Southwest Asia’s Ethnic Groups

Arabs, Kurds, & Persians
Standards

SS7G8 The student will describe the diverse cultures of the people who live in Southwest Asia (Middle East).

a. Explain the differences between an ethnic group and a religious group.
b. Explain the diversity of religions within the Arabs, Persians, and Kurds.
Teachers

Print off the following page for each student. They should complete the graphic organizer while discussing the presentation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Persians</th>
<th>Kurds</th>
<th>Arabs</th>
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<td>Location</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Directions: Complete the Venn diagram and chart below with information from the presentation.
Southwest Asia’s Ethnic Groups

Arabs, Kurds, & Persians
Ethnic Groups

• This is a group of people who share a common culture.
• These characteristics have been part of their community for generations.

• Ethnic groups can have many things in common:
  • Shared history, common ancestry, language, religion, traditions, beliefs, holidays, food, etc.
  • All of these things make up a common culture that is shared by the members of the ethnic group.
Religious Groups

• This is a group of people who share a belief system. They believe in the same god (or gods) and have common sacred text with a specific set of rules about how to live.

• Religious groups have many things in common:
  • God(s), prophets, prayers, history, sacred text, religious laws, holy days, etc.

• People from different ethnic groups may share the same religion; however, they may be from different cultures.
Location

• Arabs comprise most of the population of Southwest Asia.

• Arabs also live in the United States, Canada, parts of northern Africa, and Europe.
• Arabs of Southwest Asia believe themselves to be descendants of Abraham through his son Ishmael.

• Arabs make up the majority of the people who live throughout the Middle East.
Most Arabs practice Islam.
- Small numbers of Arabs practice other religions.
- Not all Arabs are Muslims, and not all Muslims are Arabs.

Islam consists mostly of two different groups. The majority of Muslims practice Sunni Islam. Most others practice Shi’a Islam.
- Sunnis and Shi’a disagree about who is in charge of the Muslim world.

Small numbers of Arabs practice other religions. Some Arabs are Christians.
• Sunni Islam dominates in most Arab areas, especially in North Africa.

• Shi’a Islam is dominant among the Arab population in southern Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, northern Syria, & northern Yemen.
The Kaaba, located in Mecca, is the center of Islam.
Most Arabs, whether they are Muslim or Christian, speak Arabic.
Kurds
The Kurds are an ethnic group that live in Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Kurds form almost 20% of the population of Turkey and Iraq. Many Kurds live in an area of northern Iraq called Kurdistan (not a separate country).

They are the largest ethnic group in the world without a country of their own. Many Kurds hope to have a nation of their own some day. This has caused conflict with the countries in which Kurdish people live.
Distribution of Kurdish people
In Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria
Kurds of Southwest Asia believe themselves to be descendants of the Medes, an ancient Iranian people.

In fact, Kurds share many aspects of their culture with Iranians.
Like the Arabs, the Kurds are overwhelmingly Muslim, and the great majority are Sunni; only 5% are Shi’a.

Kurdish Muslims tend to be less strict about certain Islamic practices.

For example, there are fewer laws for how Kurdish women should dress than there are for Iranian and Arab women.
Kurdish is an Indo-European language related to Farsi (Persian) and other Iranian languages.

There are many different dialects of Kurdish spoken throughout Southwest Asia.
Persians
Persians are those who live in the modern country of Iran. They make up about half of Iran’s current population. The country of Persia became known as Iran in 1935. There is written evidence (cuneiform) that was found in Iran that proves that “Persia” was the name of this area since its beginning.

Today, Persians can be found living in Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, and the Xinjiang province of China.
The Persians lived in Iran before the arrival of Islam in the 7th century.

The Persians’ ancestors were Indo-Europeans who migrated from central Europe and Southern Russia and formed a great empire.
Religion

• Most Persians in Iran practice Shi’a Islam, but some are Sunni and other religions.

• Persian women have faced many challenges as a result of strict cultural and religious practices.
Ethnic groups of Iran, in 2008, in %

- Arab: 2
- Baloch: 2
- Lur: 10
- Kurd: 6
- Azeri: 16
- Other: 1

Religious groups in %

- Shi'ite: 89
- Sunni: 9
- Others*: 2

*Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, Bahai
• Persians speak a language called Farsi (or Persian).
• It is one of the oldest languages that is still spoken today!
welcome
thank you
hello
peace be upon you
good morning
good night
goodbye
how do you do?
have you?
how are you doing?
I'm fine
not bad, thanks

what is your name?
my name is...
bon voyage!
yes
yes (question)
no
no, you must be joking
God willing
please
please (offering)
thank you
thank you very much
don't mention it
it's nothing
excuse me/sorry

khōsh āmadīd
motashakkeram
salām
salām aleikom
sobh bekehir
shāb bekehir
khodāfēz or khodā hāfez
hāl-ē shomā chetōr ast?
hāl-ē shomā khūb ē?
chetōr ē?
alhamdōlellāh
mersī, bad nīstam

esmetān chī st?
esmām...ē
safar bekehir!
balē
cherā?
nakheir, na
na bābā
enshā'āllāh
lofān
befarmā ʾīd
mersī/tashakker
motashakkeram
kheīlī mamnūnām
ghābel nabūd
chīzī nīst
bebakhshīd

خوش آمدید
متشکرم
سلام
سلام علیکم
صباح بخیر
شب بخیر
خواهش حفظ
حال شما چطور است؟
حال شما خوب است؟
چطور است
الحمد لله
مرسی، بد نیستم
استناد چهست؟
اسم... است.
سفر بخیر
بله
چرا؟
تغییر یا نه
نداها
انشا‌الله
لطفاً
برفرمانید
مرسی‌با تشکر یا متشکرم
خیلی کمئنونم
قابل نیود
چگونه نیست
بهخشید
Meet the Ethnic Groups

Your Task: If the people below were speaking about their ethnicity, what would they say? Fill in the speech bubbles below things that the people could say about their ethnic group. Next, illustrate the people.

An Arab

A Persian

A Kurd
Southwest Asia's Ethnic Groups Review Questions

1. What is a community of people sharing a common culture, ancestry, customs, and language known as?

2. What is a group of people who share a belief system in a god or gods known as?

3. Which religion do most of the people of Southwest Asia follow?

4. Most Arabs are followers of which religion?

5. Which ethnic group is trying to create its own country?

6. Which modern day country is home to Persians?

7. Which ethnic group is most numerous in Southwest Asia?

8. What language do Persians speak?

9. Most Kurds practice Islam, while most Persians practice Islam.

10. True or False (and why): “Arabs, Persians, and Kurds all live in roughly the same region of the world and are virtually the same people except they live in different countries.”
1. Ethnic group
2. Religious group
3. Islam
4. Most Arabs are Sunni Muslim, but the Arab population in southern Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, northern Syria, & northern Yemen are mainly Shi’a
5. Kurds
6. Iran
7. Arabs
8. Farsi
9. Sunni; Shi’a
10. False—ethnic groups are different; different beliefs, languages, customs, heritage, etc.
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