you’ll want to help students see that “revolution” is the term that describes broad societal change, and may or may not involve armed conflict. Because “revolution” encompasses fundamental changes at all levels of society and not just political leadership or military might, it must involve women. In this step, it is better to allow students to discover this on their own. You can provide the information at the end of the lesson if they haven’t already come to this understanding.)

Given what students know, ask: “If you did an image search on ‘Arab Spring’, what sorts of images do you think you’d find?” As a class, do that search and invite students to share what they notice about the results. (If your school does not allow access to open searches, do the search ahead of time and show the class a screen grab of the top results).

End this step by filling in gaps* in the student-generated information, so the class has a solid and accurate understanding of the Arab Spring. As they listen, they should consider whether the Arab Spring conflicts are best described as “rebellions,” “revolutions,” or “war” (or perhaps some combination of those).

*Here’s a video that summarizes key information from 2011 when the Arab Spring began. [**BBC video: How the Arab Spring Began** <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-16212447>]. It is not designed to be shown to the class; it is background information for you. It includes information that you can use to prepare for filling in the gaps, and also for evaluating the students’ Backgrounders (see next step).

You may also want to consider viewing **Times Topics** pages for the countries covered in the films. These pages aggregate useful news, archival information, photos, graphics, audio and video published on the country topic.

3. STUDENT RESEARCH ON INDIVIDUAL NATIONS

To deepen the examination of the Arab Spring, divide students into groups and assign each group one of these countries: Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, Yemen.

Students will engage in directed research to develop **(1) a general, written “backgrounder” on their assigned nation**, and **(2) a presentation to the class**. Instructions are included on the [Research Worksheet](#).

DIRECTED RESEARCH

Student investigation must include **at least one** source from each category:

1. Official U.S. Government – [U.S. State Department](#) or [CIA World Factbook](#)
2. Your assigned nation’s official website (you may need to use a program like Google Translate for English versions)
3. Mainstream Western Perspective – [World Bank](#) or [BBC](#)
4. Personal Perspective – [Nations Online](#) or a blog from a person in your assigned country
5. Human Rights NGO perspective– [Human Rights Watch](#) or [Association for Women’s Rights in Development](#)
6. The *New York Times* context piece that accompanies the video they’ll view in the next step of the lesson: Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, Yemen

The **Backgrounder** developed from these sources should include:

- **Key information, properly cited.** This will likely include answers to these questions:
 - Where is the country located?
 - What is its relationship with the USA? Did the Arab Spring change the relationship in any way?
 - When did protests begin?
 - What event or events precipitated the first protests?
 - Who was the leader of the country prior to the Arab Spring, and what type of political system did they use to govern?
 - Who is the leader now, and how do they differ from their predecessor?
 - What were the social/political/economic conditions that led to the uprising?
 - What else is important to know about this country?
- An **annotated source list** that lists the type of source (e.g., government? commercial? personal blog?, etc.), whether or not the source’s information was credible, and why you think so.

[Media Literacy Expansion – Optional]

Expand the media literacy lesson by asking students questions that compare and contrast the websites they used:

- What information appeared in all sources? What was unique to a single site?
- How was key information presented? What was featured?
- How did the site design influence your response to its content?
- Did the site include advertising? If so, what did the types of ads tell you about the target audience for the site?

CLASS PRESENTATIONS

To practice speaking skills, have each group present a live report (or “briefing”) in class. The focus of the presentation should be these two questions:

1. What is essential to know about this country in order to understand the conflict?
2. Should this conflict be described as a “war”, a “rebellion”, or a “revolution”? Why?

To practice listening skills and note-taking, the same questions that students used to prepare their own backgrounder can be used to take notes on their classmates’ presentations.

Alternatively, students could post their written backgrounders to a class wiki (or using a program like VoiceThread), with opportunities to read one another’s work and ask (and answer) questions.

By the end of the presentations, every student should be familiar with all six countries.



4. PROFILES OF PEACEBUILDERS

Now that students know about the Arab Spring and six countries in the MENA region, they are ready to meet some individuals who are trying to bring change to their home countries.

VIEWING THE SHORTS

In class, each group will convene and watch the short from their assigned country:

SYRIA: Brides of Peace

YEMEN: When is the Time?

TUNISIA: Keeping the Promise

BAHRAIN: Our Oath

LIBYA: Wake Up, Benghazi!

EGYPT: Life's Sentence

After viewing, each group will discuss the questions on their viewing worksheets. Each group should receive and fill out a general viewing worksheet, in addition to the film viewing worksheet that corresponds to their assigned film.

CLASS DISCUSSION

After each group has seen their video, reconvene as a class and invite students to share what they learned. As you near the end of the discussion, ask a version of these questions:

- Were you surprised that the video featured a woman protester rather than a man with a weapon? Why?/Why not?
- Thinking back, did your first image of war, on paper or in your mind, include a woman?
- Did the sources you used for your country profiles include information on or by women? If not, why not?

Conclude the discussion with these questions:

- How does the struggle in the video relate to your earlier conclusions about the purpose(s) of “war,” “rebellion,” or “revolution”?
- Does the likelihood of women being actively and publicly involved in the struggle change, depending on whether a conflict is a “rebellion,” “revolution,” or a “war”?

This will provide a segue to the lesson’s wrap-up.

5. WHY IT MATTERS

Assign students to read “[Arab Spring Countries Find Peace Is Harder Than Revolution](#)”

DISCUSS:

- How does social disruption (e.g., lack of access to education, water, security, etc.) contribute to the ongoing conflicts?
- Is it important to report on women’s lives and efforts in times of struggle and change? Why?

End the unit by asking students to reflect, in writing, on the article’s final paragraph:

Mohammed al-Sabri, an opposition leader in Yemen, where protests pushed the longtime president Ali Abdullah Saleh from power last year, said this general sense of empowerment was the most significant accomplishment of the uprisings so far.

“The elites and the leaders in any society, whether it is revolutionary or not, can resign and say, ‘I’m done,’ ” he said. “But the people cannot resign.”

Invite students to include comments describing what they learned from the unit in general and their thoughts about women as agents of social change.



6. EXTENSIONS

If you wish, you may continue the unit with one or more of these extensions:

1. THE MEANINGS OF WAR

Ask students to think about how we use the word “war” to describe things that don’t involve lethal weapons, with a question like this one:

Can you think of any type of “war” that doesn’t involve armed combat?

Initially, accept all answers – they might include things like the card game “War” or Dance Wars or summer camp color wars. If answers don’t include anything related to historical social movements, invite students to think about “wars” that were intended to bring social or political change, but that did not involve combat. If the students have trouble coming up with their own examples, you might suggest something like President Reagan’s War on Drugs or LBJ’s War on Poverty (and explain if necessary).

Invite students to consider: “If our typical associations with the word “war” don’t include images of women, yet we use the word to describe significant moments of social change, what does that mean for women and society?”

2. MANDATORY REPRESENTATION FOR WOMEN?

Many newer democracies in the MENA region constitutionally require a minimum percentage of elected officials to be women. Investigate why this is so and how it’s working.

DEBATE:

Should the U.S. require that the number of seats in Congress held by women be equal to the percentage of women in the population?

3. “PUBLIC” MEN, “PRIVATE” WOMEN

Some traditional voices in the MENA region see the social roles of men and women in dualistic terms, with the public, political sphere reserved for men and the private, domestic sphere for women. You might note that this has often been the case in the United States as well; as an example, you could read this passage from a recent article in the [New Yorker](#):

In 1884, the House Judiciary Committee rejected the proposed Sixteenth Amendment [which would allow women the right to vote] on the ground that women inhabit and must remain confined to a secluded and private sphere: “To the husband, by natural allotment...fall the duties which protect and provide for the household, and to the wife the more quiet and secluded but no less exalted duties of mother to their children and mistress of the domicile.”

Ask students to investigate and discuss how this belief affects women’s participation in movements for social change and peacebuilding.

4. WOMEN AS “NATURAL” PEACEBUILDERS

Dualistic constructions of gender often depict men as warriors and women as peacebuilders.

DISCUSS:

- Do you think that women are, by nature, peacebuilders?
- Can you find modern or historical examples that support the notion of women as inherently less likely to pursue armed conflict than men? Alternatively, can you think of modern or historical examples that demonstrate women as no less likely to pursue armed conflict than men, or that contradict the “peacebuilders” version of womanhood? What sorts of people or organizations have advocated for and against the notion that women are less likely to support armed conflict than men?
- Which argument seems more aligned with the idea of feminism to you?:
 - a. Women’s equality with men means equal access to political power, regardless of how they use that power.
 - b. Women’s participation in political leadership should be encouraged because they are less likely to lead their constituencies into armed conflict.
 - c. both a & b
 - d. neither a nor b

5. WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Consider how what you’ve learned about the Arab Spring and/or your assigned country fits into the Beijing Platform and the notion that “women’s rights are human rights.” Include a discussion of the abstract and concrete meanings of that phrase. What should it mean in the MENA region?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

ONLINE REPORTS AND PUBLICATIONS

Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom’s (WILPF) 2012 Report on the Status of Women in the MENA Region

http://www.wilpfinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Outcome-Report_spreads.pdf

The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) is a non-profit peace organization that brings women together to oppose war, violence and global militarization.

One of WILPF’s projects, “Ending discrimination and Enforcing Women, Peace and Security in the MENA region” seeks to strengthen and challenge the role of women in determining and restoring peaceful transition and security in the region, through the use of the UN Resolution 1325 agenda and international human rights frameworks. This report includes highlights from discussions among women human rights defenders from the MENA region.

The Association for Women’s Rights in Development’s (AWID) Fact Sheets, Policy Briefs, Primers and Reports

<http://www.awid.org/publications>

The Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID) is a global, feminist membership organization working to achieve gender equality, sustainable development and women’s human rights worldwide. AWID provides research on women human rights defenders, movement-building, religious fundamentalism, economic justice, feminist monitoring and evaluation.

Amnesty International’s 2014/2015 Report on Egypt

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/egypt/report-egypt/>

Amnesty International is a global movement that uses research and campaigning to fight abuses of human rights worldwide. This is Amnesty’s annual report on human rights abuses in Egypt for 2014-2015.

The International Federation for Human Rights’ (FIDH) Report—Egypt: Keeping Women Out: Sexual Violence Against Women in the Public Sphere

http://nazra.org/sites/nazra/files/attachments/joint_report_sexual_violence_egypt_en.pdf

Written by The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Nazra for Feminist Studies, New Women Foundation, and the Uprising of Women in the Arab World

This research report examines the use of sexual violence as a weapon of repression since the military takeover in July 2013.

Karama’s Publications and Reports

<http://www.el-karama.org/media/publications>

<http://www.el-karama.org/media/publications/advocacy-tools-and-resources>

Karama is an NGO based in Cairo, Egypt that operates throughout the MENA region to raise and expand the influence of Arab women in regional and international contexts. The organization provides policy papers on critical issues facing women in the region, and advocacy tools for building campaigns.

The International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN)’s MENA Briefs: What the Women Say: The Arab Spring and Implications for Women Extremism as Mainstream: Implications for Women, Development & Security in the MENA/Asia Region

<http://www.icanpeacework.org/what-the-women-say-the-arab-spring-implications-for-women/>
<http://www.icanpeacework.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Extremism-as-Mainstream.pdf>

ICAN is a US-based non-profit organization whose mission is to support civil society activism in promoting women’s rights, peace and human security in countries affected by conflict, transition and closed political space.

The first brief highlights common regional trends that threaten basic norms of democracy, equality and affect women’s abilities to participate in and influence the decision-making processes – nationally and internationally – that will determine the course of these countries’ futures and their lives. The second brief highlights the pervasiveness of religious extremism in the MENA region, ways its spread has restricted women’s freedom of thought, movement, and action, and the methods women are using to counter its influence.

Nazra for Feminist Studies—Concept Paper: Different Practices of Sexual Violence Against Women

<http://nazra.org/en/node/286>

Nazra for Feminist Studies is a group that aims to build an Egyptian feminist movement, believing that feminism and gender are political and social issues affecting freedom and development in all societies. Nazra aims to mainstream these values in both public and private spheres. This paper clarifies the differences between the most common practices of sexual violence against women, via the definition and description of each practice.



ADDITIONAL WEBSITES

The Trials of Spring

<http://www.trialsofspring.com/>

This is the website for the cross-media project that includes the lesson plan's short films. The site includes information about the feature-length documentary, six short films, articles by award-winning journalists, and information on how to take action and to host a screening of the film.

Peace is Loud

<http://www.peaceisloud.org>

Peace is Loud, a non-profit organization working to amplify the voices of women in peacebuilding, is overseeing The Trials of Spring's outreach and education campaign. Their site includes information on Peace is Loud's film screening program, speakers bureau, social action campaigns, and blog.

Global Fund for Women

<https://www.globalfundforwomen.org/>

Global Fund for Women is a grantmaker and a global advocate for women's human rights. This website includes impact statements, action prompts, fundraising resources and information for grantees.

The Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition

<http://www.defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/>

The Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition (WHRDIC) is a network that supports and protects women human rights defenders. This site provides information regarding action campaigns, statements and resources regarding women's human rights abuses worldwide.

Women Living Under Muslim Laws

<http://www.wluml.org/>

Women Living Under Muslim Laws is an international solidarity network that provides information, support and a collective space for women whose lives are shaped, conditioned or governed by laws and customs said to derive from Islam. This website includes information regarding women's diverse experiences and strategies in Muslim contexts, using a variety of media.

Women's Learning Partnership

<http://www.learningpartnership.org/>

Women's Learning Partnership (WLP) is dedicated to women's leadership and empowerment. WLP works with 20 autonomous and independent partner organizations in the Global South, particularly in Muslim-majority societies, to empower women to transform their families, communities, and societies. This site provides training manuals, books, films, reports, campaign information, and other advocacy tools.

RESEARCH WORKSHEET

COUNTRY: _____

INSTRUCTIONS:

You work for a major Western news agency, and you've just been asked to compile a "backgrounder" for a correspondent who is being sent overseas to cover the aftermath of the Arab Spring in your assigned country. Their success depends on your preparing them to understand what they're about to see.

Your research must include at least one source from each of these categories:

1. Official U.S. Government – [U.S. State Department](#) or [CIA World Factbook](#)
2. Your assigned nation's official website (you may need to use a program like Google Translate for English versions)
3. Mainstream Western Perspectives – [World Bank](#) or [BBC](#)
4. Personal Perspectives - [Nations Online](#) or a blog from a person in your assigned country
5. Human Rights NGO Perspectives – [Human Rights Watch](#) or [Association for Women's Rights in Development](#)
6. The *New York Times* piece that accompanies the video you'll view in the next step of the lesson for Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, or Yemen.

Your backgrounder should include:

1. Key information properly cited, including answers to these questions:
 - Where is the country located?
 - What is its relationship with the United States?
 - Did the Arab Spring change the relationship in any way?
 - When did protests begin?
 - Was there a specific incident that led to the first protests?
 - Who was the leader of the country prior to the Arab Spring, and what type of political system did they use to govern?
 - Who is the leader now, and how do they differ from their predecessors?
 - What were the social, political, and economic conditions that led to the uprising?
 - Are events in your country best described as a "rebellion," a "revolution," a "war," or some combination of those?
 - What else is important to know about this country?
2. An annotated source list that explains the type of source (e.g., government? commercial? personal blog?, etc.), whether or not the source's information was credible, and most importantly, *why* you think so.

GENERAL VIEWING WORKSHEET

What did you learn from the video about your assigned country?

Who would you define as the “combatants” in your country’s conflict?

What did you learn about the meaning of “activism”?

Did “combat” take place in public or in private spaces?

What did you learn about social or political inequality?

Were all combatants wearing uniforms? Why or why not?

What surprised you in the video? If you still have questions, what do you want to know?

DEVELOPING EXPERTISE

BAHRAIN: OUR OATH

Who is Nada Dhaif? What do we know about her?

What happened in Nada's life that caused her, in her words, to "become an activist?"

How did the government react to the pro-democracy protesters in Bahrain?

How was Nada treated while she was in captivity?

What were the charges against Nada?

Why was Nada eventually acquitted of the charges against her?

Nada wanted to use her experience to help other victims and families of victims of torture. How did she do that? What tools did she use?

What do you think Nada hopes to achieve with the work she's doing?

DEVELOPING EXPERTISE

SYRIA: BRIDES OF PEACE

Syria's government is often described as an "authoritarian regime." Why? What does this mean?

What was happening in Syria that led the four women in the film to stage a protest?

How would you describe the women?

Why do you think a wedding dress symbolized peace for them?

How would you interpret the gesture of throwing off the black abayas to uncover the white wedding dresses?

How did people respond to the women's demonstration at the souk? Is it what you would have expected? Was it what they expected?

When the women were apprehended, how were they treated by the authorities? How long were they detained?

How had Syria changed during their detention?

Why do you think the people in Sweida reacted as they did toward the sisters (and their father)?

DEVELOPING EXPERTISE

EGYPT: LIFE'S SENTENCE

What were the “Cabinet Events”?

Hend Nafea, in her words, describes the events of December 17, 2011.

Create a two-column chart (T-Chart). On the left side, write down what happened, and on the right side, write your reaction to what she details.

What was Hend charged with, and how many charges were brought against her? What is the argument of her attorney, Ossama Kalil?

When Hend says, “I think it’s a systemic attack,” what does she mean? What examples does she cite?

What does “victim blaming” look like in the United States? Provide a few examples.

What does your group think about the court’s verdict in Hend’s case?
Did she receive a fair trial? Explain your answer.

What does justice seem to mean in Egypt now, judging from what you know of Hend’s case? Is it different from your understanding of justice in the United States? Why or why not?

DEVELOPING EXPERTISE

LIBYA: WAKE UP, BENGHAZI!

Who was Salwa Bughaighis?

According to Salwa's sister, Iman, what caused Salwa to become an "activist ... to develop her character?"

What is Salwa referring to when she says "there used to be fear inside of everyone ... Gaddafi raised us with fear?"

What occurred in Benghazi on February 17, 2011?

How did Salwa's leadership propel other Libyans to become civically engaged?

Even though Salwa knew her life was in danger, why do you think it was important for her to be in Benghazi the day of the election?

What are three words that you would use to describe Salwa? Why would you choose these words?

Why do you think Salwa was killed? Do you think Libya will see the "equal opportunity in all factors, political and economic" that Salwa fought and died for?

DEVELOPING EXPERTISE

TUNISIA: KEEPING THE PROMISE

Who is Ghazala Mhamdi, and what are her values?

What social issues specific to women prompted Ghazala to run for Parliament?

Ghazala is from the city of Gafsa. What is the economy of Gafsa, and why is this important?

When Ghazala says, “And from Gafsa, a woman from Gafsa!” what can you surmise about the city from this statement? What city/region in the United States would you compare to Gafsa?

In the introductory section, you discussed inequality and oppression. How do you see these forces manifested in Gafsa, Tunisia?

Since 2008, what role have women played in the Tunisian protests that led to the end of Ben Ali’s regime?

A gentleman refers to Ghazala as “the queen of resistance;” what has she had to endure that would prompt him to give her that nickname?

The symbol of Ghazala’s political party, “Keeping the Promise,” is a red flower with a tear. Why? What does this symbol represent to you?

DEVELOPING EXPERTISE

YEMEN: WHEN IS THE TIME?

How does Belquis recall life in Yemen during her childhood? What was life like for women back then?

At what point in Belquis' life did societal conditions begin to change, in her opinion?

What was Belquis' role in Yemen's revolution?

What did Belquis and other women feel they were fighting for? Were their demands reasonable? Why, or why not?

How did the capital of Yemen, Sana'a, begin to change during the uprising, in Belquis' experience? Why is this significant?