

- Ibn Batuta has been described as the Marco Polo of the Arab world, traveling throughout the Middle East in the 14th century and keeping detailed records of his observations. Ask students to research the writings of Ibn Batuta in Asia and Africa, and analyze his description of the Great Mosque of Damascus. Students may create a map of his journeys and identify the modern countries he visited. Portions of Batuta's recollections may be found at this web site: www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/batuta.html
- Damascus was conquered many times over its nearly 5,000 year history. Ask students to research the history of Syria and develop a detailed time line outlining the various peoples and empires such as the Babylonians, Romans and Mongols that have controlled it over the centuries.
- Over the course of its history, Aleppo has been besieged and conquered by empire builders, such as Alexander the Great, Tamerlane and Hulagu Khan. Ask groups of students to research and develop biographical sketches of these ancient rulers and to discuss their historic and cultural impact on Syria. Students may create Venn diagrams comparing and contrasting these leaders' military strategies and leadership styles.
- Aleppo was part of the Byzantine Empire, but was captured by Arabs in the seventh century CE and later became a stronghold of Muslim resistance during the Crusades. Saladin, a Kurdish warrior born in Iraq and founder of the Ayyubid dynasty, conquered Aleppo in 1183, thereby reuniting Syria and Egypt under his control. Ask groups of students to read primary sources associated with decisive moments Saladin participated in during the Crusades, such as the Battle of Hattin (1187) and the Capture of Jerusalem (1187). Students may write newspaper headlines and accounts of these events from various perspectives. Excellent primary source material on the Crusades may be found at this web site: www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook1k.html
- In comparison to other states in the Middle East region, Syria is a secular Islamic country with diverse religious traditions. Ask groups of students to research and describe aspects of Syria's Jewish, Christian and Islamic heritage and to generate position papers analyzing the extent to which religious freedoms and human rights are being protected in the country. Human Rights Watch provides solid background information on Syria at the following web site: hrw.org/english/docs/2005/01/13/syria9812.htm

Suggested Internet Resources

Periodically, Internet Resources are updated on our web site at www.LibraryVideo.com

- www.brown.edu/Departments/Anthropology/Petra/
Brown University offers "Petra: The Great Temple Excavation," which includes detailed summaries on a series of archaeological digs done at the Great Temple under the auspices of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities.
- www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/naba/hd_naba.htm
The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York provides information, images and links regarding the world of the ancient Nabateans through its exhibit "The Year One: Art of the Ancient World East and West."
- www.msu.edu/user/zayzafo1/travel/damas.htm
#MYTHS%20ABOUT%20DAMASCUS
Michigan State University's "Damascus, The Most Ancient Inhabited City" has a wealth of information about this historic city, including myths, markets and religious sites.

Suggested Print Resources

- Keenan, Brigid. *Damascus: Hidden Treasures of the Old City*. Thames and Hudson, New York, NY; 2000.
- Skinner, Patricia. *Jordan*. Gareth Stevens Publishers, Milwaukee, WI; 2003.
- Taylor, Jane. *Petra and the Lost Kingdom of the Nabateans*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA; 2002.

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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- | | |
|---|---|
| • ANCIENT CITIES OF THE ARAB WORLD, VOLUME I | • ARAB DYNASTIES |
| • ANCIENT CITIES OF THE ARAB WORLD, VOLUME II | • ART & ARCHITECTURE OF THE ARAB WORLD, VOLUME I |
| • ANCIENT TRADE ROUTES OF THE ARAB WORLD | • ART & ARCHITECTURE OF THE ARAB WORLD, VOLUME II |

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ANCIENT CITIES OF THE ARAB WORLD, VOLUME I

Grades 7 & up

This guide is a supplement designed for teachers to use when presenting programs in the series, *The Arab World*.

Before Viewing: Give students an introduction to the topic by relaying aspects of the show overview to them. Select vocabulary to provide a focus for students when they view the program.

After Viewing: Review the program and vocabulary, and use the follow-up activities to inspire continued discussion. Encourage students to research the topic further with the Internet and print resources provided.



Program Overview

Petra, Jordan and Damascus and Aleppo in Syria are cities with histories that stretch back for thousands of years. Each city developed primarily because of its prime location on ancient trade routes that linked the Far East, Middle East and Mediterranean. Arabs in these cities served as middlemen in commercial activity such as the spice or frankincense trade, or provided *caravanseerai* and water for weary travelers. While Petra is now a wilderness populated by local Bedouin, Damascus and Aleppo are considered two of the longest continually inhabited cities in the world.

Episode 1: Petra

The Nabateans were a nomadic tribe who settled in present-day Jordan and northern Arabia. They grew rich from facilitating commerce through their territory, and with their wealth, carved the unique capital city of Petra from red rock, including temples, palaces and tombs. At the height of its power (9 BCE–40 CE), approximately 20,000 people lived in Petra. Petra remained an independent city until it was absorbed into the Roman Empire in 106 CE. Petra later declined and was abandoned by the Nabateans in the 4th century after trade routes shifted north. The city was not discovered again by Europeans until the early 19th century.

Vocabulary

bedouin — A member of a nomadic Arab group living in Arabia, North Africa or the Sahara region.

Nabatean — A nomadic tribe that settled in the Naqab desert, northern Arabia and southern Jordan, where it established Petra as its capital.

necropolis — From the Greek, meaning “city of the dead,” an elaborate burial place in an ancient city.

Dushara — The sun-god of the Nabateans, it was represented by a large, four-cornered rock.

Siq — From the Arabic, meaning “canyon,” referring to a long, narrow gorge, known as the “Gorge of Trial” that is the only entrance to the ancient city of Petra.

Khazneh — A rock-cut building also known as the Treasury, which served as a royal temple for a Nabatean king of Petra.

El-Dier — A famous ruin in Petra that functioned as a building of worship dedicated to Nabatean King Obodias.

Episode 2: Damascus

Damascus, the capital of Syria, is a large metropolis in the Middle East that originated thousands of years ago near the Barada River, which fed a large oasis on the edge of the forbidding Sahara desert. The city’s rich water supply allowed it to become a great trading center — an important stop for the spice and frankincense caravans. In addition to the city’s vibrant commercial life, Damascus — sometimes called the Mother of All Cities — features the Great Mosque, one of the largest and most sacred holy places in the Islamic world.

Vocabulary

Islam — A religion practiced by more than one billion Muslims, “Islam” comes from the Arabic word for surrender.

Ibn Jubair — A famous Arab geographer and traveler who wrote of his visit to Damascus in the 12th century.

souk — A word that means “marketplace” in Arabic.

frankincense — The sticky substance obtained from various trees in Arabia or East Africa, which emits a sweet smell when burned.

caravanseerai — An important public facility where Middle Eastern travelers rest and store their animals and goods.

Umayyad Mosque — The “Great Mosque” of Damascus which was built in the early eighth century by the Umayyad caliph al-Walid.

Mecca — Located in Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Muhammad and the holiest city in Islam.

Allah — A word that means “the God” in Arabic.

Episode 3: Aleppo

Aleppo is the second-largest city in Syria and has a rich and ancient past. Some consider Aleppo, not Damascus, to be the longest continually-inhabited city in the world, with a history that dates to the 3rd millennium BCE. With its location in northern Syria, Aleppo was at the center of ancient trade routes, making it attractive and vulnerable to ancient empire builders such as the Assyrians, Seleucids and Romans, and it is noted today for its many miles of covered bazaars. Aleppo is also known as a vibrant cultural center, which includes a major Islamic university and museums featuring a treasure trove of archaeological finds from the area.

Vocabulary

sbeikh — A title of respect for the leader of an Arabic village or family.

muezzin — The official who calls Muslims to daily prayer.

Mongols — Members of an ethnic group from Central Asia known for its nomadic ways and formation of one of the largest empires in world history.

caliph — A successor to Muhammad who carried forth the message of Islam after his death.

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Mamelukes — Slave soldiers that controlled several Islamic states during the Middle Ages. Also spelled “Mamluk.”

Follow-up Discussion Questions

- Historians still know relatively little about Nabatean society. Ask students to brainstorm ways archaeologists could learn more about this ancient Middle Eastern culture. In general, what type of artifacts could help us draw relevant conclusions about ancient peoples?
- Ask students to reflect on why the Nabateans called Petra “Raqmu” or “the place of colored stripes.” Describe the natural conditions that cause this phenomenon to occur.
- In the 12th century, Arab traveler Ibn Jubair described Damascus as “a city that is a symbol of beauty, of rich blessings, of the fullness of life.” Ask students to analyze cultural and architectural aspects of Damascus they believe may have sparked Jubair’s conclusions. As a follow up, students may note a city they believe has the same type of positive characteristics as Damascus.
- Ask students to discuss the significance of the city of Damascus to the Islamic community. Why do devout Muslims make a pilgrimage to the city? Brainstorm other major world religious sites and analyze the importance of ritualistic pilgrimages to these places by the faithful.
- The narrator describes the bazaar in Aleppo as “life itself.” Ask students to discuss the social, cultural and economic importance of the marketplace in Aleppo.

Follow-up Activities

- The most important and scarcest resource for any desert community is water and the inhospitable region surrounding Petra receives only a few centimeters of rain each year. Despite living in this severe environment, the Nabateans were able to develop a thriving city that was home to many thousands of people. Ask students to research the Nabatean water system and to draw diagrams depicting their methods of obtaining water. A detailed description of the Nabatean water system may be found at this web site:
www.geotimes.org/june04/feature_petra.html
- T.E. Lawrence, also known as Lawrence of Arabia, served as a British officer in the Middle East during World War I and wrote extensively about his experiences. Read portions of Lawrence’s classic *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, and ask students to analyze the language he uses to describe southern Jordan, including the city of Petra. As a follow-up, after viewing the program, students may write their own creative descriptions of Petra.

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