

World On Trial: Headscarf Law Episode



[The Center for Global Studies](#), a Title VI National Resource Center at the Pennsylvania State University, is committed to enhancing global perspectives in K-12 classrooms in the state of Pennsylvania. We are pleased to have coordinated the development of curricular materials for the World on Trial: Headscarf Law episode.

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Grade Level: 7-12

Concept Areas: Social Studies, Civil Rights, Women's Rights, Cultural Studies, Globalization, Religion, Immigration

Key Concepts: This lesson plan is intended for use in conjunction with the World on Trial: Headscarf Law Episode. In 2004, the French government banned the conspicuous display of religious symbols in public schools. This most notably affected the right of young Muslim women to wear traditional headscarves or other forms of cover. Students will research the practice of covering and the motivation for the ban. They will then view a trial-format debate between experts in the World on Trial episode. Finally, they will analyze the arguments presented by both sides and register their own opinion in the ongoing debate.

Vocabulary:

Laïcité - French policy of secularism or “freedom from religion”

Law of the Brothers - social pressure to conform exerted by Muslim men on Muslim women

Cover - general term for various degrees of modest clothing and head covering required of Muslim women

Hijab - both a common type of headscarf worn by Muslim women and the practice of wearing it

Paternalism - Social structure in which men hold authority

Standards:

PA 5.1.7.A *Cite functional examples of how the rule of law protects property rights, individual rights, and the common good*

PA 5.2.7.A *Compare and contrast rights and responsibilities of citizenship in the community, state, and nation*

PA 8.1.7.B *Identify and use primary and secondary sources to analyze multiple points of view for historical events*

PA 8.1.8.B *Compare and contrast a historical event, using multiple points of view from primary and secondary sources*

PA 8.4.7.C *Differentiate how continuity and change have impacted world history*

- *Belief systems and religions*
- *Commerce and industry*
- *Technology*
- *Politics and Government*
- *Physical and human geography*
- *Social organizations*

PA 8.4.8.D *Compare conflict and cooperation among groups and organizations which have impacted the history and development of the world*

Materials:

- [World on Trial: Headscarf Law Episode](#), on-line
- Computers with internet access
- Copies of *Research Guide* (included in this document)

- Pencils
- Notebook paper

Schedule: Three 45-minute periods.

- Day 1: Introduction and research
- Day 2: Begin watching episode
- Day 3: Finish episode, discuss

Background:

In February 2004, the Parliament of France overwhelmingly passed a resolution banning display of conspicuous religious symbols – large crosses, turbans, yarmulkes, and head scarves – in public schools. The law did not specifically ban Muslim symbols or the headscarves worn by Muslim women, but it became known as the “headscarf law” or “headscarf ban” because this was the symbol most visibly affected. Concerns about headscarves were also a driving force in the law’s creation. (Ganley)

The French constitution and several international human rights agreements which France endorses guarantee citizens freedom of religion and religious expression. These rights can be limited or abrogated in the interest of public safety and tranquility. A similar ban at Istanbul University in Turkey was upheld by the European Court of Human Rights. (BBC)

France has the largest Muslim population in Europe, due significantly to immigration from North Africa after World War II. With such a visible Muslim population, headscarves were the subject of several controversies in recent decades, most notably in 1989 when three girls at a public middle school were suspended for wearing them. No legal precedent resulted from that case. This 2004 law was an attempt to create a standard policy for all of France. (Smith & Wing)

France has a long tradition of *laïcité*, or secularism. This is often interpreted as a desire for freedom from religion in the public sphere. In 2003, French President Jacques Chirac set up a commission headed by Bernard Stasi to investigate the application of *laïcité* in France. The Stasi Commission provided 26 recommendations but only one -- the “headscarf ban” – was taken up by Parliament.

In addition to the desire to preserve the secular nature of French society, proponents of the ban feel that the headscarf is a sign of oppression. The “Law of the Brothers”, whereby Muslim men exert social pressure and potentially physical or mental abuse to force Muslim women to conform to expected behaviors, is another major concern. Many of the law’s supporters cite examples of young girls who wear cover against their will and only in areas where they know the “Law of the Brothers” to be enforced. A government ban, then, acts to free these girls during school hours from the oppression they experience elsewhere in society. (Bennoune)

The practice of covering originates from the Quran and has a long history in Muslim society. According to Islamic scholars who subscribe to the practice, the Quran provides examples of covering as a sign of modesty and protection against unwanted or improper sexual interest from men. Specifically, they believe Muslim women are directed to cover when in the presence of men outside their own family. Many Muslim women choose to cover out of religious conviction, regardless of any societal pressures to conform. They do not see covering as a sign of oppression, or even an inconvenience. (Hussein, islamcan.com)

Lesson Plan:

- Day 1
 - (5 min) Introduce topic and give a brief overview
 - (15 min) Gather student background knowledge and opinions. Ask any or all of the following questions; write responses on board as necessary.
 - Why do we have freedom of religion?
 - Are there other cases when school students are denied rights?
 - When is it justifiable to limit students' rights?
 - What is the difference between “freedom **of** religion” and “freedom **from** religion”?
 - How much responsibility does the government have to protect citizens from oppression?
 - Can a person oppress herself? Can oppression be voluntary?
 - (25 min) Distribute copies of the Research Guide handout which includes a list of recommended articles. Allow students to complete the Research Guide.
- Day 2
 - (5 min) Prepare students to watch the World on Trial: Headscarf Law episode. They should be ready to take notes on arguments presented by both sides. Finally, remind students to keep an open mind. The most important function of a jury is to set aside preconceptions and give fair consideration to the case at hand.
 - (40 min) Watch World on Trial: Headscarf Law episode. The closing arguments begin 39 minutes into the episode. This is a good place to break between classes.
- Day 3

- (15 min) Watch closing arguments and jury deliberations.
- (25 min) Discuss student reactions. Do they feel the law is justified? Why or why not? Use any or all of the following questions to spark conversation:
 - Do you feel the law was designed to target Muslim girls specifically?
 - One motivation for the law is to protect Muslim girls from the “Law of the Brothers”. If the government is concerned about male behaviors, is it justified in passing a law that primarily affects female behavior?
 - Several jurors voiced a belief that the law does not solve the problem; it only removes it from the school setting. Should the government do more to address oppression felt by Muslim girls pressured to wear headscarves against their will?
 - Out of all the juries who registered verdicts in the episode, only the jury from Yeditepe University in Istanbul, Turkey found in favor of the ban. They favored the ban very strongly, with a 4-1 vote. Even Sciences Po University in Paris, France was narrowly against the ban with a 2-3 decision. Is it surprising that Turkey would support the ban? Why or why not?
- (5 min) Students should register their votes at worldontrial.psu.edu

Assessment: Check research guides for comprehension of facts.

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Handouts: See Research Guide on the next page

WORLD ON TRIAL:

Muslim Headscarf Episode

Research Guide

Prior to watching the episode, research answers to the following questions using the recommended articles as well as any other sources approved by your teacher.

1. What is "covering"? Why do many Muslim women choose to cover?
2. Why does France have such a large Muslim population?
3. What is *laïcité*? Why does France place such heavy emphasis on maintaining secularity?
4. How might Muslim girls be forced to wear cover against their will?
5. What were the motivations for French lawmakers to pass the headscarf ban?

Recommended Articles:

[Why do Muslim Women Wear the Hijab?](http://www.islamfortoday.com/hijabcanada4.htm)

<http://www.islamfortoday.com/hijabcanada4.htm>

[France Bans Headscarves in Schools](http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/02/02/world/main597565.shtml)

<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/02/02/world/main597565.shtml>

[Q&A: Muslim Headscarves](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/3328277.stm)

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