

Cadette Girl Scout Badge Project: “Just like U.S.”

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**Dear Girl Scout Leader:** Welcome to the exciting world of Girl Scouting! As a new volunteer you will experience many joys and create many memories not only for the girls you lead but also for yourself. As part of your training, I am providing you with this resource in order to get you and your girls thinking about ideas relating to multiculturalism in Girl Scouting and how these ideas relate to the four Girl Scout program goals<sup>1</sup>:

1. To become the very best person you can be such as feeling good about yourself and your accomplishments, be able to try new activities and be open to new challenges and use your talents and skills in new ways.
2. To respect other people, build strong friendships, and to learn to understand and appreciate people who are different from yourself.
3. To build your own set of values that will help you to make decisions and that will guide your actions.
4. To build leadership skills and to contribute to your society by helping other people.

In order to help you get started with leading girls on the topic of multiculturalism, I've created a new project badge your girls can earn called "Just like U.S." The purpose of the badge is to introduce your girls to the Middle Eastern cultures of the newest American immigrants to their neighborhood and for them to explore their own cultural differences and similarities. My rationale behind creating this project is that the Detroit Metro area has the highest population of Arab immigrants outside of the Middle East. These immigrants bring with them a culture very foreign and threatening to many Americans who struggle with the idea of accepting those who may represent differing religious and moral beliefs. However, according to historian Ronald Takaki "a new America is approaching, a society where diversity is destiny, (Takaki, 2004, p. 439). If this is so, we need to prepare our girls to live and be comfortable in this new society so that they themselves feel included in this destiny.

## **History and Purpose of Girl Scouting**

The Girl Scouts of the USA was started in 1912 by Juliette Gordon Low. Low had traveled to England and met Boy Scout founder Robert Baden-Powell who encouraged her enthusiasm to bring the fun of scouting to girls in America. Open to any girl aged 5 - 17; Girl Scouts is an organization whose mission is to “build girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place.”<sup>2</sup> The mission is achieved by providing fun and educational leadership activities chosen by the interests of the girls. Over the last century, Girl Scouts became hugely popular in America and today there are 3.2 million Girl Scouts in the USA and “through its membership in the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS), Girl Scouts of the USA is part of a worldwide family of 10 million girls and adults in 145 countries.”<sup>3</sup>

Diversifying the membership of Girl Scouting has long been an integral part of the Movement. Low began the program during times of segregation and long before the civil rights laws were passed yet she “ensured that African-American, American Indian and Hispanic girls were able to become Girl Scouts. She led efforts to make scouting available to girls who lived in rural and urban areas, to girls who were rich, middle class and poor, and to girls who were born in this country as well as immigrants,” (Cloninger, 2011). Today, Muslim girls are following in the footsteps of other immigrant groups by joining the Girl Scouts in order to feel more accepted or Americanized. According to an article in the online New York Times, “Scattered Muslim communities across the United States are forming Girl Scout troops as a sort of assimilation tool to help girls who often feel alienated from the mainstream culture, and to give Muslims a neighborly aura,” (November 28, 2007).

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The leadership structure of the organization's volunteers, paid staff and governing board is also committed to diversity. "Diversity means representation of different individuals, but that does not mean all are included or thought of or treated equally. Inclusion is taking diversity a step further by incorporating, valuing, understanding and utilizing those individual differences," (Gottlieb, 2011). The idea of inclusion is also a significant area to consider when preparing activity options for girls in this age group.

### **Adolescent Girls Aged 11 – 14**

To better understand the uniqueness of the adolescent girls you will be leading, it is important to take an interest in how they develop psychologically at their age. I recommend you read the psychological developmental theories of John Piaget and Erik Erikson. Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development spans the entirety of the human lifespan and his staged theory centers on the development of the human ego identity. The adolescent's particular crisis concentrates on finding their identity vs. role confusion. Girls this age are yearning to find their identity or "seek their true selves through peer groups, clubs, religion, political movements, and so on," (Miller, 2002, p. 155). Working on this project with others in their Girl Scout troop may offer them a unique way to explore their individuality as it relates to their cultural heritage. Also, Jean Piaget's cognitive developmental stages explain how children process, or learn, new information. Understanding that adolescents are able think abstractly and are capable of hypothetic and deductive reasoning will help you, as a leader, ask the girls meaningful questions about what they are learning.

I also recommend an interesting book *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* written by Dr. Mary Pipher, a clinical psychologist. "Psychology has a long history of

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ignoring girls this age. Until recently adolescent girls haven't been studied by academics, and they have long baffled therapists. Because they are secretive with adults and full of contradictions, they are difficult to study. So much is happening internally that's not communicated on the surface," (Pipher 1994, p. 21). Girls are more wary of revealing their opinions and thoughts at this age because they often want to fit in to whatever the popular opinion is, so be sure to give them plenty of time to build trust within the group and, if needed, to allow them to decline to openly share their opinions.

### **Learning Objectives**

As stated above, the goal is for your girls to learn about the Middle-Eastern cultures of the newest American immigrants to their neighborhood and for them to explore their own cultural differences and similarities. In Scouting, we reward girls for what they learn by giving them a symbol of that learning, usually through specially designed badges or pins they can wear on their Girl Scout uniforms or sashes. The girls earn these recognitions by choosing to complete a series of activities relating to the subject matter. For this particular project, girls will be able to earn a badge which depicts the Statue of Liberty and the words "Just like U.S." The design intends to represent America's historic identity as a haven for immigrants as well as the hope for embracing the idea that despite our differences, we are also alike.

Our learning objectives will be to relate the four Girl Scout program goals listed above to the ideas of Banks (1995) who describes five primary dimensions of multicultural education:<sup>4</sup>

1. **Content integration** – describes a teacher's efforts to integrate examples and content from a variety of cultures and groups when they teach particular subjects (relates to girls choosing from a variety of activities and the 2<sup>nd</sup> program goal).
2. **The knowledge of the construction process** – whereby teachers aide students in understanding how implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, and bias influence the constructed knowledge within a particular discipline (relates to leaders competency).

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3. **Prejudice reduction** – which highlights the teacher’s focus on the characteristics of students’ racial attitudes (reflects program goals 1 & 2).
4. **An equity pedagogy** – as a goal of the teacher who prioritizes the academic achievement of all students (parallels the ideals of girl scout leader training)
5. **An empowering school culture** - which is the attention paid by the entire school to issues of equity and interactions between members of the school community across ethnic and racial lines, for the express purpose of developing a school culture of empowerment for all students, in particular those students from disenfranchised groups in society (reflects the Girl Scout Law and diversity policies of the organization).

Another thing to consider is that the girls should be encouraged to draw their own conclusions about the information given them without judgment or forced to accept your (right or wrong) attitudes towards the cultural content. Hoffman (1996) advocates that the teaching of culture be approached from a holistic perspective, thereby allowing students to draw their own conclusions and abstractions from the evidence. This approach, she argues, reduces a pervasive tendency in so-called multicultural texts to “force feed proper attitudes or principles without grounding in knowledge base or context.”

### **Learning Outcomes**

Due to the nature of adolescent girls as described by Pipher, assessing whether or not they are internalizing what they are learning is hard. However, I do believe the girls will respond to direct questions regarding their ideas about how others or the world in general can become more inclusive. Here is where writing their ideas down will be a tangible way to assess whether or not they are absorbing the lesson. Also, make sure to provide opportunities for the girls to share thoughts that aren’t directed at their personal story, as they may feel freer to share. The outcome then, is for girls to speak out regarding the ideas represented in the topic.

According to the Girl Scout Research Institute, “Cadette (ages 11-14) and Senior Girl Scouts (ages 14-17) said troop activities gave them much greater levels of experiencing leadership, respect for others, feelings of belonging, and values/decision-making than school

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activities,” (Hwalek and Minnick, 1997). “Active” is the primary goal here. Girls don’t want scouting activities to mirror school work. Field trips, web-surfing, cooking, crafts etc. are all active learning opportunities girls will enjoy and will want to participate in. If you find the girls are dragging their feet in choosing an activity to complete or they are going unfinished, you will know your learning outcome will not be achieved.

### **Activity Options**

First, girls should be able to choose to explore a variety of cultural groups from the Middle-East. All Arab people or Islamic followers do not have the same cultural background. As Jerry Aldridge and Charles Calhoun (2000) suggest in their article 15 Misconceptions About Multicultural Education, it is a common misperception that “people from the same nation or geographic region, or those who speak the same language, share a common culture,” (p. 1). Indeed, in the Detroit Metro area there are many Middle-Eastern tribes and countries represented as well as religions. There may be as many Chaldean churches as there are Muslim mosques.

Second, no matter the assignment, girls should be encouraged to write or journal about the project in a variety of ways. In *A White Teacher Talks About Race*, Julie Landsman (2009) implores we make student’s voices a critical part of the curriculum. “If we make the thoughts, reactions, and words of our students central to the curriculum, we can have deeper discussions of history, philosophy, science and literature,” (p. 51). So be sure to incorporate writing into the activities they choose.

Listed below are a variety of activities and discussion prompts you can use to stimulate interest in the Middle-Eastern cultures. Again, girls should be empowered to choose their own related activities so same room for them to add their own ideas. The idea is to explore many

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aspects of a culture in an age-appropriate way. In all cases, girls should be encouraged to relate how their own culture is similar or different to the new culture they are exploring and hopefully, how understanding the differences will help them to become more accepting of them. The “Middle East” is defined as the Arab World, Iran, Israel, Turkey, and Afghanistan. Encourage girls to explore any of them.

### Resources

1. Girl Scouts of the U.S.A.: Tip Sheet: about Peace Corps Speakers.
2. Middle East Book Awards  
[http://socialscience.tjc.edu/mkho/MEOC/middle\\_east\\_book\\_award.htm](http://socialscience.tjc.edu/mkho/MEOC/middle_east_book_award.htm)
3. *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*, Dr. Mary Pipher
4. Makkah Islamic Superstore (313) 846-3224 · 13300 Michigan Ave, Dearborn, MI
5. Directory of Michigan Soccer Leagues  
[http://www.michigansoccer.net/directory\\_of\\_soccer\\_organization.htm](http://www.michigansoccer.net/directory_of_soccer_organization.htm)
6. Rules of Soccer <http://www.soccer-fans-info.com/soccer-rules.html>
7. Belly Dancing classes in Detroit area: <http://us.bellydanceclasses.net/michigan/detroit/>
8. Service Learning: <http://www.servicelearning.org/>
9. Peace Pals International: <http://wppspeacepals.org/index.html>
10. Pen Pals: <http://www.friendship-by-mail.com/pen-pals-for-kids.html>
11. Middle Eastern Crafts Kids Can Do, Sarah Hartman

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<sup>1</sup>Bergerson, Chris et al. (2001) *Junior Girl Scout Handbook*. Girl Scouts of the USA, New York, N.Y.



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