Deconstructing the Stereotype: Scheherazade's Feminist Voice

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INTRODUCTION

I am an ESL teacher of 9th, 10th and 11th grade Advanced and Transitional students at Westside High School, the most evenly diverse student body in HISD. While the ethnic breakdown in HISD is 70% Hispanic, 20% Black and 10% White, Westside's population is a neatly distributed one third each. And, although our immigrant population of roughly 200 is not as large as other high schools, it is remarkably diverse given its size. I teach students from over 35 countries and 5 continents; some of these students are refugees from war-torn countries while others are privileged children of petroleum engineers or teachers. All of them are non-native English language learners.

The required curriculum supports broad goals for these English learners in the four language arts strands of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Because my students are classified as Advanced or Transitional, they often know a great deal of English, but lack the refinement of those skills necessary to survive in the mainstream English literature classes at Westside. What makes an ordinary class in language learning compelling is often determined by the relevance of the materials and the interest levels they generate. Given the daily media coverage of some turbulent areas of the Middle East, it seems natural to develop a curriculum unit that would help to establish a foundation of understanding about the area America both covets and fears simultaneously.

Because my ESL students must daily negotiate and transfer meaning in language and culture as they attend an American high school in Houston and because they are accustomed to being "outsiders" no matter how warmly the student body and faculty welcome them, I find that these students are pleasantly surprised, and even charmed by any attempts made to embrace them, to learn their cultures and to hear their stories. This is especially true of students from the Middle East, whose presence is suspect, or at least marked, by the fact that they might come from "enemy lands." Put a head scarf on it and "different" becomes magnified dramatically.

I am fortunate to have great freedom within the ESL curriculum to create and refine materials according to student population needs; I feel sure that I can deliver the mandated teaching objectives while developing a culturally sensitive unit about the Middle East. I envision a two-week unit that is divided into two parts. The first part would present a broad historical backdrop of the geographic region known as the Middle East, and the influence of the birth of Islam on the region. This first part of the unit is necessary in order to lay a foundation for the appreciation of the second part: Scheherazade, the storyteller of the *Tales of the Arabian Nights*. My choice of Scheherazade serves a twofold purpose. One , to focus our attention as readers on a strong female voice—one that contradicts the Western stereotype of oppressed Arab women—and two, to underscore the impact of the oral tradition of storytelling, especially one that was entrusted to the female voice. Scheherazade is such a fascinating heroine—part psychiatrist, part warrior—that I know my students will enjoy the reading and analysis of some of the better known tales. I hope to look at Aladdin, Ali Baba, and Sinbad, as these stories have been captured in books and film; together we will explore the plots, characters and themes within. I have chosen Sinbad to

illustrate the use of the frame tale; Aladdin and Ali Baba have similar stock themes of avarice, deceit and cunning. They will be used (beyond the usual vocabulary and reading comprehension strategies) for compare and contrast techniques in short answer responses.

OBJECTIVES

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills.

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(5) Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Fiction. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of fiction and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to:

A) analyze non-linear plot development (e.g., flashbacks, foreshadowing, sub-plots, parallel plot structures) and compare it to linear plot development;

(B) analyze how authors develop complex yet believable characters in works of fiction through a range of literary devices, including character foils; and

(C) analyze the way in which a work of fiction is shaped by the narrator's point of view.

(14) Writing/Literary Texts. Students write literary texts to express their ideas and feelings about real or imagined people, events, and ideas. Students are responsible for at least two forms of literary writing. Students are expected to:

(A) write an engaging story with a well-developed conflict and resolution, interesting and believable characters, and a range of literary strategies (e.g., dialogue, suspense) and devices to enhance the plot.

(27) Second language acquisition/learning strategies.

(A) use prior knowledge and experiences to understand meanings in English;

(B) monitor oral and written language production and employ self-corrective techniques or other resources; and

(C) use strategic learning techniques such as concept mapping, drawing, memorizing, comparing, contrasting, and reviewing to acquire basic and grade-level vocabulary.

(28) Second language acquisition/listening.

(I) demonstrate listening comprehension of increasingly complex spoken English by following directions, retelling or summarizing spoken messages, responding to questions and requests, collaborating with peers, and taking notes commensurate with content and grade-level needs.

(29) Second language acquisition/speaking.

(D) speak using grade-level content area vocabulary in context to internalize new English words and build academic language proficiency;

(E) share information in cooperative learning interactions;

(H) narrate, describe, and explain with increasing specificity and detail as more English is acquired; and

(K) share prior knowledge with peers and others to facilitate communication and to foster respect for others.

RATIONALE

> For at the very heart of storytelling, journalism, writing, filmmaking, scholarship and teaching there still lies the hope that words wield power over understanding, perhaps over the very course of history—if only someone is listening. (Gauch 135)

I have a twofold reason in my intent to uncover/discover the feminist voice of Scheherazade. First, I hope to make this unit a sincere effort towards balancing the distorted, media-fed, anti-feminist view of Muslim women that students in America see and hear through the lens of journalistic bias. While it is not the purpose of this paper to argue the positive or negative points of fundamentalist Islam, it is important, at the very least, to clarify the fact that all Muslims are not fundamentalists, nor are all Muslim women victims of misogyny. While I do believe that my international students have a better understanding of global affairs than their American counterparts, I still maintain that our curriculum is lacking when it comes to teaching students about the Middle East. While the technological world around us operates at unprecedented speeds, curriculum revision can seem to move at a glacial pace. Pedro Noguera, an urban sociologist at New York University and recent guest speaker in HISD's Leadership Series, maintains that:

> To acquire this form of political literacy, our students must have an understanding of American and world history that goes far beyond regurgitating facts, dates and events, or passing state history exams. They must also understand the complexity of politics in ways that exceed what is typically made available to them in the mainstream media. In short, they must learn, as Paulo Freire once admonished, to 'read the world' so that they might have a clearer understanding of the forces shaping their lives. (Noguera and Cohen)

And when we fail to teach students about current affairs in the Middle East we create a void in their educational experience; we raise students who accept as fact, and without question, the narrow spectrum of American journalistic coverage. This acceptance propagates a myopic tendency to generalize about an enormous region whose history, tradition, culture and size make it far too complicated a subject to reduce to generalizations. Shortly after the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003, Noguera urged educators to find the time and space in the school curriculum to teach students about the Middle East: "The Middle Eastern focus of much of the war on terrorism poses a serious challenge to our schools, because many of our students lack an understanding of the history and culture of the region that would be needed to understand the complex issues" (Noguera and Cohen).

In the spirit of educational equilibrium, students must at least be taught that there are two sides to every argument, and certainly more than one point of view in every political situation. "To do anything less is not only irresponsible but a willful neglect of our professional duties as educators" (Noguera and Cohen).

While this unit will not directly focus on the politics and policies of the Middle East, it will, by default, create an awareness of the rich oral tradition and feminist influence which permeate the centuries- old *Tales of the Arabian Nights*. This brings us to my second reason for creating this unit: to introduce my English Language Learners to literature that is overlooked in most ESL curricula. Were they in a regular English class with native speakers, they would be reading either American or British literature. The choice to use the stories of Scheherazade pays homage to a part of the world often labeled as violent, unsafe, and unstable. Because we focus less on literary works from the Middle East, students may graduate without ever having been exposed to some of the most entertaining stories ever written. Are they any less important/entertaining than the *Canterbury Tales*? Or simply not offered as possible alternatives? In an international classroom, does it make sense to read only American or British literature, just because the central objective is the learning of the English language?

UNIT BACKGROUND

The Modern Middle East

Possibly one of the least understood factors about the region we call the Middle East is its geographic boundaries. Indeed, as I did research for this unit I kept finding different perimeters depending on how I searched and what key words I used. The Middle East, according to Dr. Nezar AlSayyad at the University of California at Berkeley, "is the only area-study discipline that lacks easily drawn geographic boundaries" (qtd. in Powell). The term Middle East itself has been criticized as a product of Eurocentrism (middle of what? east of where?) and the empires that colonized the area. To this day the boundaries of the area are still debated, as Dr. Al Sayyad points out:

> When the Soviet Union collapsed, we in the Middle Eastern Studies suddenly inherited all its southern republics. Why? Because the people in those republics speak Turkic languages and in terms of culture, are much closer to Turkey than to Russia. So at least according to the U.S. Dept of Education, which funds most Middle Eastern centers, the borders of what we called the Middle East extended all the way from Morocco in the far west to Uzbekistan in the east, and from Chechnya in the north to Sudan and Somalia in Africa. (qtd. in Powell)

If one uses Dr. Al Sayyad's boundaries as guidelines, then the Middle East becomes an enormous expanse covering thirty-eight countries and at least a dozen languages ("Middle East"). It is no wonder that tempers flare at Western generalizations about an area that is rich with the influence of many ethnic groups. It is no less than the birthplace and spiritual center of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; some nations are heavily dependent on oil export for their economic well being while others are quite diverse economically. While political turmoil exists, it is not everywhere. While an illiterate population exists, it is also the home of the earliest civilizations. And while there are pockets of fundamentalist religious radicals, there are also religiously diverse areas that co-exist peacefully. There is no one definitive way to describe the Modern Middle East except to say it is——large!

In this part of the unit I hope to do nothing more than expose my students to the geographic area known as the Modern Middle East, with class discussion about the various cultures, religions, and languages that can be found there. Although I do not intend to ignore the war in Iraq and U.S. involvement, I do not intend to belabor the subject either. My goal is to familiarize my students with information and literature they might not ordinarily study in the high school curriculum.

History of the Tales

I plan to introduce my students to the Tales with a History Channel DVD entitled *The Arabian Nights.* This DVD gives a great introductory overview that includes a brief historical background of the collection, with special attention paid to the possible authorship of the stories. Noting that the tales in the collection range in geographic area over three continents (Asia, Africa and Europe), this source suggests that the stories were, most likely, borne form oral tales collected along trade routes, specifically the silk routes to and from China. The stories in written form were traced to a Syrian manuscript dating to the early 1300s; little attention was paid to them by the Arabs, who scorned oral storytelling as marketplace entertainment and "a symbol of the uneducated masses" (Mernissi, *Scheherazade Goes West* 55). It was Charles Galland who translated the original manuscript from Syrian to French, where the stories enjoyed great popularity among 18thC literate Parisians. According to Mernissi, "Not until the nineteenth century, one hundred years after the Europeans, who had the written text as early as 1704, were the tales finally published in Arabic. And none of the first editors was Arab!" (56). It is certain

that scholars agree on at least one point: that the stories did not stem from one authorship, but were instead compiled from different sources, often rewritten to the local tastes of the audiences (Dwight Reynolds, Ph.D. qtd. in *The Arabian Nights* DVD). All that is known is that someone, somewhere, gathered them together as one manuscript. Yet, the original manuscript did not include some of the famous tales we know and enjoy today. *Ali Baba, Aladdin* and *Sinbad* are stories that were added by Galland, after he heard them recited by Hanna Diab, a Maronite Christian Arab from Aleppo, at a Parisian dinner party (Reynolds, *The Arabian Nights* DVD). And the tales underwent additional revisions by the time they reached Victorian England. Sir Richard Burton, a renowned linguist, fluent in Arabic, and a flamboyant social figure, chose to do some translating of his own. The result was a contentious, yet most popular, eroticized version of *The Arabian Nights*—a Victorian, pornographic bestseller (Reynolds, *The Arabian Nights* DVD). Contentious though they may have been, Burton's translations remain for some the best versions we have today of the Tales (Irwin 36).

And yet, as the Tales moved west, certain critics maintain that Scheherazade was irrevocably changed and today remains one of the most misunderstood female characters in folklore. Suzanne Gauch, in her forward to *Liberating Shahrazad: Feminism*, *Postcolonialism and Islam*, remarks: "No matter how many tales European translators included within the *Nights*, their inevitable relegation of Shahrazad to the silent shadows served the purpose of reinscribing stereotypes of the Islamic world as inherently misogynist and retrograde" (xiv). And Susan Muaadi Darraj (*Scheherazade's Legacy: Arab and Arab American Women on Writing*) maintains that Scheherazade "suffered terribly at the hands of translators" where she became disempowered and turned into a "sex kitten" (1-2). She is perhaps one of the most famous literary examples of Orientalism when depicted as a defenseless female whose sexuality, rather than wit, wins her a succession of tomorrows. She is hardly helpless, as Mernissi explains: "In the Thousand and One Nights, Scheherazade officially admits that a man should use words instead of violence to settle his disputes. They are a symbol of the triumph of reason over violence" *(SGW,* 51). It will be the purpose of this portion of the unit to explore the character of Scheherazade by deconstructing this stereotype and listening to her feminist voice.

Scheherazade

Being descended from a long line of long-winded Irish storytellers, I was bitten by the bug early in my childhood. One of my fondest childhood memories is of being put to bed with a story. Not a "read-out-of-the-book" story, but a "made-up-out-of-the-head" kind. My father was a gifted storyteller. Sometimes he told originals with me as the heroine; other times he told stories I knew he had read long ago. No matter though—the delicious part was in the hearing of a tale told orally, with the inflections, pauses, and specific nuances of story that only an oral storyteller can add to make a story grow or shrink, calm or frighten, anger or please.

And so it was with a titillating chill that I first learned about Scheherazade of the *Tales of the Arabian Nights*. I had just recently learned to read and was eager to get my hands on any really good story, when my dad gave me a children's version of *The Arabian Nights*. I was sucked in immediately; this was some special lady! Oh, yes, the stories were great, the book's illustrations were wonderful, and I had no trouble wandering around in the stories of places I could not even locate on a globe, much less picture. It was the storyteller who more than intrigued me. I was in awe of her ability to tell non-stop, life-saving cliffhangers for what? 1,001 nights? Nearly three years? Now this was one remarkable woman!!

And, when I became a teacher I still felt a remarkable kinship with Scheherazade because I think our jobs are pretty much the same. If I have a great story, my students will listen. If I have a bad day, it means my story wasn't good enough. Scheherazade is a great role model for teachers because her very life depends on story—and she can't afford to have bad day!

And Fatima Mernissi, *Scheherazade Goes West*, agrees. Mernissi, shocked to realize that Westerners believed Scheherazade's greatest powers to be sexual, reveals: "I was amazed to realize that Scheherazade was considered a lovely but simple-minded entertainer, someone who narrates innocuous tales and dresses fabulously" (*SWG* 15). She adds that the metamorphoses happened as Scheherazade moved west, that in her part of the world (the Middle East) she is a "courageous heroine" (Mernissi, *Dreams of Trespass* 15), "a strategist and a powerful thinker, who uses her psychological knowledge of human beings to get them to walk faster and leap higher" (15). After all, Scheherazade has put herself in the most unfortunate position. For the sake of all women, she has agreed to marry this female-slaying king, in an attempt to stop the bloody carnage of her sisters. King Shaylihar has been on a murderous rampage since he discovered that his wife has been unfaithful to him. Heartbroken and shamed by her infidelity, he decides that women are not to be trusted, especially with one's heart. And his plan? Just this: to bed a different virgin every night and kill her the following dawn. As Mernissi wryly observes, "This man is not looking for sex, he is looking for a psychotherapist!"(*SGW* 48). And Scheherazade is not "just telling stories." Her words are carefully crafted, and her stories full of profound moral underpinnings. "Locked in the confines of the palace, this storyteller profoundly transforms the manner in which the ruler perceives not just her but also himself, his subjects and his authority" (Gauch 14). The fact that the King is swept away, unaware of time or place (it is Scheherazade who reminds him every dawn that she must die) while caught up in the world of story, takes a master strategist, the like of which this kingdom has not seen. Mernissi (*SGW 47*-48) outlines three strategic skills that Scheherazade must master in order to be successful:

> 1. She must have control over a vast store of information. We know from the very start that Scheherazade is well read; she knows poetry by heart and has studied literature, philosophy and medicine.
>
> 2. She must have the ability to grasp the criminal's mind. Scheherazade cannot afford to make a mistake, by miscalculating what the King needs. Scheherazade knows the King is suffering from a broken heart and the acute self-loathing we all feel when we discover we have been betrayed.
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> 3. She must have the determination to act in cold blood. Scheherazade must control her fear despite the uncertainty of the situation. As Suzanne Gauch observes, Scheherazade does not speak at the behest of the king. "Always it is Scheherazade who takes the initiative, fearless in the face of death. Kings, judges and sultans are all men of action, desirous of winning the execution of justice, of seeing the effects of their governance. To them Scheherazade says: Listen. (132)

The Tales

Sinbad the Sailor's Voyages

Set within a frame tale in which Sinbad the Porter meets Sinbad the Sailor (or really Sinbad the Merchant as he spends most of his time shipwrecked!), the great adventures of Sinbad the Sailor number seven. Like the trials of Hercules, or the travels of Odysseus, each voyage is chock full of foreign wonders, nearly fatal disasters, and countless unforeseen surprises. When Sinbad encounters difficulty it is due to his own foolish, undisciplined character, and when he is delivered from such difficulty, it is always at the hand of Allah, protector of Believers.

As tempting as it is to try to squeeze all seven voyages into this unit (one is more delightful than the next!), I have chosen to introduce my students only to the first two voyages of Sinbad. They are certainly representative enough of the collection for students to grasp the overall themes, and perhaps become just familiar enough to pursue reading the rest on their own.

The Sinbad collection begins with Sinbad the Porter, whose livelihood depends on literally carrying the burdens of others, stopping to rest from a particularly heavy load right outside a wealthy merchant's home. As his weary muscles relax, his senses delight in the aromas and sounds of merriment coming from within the walls of the merchant's compound. He cannot resist tiptoeing to the gates and peering in. What Sinbad the Porter sees is a rich man's life, replete with all of the servants, material goods, and luxuries the poor only dream of. Rather than curse the lavish display of wealth that lies beyond the gates, Sinbad the Porter instead begins to sing a social commentary of sorts on the whims and fancies of Fortune, who gives much to some and nothing to others. His song is overheard by the guests within, and the Porter is summoned to join the guests inside. Here Sinbad the Porter meets Sinbad the Sailor, who assures him that he too has endured great misery and suffering in his life. It is no coincidence that both are named Sinbad; indeed the wealthy merchant pronounces them brothers. Sinbad the Porter is invited to dine and listen to the voyage stories told by the merchant.

I am sure my students will note how closely this frame tale imitates the frame tale of Scheherazade and Shaylihar. Just as the Porter does not condemn the Sailor for his riches and servants, neither does Scheherazade condemn the King for his ruthless use of power to assuage his anger towards his unfaithful wife. Instead, in both cases, the tales serve as tableaux for codes of behavior, prescriptions for a moral society that gently nudge the listener into an awareness of what the good and righteous do.

Sinbad's First Voyage

Sinbad begins his story by confessing that he was the son of a very rich merchant who squandered nearly all of his inherited fortune on material possessions and fine living. Before Sinbad was penniless, however, he manages to sell the last of his possessions so that he can earn a living as a merchant trader. Although he has had no previous experience as a seaman, he soon becomes accustomed to this life, until his ship happens upon a tropical paradise that begs visiting. This island is no ordinary island but a giant slumbering whale angrily awakened when the sailors begin cooking freshly caught fish over a campfire. It seems the whale has been sleeping long enough for sand to settle over it and foliage to sprout upon it. The whale cannot, however, sleep through a fire cooking the skin off his back! Before Sinbad can race back to the ship with the other sailors, the whale plunges in to the depths of the sea, threatening to drown Sinbad in the process. Fortunately, he is able to float to safety by catching hold of a crate and riding the waves until he is cast ashore, again on a seemingly deserted island. In the distance, however, he spies a large white dome which must surely be a mosque in which he can praise Allah for his rescue. After a long trek, he arrives at the giant white dome and stops to rest in its shade. Not until he spies the enormous hawk with "talons as large as the tusks of elephants" (McCaughrean16) does he realize that he is resting against the egg of the Giant Rukh, the bird that even rugged sailors spoke of in hushed tones at Baghdad Harbor In the near distance, Sinbad spies the enormous bird preparing for descent. Remaining huddled under the egg, Sinbad hatches his escape plan. As the Giant Rukh settles over the egg, Sinbad crawls between its claws and ties his turban to one of its talons. When the Rukh next leaves the nest to feed, Sinbad goes along for the ride. Hours later, the bird, with Sinbad in tow, heads to a deep canyon, full of mounds of priceless gems, but also full of writhing snakes. As the bird settles to feed, Sinbad unties himself and begins to fill his pockets with the glittering gems. He knows that he was in the Valley of Diamonds. He also knows that merchants have grown rich from the gems, but only because they are clever enough to devise a means to retrieve them. The most successful method requires throwing large cuts of meat into the pit. The meat lands on the gems, which become embedded in the meat. When the enormous birds come to retrieve the meat to bring to their chicks, the gems go with it. Merchants, perching in hiding places near the nest, wait to remove the gems from the meat. Knowing this, Sinbad devises his escape plan. He fills his pockets with jewels and grabs hold of the nearest slab

of meat. He is carried to a Rukh's nest where merchants are waiting in the distance. After the Rukh flies away, Sinbad approaches the waiting merchant, offering a share of the booty in return for help. The merchant obliges, and Sinbad purchases a whole fleet of ships with his new found wealth. He sends his fleet sailing in all directions and he boards the ship with the richest cargo.

Sinbad's Second Voyage

Sinbad's ship enjoys strong winds, for which he and his crew praise Allah—that is, until the captain spies an island in the distance that they need to avoid. No sooner have they turned the ship around and drawn in the sails, than they discover a pirate ship bearing down on them. The pirates are vicious ape-men, short in stature, but agile and quick. They easily gain control of the ship and set full sail toward the dangerous island Sinbad is struggling to avoid. Sinbad and his crew are dumped on the shore and the ape-men make away with the ship. Unfortunately, they are all now on the dangerous island the captain tried to avoid. Known as the Island of Cannibals, it is home to a giant couple who regularly received human deliveries from the ape-men pirates. These giants like their humans barbequed. As Sinbad watches horrified, the giants begin to eat his crew members, one each night. Finally, he and a few remaining crew members devise a plan to escape. Using the same life-sized skewers the giant uses to prepare his evening meal, Sinbad and his crew create red hot pokers to blind the giant. As the giant howls in pain, Sinbad and the crew use the opportunity to escape. With benches as makeshift life rafts, they paddle into the sea. They next encounter a hissing sea serpent, which eats all of Sinbad's remaining crew members. Sinbad alone floats in the sea until he is picked up by a passing merchant ship. Although times have been hard, the captain of this ship has been keeping Sinbad's cargo for seven long years, refusing to sell it because he believes Sinbad will return. When Sinbad discovers he is aboard this good captain's ship, he immediately gifts him with one half of his stored cargo's value. In addition, Sinbad's other ships have all managed to yield a handsome profit, making him a very rich man.

Despite his great wealth, however, the lure of adventure is too great for him to resist, and so he sails on five more voyages, each more spectacular than the last.

Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp

The story of Aladdin is the one with which my students may be the most familiar, given the popularity of the Disney cartoon version. I think they will be very interested to see that Disney has taken great liberties with this story, as it has with many other classic tales such as *Hercules* and *The Little Mermaid*. In any event, after reading this translation, I think they will find the Disney version lacking.

The story of Aladdin begins with a description of the young boy as a lazy, disobedient troublemaker who is the son of a tailor's widow. With no father to discipline him, Aladdin has become a street urchin, prone to mischief and wrongdoings. One day a black dwarf arrives at his doorstep claiming to be the brother of Aladdin's father, Mustafa the tailor. Despite her uncertainty, Aladdin's mother allows the dwarf to undertake her son's tutelage, for he seems to have a favorable effect on him. The dwarf, however, has ulterior motives. It seems he has heard of the magical cavern which can only be opened by Aladdin, son of Mustafa. He knows of the treasures within the cave and hopes to lure Aladdin to the spot, where he can gain access to the riches and magic inside. The dwarf gives Aladdin specific instructions to enter the cave and remove a certain old lamp. To keep him safe, he gives Aladdin a ring to wear to guard against evil magic. Aladdin, however, recognizes the dwarf's greed and refuses to hand over the riches; he seals the entrance so that the dwarf cannot enter, but Aladdin can also not exit. In despair, he wrings his hands and unwittingly releases from the ring an ifrit, a magical slave who exists only to do the bidding of the wearer. Aladdin's fondest wish is to be transported to the safety of his home. The ifrit obliges, and mother and son are reunited. Once home, Aladdin gifts his mother with the "baubles" he has brought from the cave (he has no idea of the value of the gems), and

bids his mother to “shine up” the old lamp so that they can sell it. Immediately a more powerful ifrit appears. This slave of the lamp conjures great sumptuous meals on golden dishes for mother and son at their command. Because Aladdin’s mother knows well the temptations that owning a powerful ifrit can bring, she cautions her son never to use the lamp again.

The golden dishes the ifrit has served the food upon can be sold so that they might never again be hungry. Although Aladdin’s ignorance has cost him in previous sales, a reputable jeweler advises him of the true value of his dishes. He also comes to realize that the “baubles” he brought to his mother are really precious jewels which would make him an extremely wealthy man. This realization comes at a most opportune time for Aladdin; he has fallen in love with the princess Badr al-Budur and is determined to marry her. Although he is not of royal blood, he is quite wealthy; his mother agrees to petition the king on her son’s behalf. The king, shocked at the quality and size of the token Aladdin’s mother brings, realizes that Aladdin is his daughter’s wealthiest suitor by far. But the king’s own wizar hopes to marry his son to the princess, and so he suggests that Aladdin might be a bandit, whose lineage would mar the royal bloodline. The king decides that a bandit would not be satisfied to wait, and so imposes a three-month waiting period – the time until his daughter’s 17th birthday. Aladdin agrees to these terms and daily sends tokens of love to the princess. On the 2nd month and 25th day, his mother overhears gossip in the marketplace. Apparently, the king has broken his promise to Aladdin and his daughter will marry the wizar’s son. This news throws Aladdin into a state of utter despair. His mother decides to intervene; this news is serious enough to require the assistance of the ifrit. With the ifrit’s powers, the wizar’s son is relocated every evening, just before bedtime. He is transported 17 miles from the city and forced to walk back every night. This, of course, prevents the consummation of the marriage and greatly discourages the wizar’s son. He tells the king that his daughter is too ugly and he wants out of the marriage. The king, enraged, decides to award his daughter to her true love, Aladdin. The newlyweds, so completely in love, have no unfulfilled wishes and, therefore, no need of an ifrit in a lamp. Aladdin, failing to tell his bride about the powers of the lamp, simply stores it away on the highest shelf in their new home.

News of the now Prince Aladdin and his lovely bride reaches the ears of the Black dwarf, who realizes at once that Aladdin had not died in the cave, but lived, and still possesses the magic lamp. Disguising himself as a salesman, he walks through the city, offering new lamps for old. The princess tosses him the magic lamp in exchange for a new one. Immediately the dwarf orders the ifrit to transport the castle and princess to Africa, where he can have both for himself. The king, discovering the palace and his daughter missing, blames Aladdin and banishes him from the kingdom. Aladdin, distraught with worry and confusion, stops to wash his face in the river. As he wrings his hands, he realizes he still wears the ring. Immediately he summons the ifrit of the ring, who possesses magical powers, though far less powerful than the ifrit of the lamp. The ifrit transports Aladdin to the palace where, with his bride, he hatches a scheme to overcome the dwarf. By concocting a sleeping potion and pretending to welcome his amorous advances, the princess is able to steal the lamp back from the sleeping dwarf.

Aladdin, realizing that the pursuit of the lamp has caused all of this misfortune, grants the ifrit his freedom and allows him to destroy the lamp forever. The dwarf, his evil schemes thwarted, leaves the kingdom with nothing.

Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves

The story of Ali Baba begins with a question. Scheherazade wonders aloud why Allah deals such different fates to two brothers of the same parents. If one is familiar with the clever storyteller, Scheherazade, one knows no question is innocent, no musing without purpose. Scheherazade knows that King Shaylihar and his brother have had the same unfortunate luck with women. She knows that the question will pique his interest as he ponders the meaning of her

question. And she knows that he will want to hear the story that has led her to pose such a question. Thus begins the story of Ali Baba, the poor brother of wealthy Kasim.

Ali Baba, a woodcutter, makes his living in the forest. His work often takes him to wild, out of the way niches. One day, he hears the thunderous stampede of horses and quickly hides himself from view. Forty bandits carrying bulging saddlebags sat astride their horses and stop at the base of the mountain of solid rock. Their robber chief shouts, "Open Sesame!", and the wall of rock part to reveal a dark cave. Each man enters the cave and returns with an empty saddlebag. Finally, the robber chief orders the wall to "Close Sesame" and the cave disappears within the solid rock. No sooner have the bandits left than Ali Baba orders the cave open with the words he has overheard. Inside the cave is more treasure than Ali Baba could ever have imagined; he takes only two bags of gold and presents them to his wife. His wife, thrilled at their new wealth, insists on knowing exactly how much gold they have. It is far too much to count; it must be weighed. She runs to borrow Kasim's wife's measuring jar, which raises her sister-in-law's suspicions. She knows that Ali Baba and his wife are poor—what do they have so much of that it requires measuring? She places a dab of butter on the bottom of the jar so that whatever her sister-in-law is measuring will stick. When Ali Baba's wife returns the jar, a gold coin is stuck to the bottom.

Kasim's wife immediately reports her findings to her husband. He forces Ali Baba to tell him where he had found the gold. Reluctantly, Ali Baba confesses what he knows. Kasim's greed cannot be contained, and so he visits the cave himself. Although he remembers quite well how to enter the cave, his memory fails him when he tries to exit. He is still in the cave when the robbers return. Kasim is immediately sliced into several parts, and this is how his brother finds him when he returns to the cave. Ali Baba returns to his home with his brother's body parts.

As they are now wealthy, Ali Baba has promised his wife a servant girl. Imagine that her first task in the house is to help Ali Baba bury his brother! Marjanah, grateful for the job and the roof over her head, obliges Ali Baba. Aware that Kasim's death and burial must remain secret, she finds a tailor who agrees to perform the task blindfolded. He sews up the body parts into one corpse so that Kasim can be buried in one piece.

However, when the bandits return to the cave and discover the body parts gone, they know that their secret has not died with Kasim. The robber chief inquires in town if anyone has recently been buried. By pure chance (as he has torn his trousers), he inquires if the tailor has any information. Of course the tailor, boasting on his excellent sewing skills, says that he had sewn a man up blindfolded just last week. The robber chief pays the tailor to lead him to the house where he had performed such a task. There the chief marks the door with a cross; he intends to return and burn the house down.

Marjanah, however, rises before anyone else. When she discovers the cross which marks Ali Baba's house, she knows it has to mean trouble. She then draws a cross on every other home in the village to confound the evildoers. The robber chief is forced to return to the tailor and have him identify the house again. This time the chief decides to pose as an oil merchant. With his band of thieves hiding in 39 stone jars, he fills one jar with olive oil and goes to the house of Ali Baba. When the chief decides the time is right, he will give the order and the thieves will kill Ali Baba and his family. While he is visiting with Ali Baba (for Ali Baba was a kind man who had invited the thief under his roof), Marjanah decides to take a cup of oil to prepare dinner. As she approaches a jar, she hears a voice ask, "Is it time?" Realizing that this "merchant" is plotting against her master, she answers, "Not yet." She then plugs the only air holes in the jars with cheese. With his band of thieves dead, the robber chief cannot fulfill his plan. Angered at his plot gone awry, he vows to return and destroy Ali Baba.

On his final trip to Ali Baba's, the chief is disguised as a wealthy sheikh. He has an "accident" outside Ali Baba's house and so is invited within. Marjanah recognizes the chief and

offers to dance for them all after dinner. The robber chief is entranced by her dancing, especially as she pays special attention to him. As she twirls and whirls in a frenzied display, she begins to dance in circles around the chief, until at last she stabs him with the very dagger that is part of her dance routine.

Ali Baba is so overcome by the resourcefulness and bravery of Marjanah that he immediately gives her in marriage to his son. The family lives out the rest of their days with the wealth from the chief robber's cave.

LESSON PLANS

"What we've got here is a failure to communicate!"(Paul Newman, *Cool Hand Luke*, 1967)

My ESL students are, for the most part, reluctant writers and speakers of English. Although they feel safe in the comfort of the ESL classroom, they freeze when they are expected to speak in front of a room full of native English speakers, or write an essay that must pass native writing standards (i.e. TAKS ELA tests). Because they have remained mute throughout the semester, they believe their presence in the mainstream class has gone unnoticed. They have perfected the art of blending in with the classroom décor and would prefer to keep it that way. They truly believe that their native speaking classmates are unprepared for the sound of their accents, and they dread the inevitable oral presentations required in certain subjects. Nothing, however, strikes fear in the hearts of Westside ESL students like the Communication Application ½ credit course which is a requirement for graduation. This Communication course, and the TAKS ELA test, has become the two headed monster of the ESL students' Westside experience.

Both situations seriously worried my ESL kids, making them feel insecure and unsure of themselves, even if they were straight "A" students. I realized that my kids were really suffering from identity issues and genuine concerns that they would not be understood. That expectations for them were the same as for native English speakers both overwhelmed and frightened them. In both of these situations (TAKS ELA writing and classroom speeches), I realized that their fears were justified. Their TAKS essays would be judged alongside native speakers, and the audiences in their speech classes were all native speakers too. While I was fairly sure that the readers of the TAKS essays could spot one written by an English language learner, and that the speech teacher would recognize the special effort that speaking in a second language requires, it didn't change the fact that my students suffered from a real fear of being misunderstood and worse, ridiculed. More than once I have heard, "Miss, I know exactly how to write/say it in Farsi/ Spanish/Chinese/Arabic, etc, but it doesn't come out right in English." Since I have spent so much of my life loving my language and its wondrous words, I can truly feel their frustration. How could I help them through this transition time between languages—no longer monolingual but not yet truly bilingual?

Because I believe that writers write best when it comes from within, when writers write about what they know and not what others tell them to write, I urged my students to use their immigrant experiences to their advantage. They had, I argued, what others did not—they experienced what it was to be an American immigrant. Rather than try to avoid discussing the elephant in the room, they needed to exploit the very thing they tried to hide. And in so doing, I urged, they would disarm the very audience they feared.

In these first two lesson plans I hope to accomplish two goals for my students: The first is the writing of a personal narrative and the second is the delivery of an oral presentation. In both cases the overarching theme will be an emphasis on their identities as English Language Learners. Both of the activities within this plan will focus on students using their experiences as immigrants to their advantage by celebrating them rather than hoping to disguise them. Each activity will draw

upon students' ability to do what only they can do: give an "outsiders" perspective (as speakers or writers) to the "insiders," who are their audiences.

Lesson Plan 1: 1001 Westside Nights

Objective: The learner will write a personal narrative about being an immigrant entitled "What Am I Doing Here?"

Introduction: This activity is a part of what will become a class wide version of an Arabian Nights compendium. Either in video or in written format (or both!) students will tell their own stories, real or imagined, to be compiled into a publication of our own.

As long as I can pique student interest and engage them in the subject matter, I feel sure that their language learning skills will progress appreciably. Moreover, if as a group we focus on the beauty, imagination and wit of the storyteller's art, we remind ourselves of the power of words over wars.

Materials: student journals, overhead projector, vis a vis pens.

Activity:

Part 1: Students will be guided through the brainstorming and pre-writing process, using the 5W graphic organizer (who, what, when, where, why)

Part 2: Students will organize their ideas into a rough draft 5 paragraph essay plan: Paragraph 1 contains the Introduction, Paragraphs 2, 3, 4, the Body, and Paragraph 5 the Conclusion.

Part 3: Students will produce personal narratives about their own journeys to the United States.

Assessment: Will be based on a writing rubric.

Lesson Plan 2: The Other Me

Objective: the learner will present a personal narrative 4 minute oral speech about life in their homeland.

Introduction: The purpose of this activity is to allow students the opportunity to practice oral presentations in front of a "friendly" audience.

Materials: students' personal narrative outline, notecards, stopwatch

Activity:

Part 1: Using the same 5 paragraph format from their personal narratives, students will create an oral presentation outline of their speech. Once they have completed this part of the assignment, they will reduce the paragraphs to short phrases designed to jog their memories when referenced. Students will transfer these mnemonic phrases to notecards.

Part 2: Using artifacts from their native countries as personal symbols (i.e. "this jewelry box represents the treasures I left behind"), students will tell a story about a day in their native countries.

Assessment: Will be based on the rubric designed for this presentation.

Presentation Rubric : The Other Me

Student Name: ____

CATEGORY	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
preparation	well prepared and rehearsed; speech was clearly very familiar to speaker; had all materials; included visuals to enhance presentation	showed signs of advance preparation; rehearsed but had some rough spots; could have used more practice; had most materials	minimally prepared; some signs of familiarity with speech; lacked some materials	did not rehearse; lacked necessary materials; no visuals
delivery	great delivery; maintained eye contact; clear, confident and in control	good delivery but did not maintain eye contact; body language distracted	acceptable delivery, but unremarkable	weak delivery; speaker was unsure and unclear
content	excellent content; gave ample amount of info	good content; good amount of info	adequate content; adequate amount of info	weak content; little info
follows directions	followed all directions; no parts missing	followed most directions; some small parts missing	followed some directions; had some important parts missing	did not follow directions

Lesson Plan 3: Open Ended Responses

Objective: The learner will understand and use the A-P-E model for short answer essays (also known as Open Ended Responses).

Introduction: This is perhaps not the most exciting lesson plan I have ever written, but I believe it will prove to be useful to my English Language Learners. Statistically speaking, it is the OER part of the TAKS ELA test in which ESL students perform most poorly. Even when students can manage to score a passing grade on the narrative essay, they struggle with open ended responses. For this reason, I offer this lesson plan to give my students some extra practice with writing them. I am hoping that by using the stories from the *Arabian Nights*, rather than the ones in the pre-packaged TAKS practice booklets, my students will engage more readily in an activity that most find fairly odious!

Using the two stories of Ali Baba and Aladdin, students will answer questions in the A-P-E model.

Concept Development:

Students will learn the A-P-E model for short answer essays. A= answer the question. Students rewrite the question stem making certain to respond specifically to the question asked. P= prove. Students cite textual evidence to support their answers either with direct quotes or paraphrasing. E= explain. Students finish the short essay by explaining the connection between the question asked and the overall story theme.

Student Practice:

Students will respond to the following questions:

In what way is the theme of greed a constant in the story "Ali Baba"? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

How does ignorance affect the destiny of Aladdin? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

Is cleverness strictly a female trait in "Ali Baba" and "Aladdin"? Support your answer with specific textual evidence from both literary selections.

Assessment: Will be based on how closely students adhere to the A-P-E model.

Lesson Plan 4: Figuratively Speaking

Objective: The learner will understand and use the strategy of "windowpaning" to explain figurative language.

Introduction: My English Language Learners need lots of practice deciphering figurative language in English before they can be asked to create it on their own. Fortunately, the version of the Tales that we are using makes great use of figurative language, despite the fact that it is a translation specifically geared toward a younger audience. Using select phrases from each of the stories we have read, students will "windowpane" their phrases in this activity.

Concept Development:

Phrase	**Meaning**	**Phrase**	**Meaning**
May Allah grant the serpent a short life.	This means: I hope the serpent dies soon.		

Student Practice:

Using the phrases below, students will work in small groups to create windowpanes of their meanings. This activity can be as long or as short as the teacher chooses. It might even be fun to create notebooks of all of the phrases for writing exercises in a later lesson.

Possible Phrases for “Translation”

- “In the kingdom where only the fish can breathe.”
- “The sight of them was so repulsive that the shallow shoreline waves wrinkled up their noses”.
- “His face could only have pleased his mother.”
- “For truly his looks would not win him so much as a goat for a bride!”

Assessment: Will be based on the completed product with all of the windowpanes filled in. Extra credit could be given for additional original (not from the story) phrases.

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