**Experiencing Colonialism: Identity and Resistance in French Algeria**

# – Module Lesson Plan

This module is part of the History for the 21st Century project (H/21). The primary mission of H/21 is to create resources that make the latest knowledge in world history topics accessible to a diverse student body at the introductory level and to support university and college teachers with best practices in inquiry-based learning. You can find out more about H/21 by visiting [www.history21.com](http://www.history21.com).

**Module Overview**

This module offers an introduction to the global process of anti-colonial national awakening leading to political decolonization by exploring the experiences and perspectives of colonized people in French-occupied Algeria across several generations from 1830 to 1930. It explores how the experience of colonialism led people to develop new identities and new forms of resistance, leading eventually to political independence. Students will explore these questions:

* What were the lived experiences of Algerian men, women and children during the period of French colonial rule?
* What resistance strategies and identities did Algerians develop in response to French colonial policies, and how did these strategies and identities evolve over time?
* How did the experience of resisting colonialism across several generations shape Algerians’ visions and dreams for national independence?

The class will begin by brainstorming questions and thinking about the connections between the topic, current events, and student knowledge/interests. Then we will dive into the history of the topic by reading, critically analyzing eyewitness accounts from multiple perspectives, and discussing how they connect to the core questions of the unit. At the end, students will be given a chance to reflect on how this topic connects to other class topics and to consider how what they have learned connects to their own lives, the lives of community members, and the world as a whole.

**Format**

The module employs a student-centered pedagogy. This means that instead of giving the information as a lecture, the teacher initially holds back some of what they know and instead models how to ask questions and how to use primary sources to generate observations, inquiries, and personal reflections. After guiding learners to "discover" the history for themselves, the teacher reinforces key points and fills in gaps at the end of the lesson.

The basic lesson structure is as follows: Each day, we activate students' knowledge and curiosity by asking them to interpret a quote and use it to make predictions about the topic. Then we have a quick review of the content from the prior night’s homework to clarify points of confusion and check for understanding before asking students to explore the day’s topic more deeply through an activity or discussion. At the end, the teacher reinforces the main points and ends by connecting what students have just learned with what they will be exploring next.

The daily activities use varied formats that target different kinds of learners (introvert, extrovert, neurodiverse, English-language learner) and provide a chance for visual, aural, oral, written, group, and individual processing. The activities are adaptable to different classroom settings and have two goals in common:

* Use primary sources to get students engaged and immersed in discovery of how people lived and experienced history
* Allow the teacher to check for understanding by having students show their learning (respond to questions in class + produce written work that can be graded or ungraded)

**Learning Goals**

By the end of this module students should have gained both content knowledge and skill-building practice. The teacher can monitor the progress of these goals through the daily activities and, optionally, by including a final test or essay assessment.

Content:

* Become familiar with the major historical eras and cultural practices of North Africa
* Understand the chronology, causes, and impacts of French colonialism in Algeria
* Construct an understanding of colonization from the perspectives of colonized peoples
* Reflect on how the relationship between “Europeans” and “Muslims” (settlers and subjects) has been historically constructed
* Gain insight into how this history connects to the global history of freedom revolutions

Skills:

* Taking effective notes on readings
* Using credible reference sources to find out basic information about a place or people
* Interpreting primary source quotes and images to understand events from the perspective of multiple historical actors
* Using contextual information to explore the historical experiences of those who left no written records

**The “Flip” and Best Practices**

In order to create an inclusive and culturally responsive classroom, it is important to engage as an instructor in a self-reflective process of critically examining your own practices, feedback language, and so on through an equity lens. One easy principle to start with is the “flip.” Try to “flip” the content to center what has historically been sidelined and to sideline what has historically been dominant. This module has been designed according to the “flip” principle: Instead of including one lesson or reading on “Algerian resistance” in a unit about the French Empire, this unit “flips” to hold students’ sustained focus on diverse Algerian experiences over generations, with one lesson that gives the context of French colonialism.

As you teach this unit, model the flip by keeping North African people and the Mediterranean region at the center of the story. If students question this, you may explain that the unit is not about what European colonialism is or why it happened (although that is also a fascinating topic). This unit is about the *experience* of being colonized, and the people who are the experts in the *experience* of being colonized, are the colonized.

“But, won’t the flip end up removing valuable canonical information?” you may ask. Well, the flip actually helps students of all identities and backgrounds understand and engage with traditional canons more deeply and thoughtfully. The value of the flip is that it helps put *everyone* in a state of growth and transformation in learning and creates what Rudine Sims Bishop, Emily Styles, and others called “windows and mirrors”—a balance of being able to see yourself, and to understand the different experiences of others, in what you are learning. Centering the historically marginalized helps to create deeper, more engaging learning for all.

Using a student-centered inquiry pedagogy and choosing content that centers the historically marginalized are two great first steps to creating an inclusive and self-reflective classroom. Here are some other easy practices that are useful to consider:

* Be aware of the diversity (ethnic, cultural, political, social class) of your students: Avoid making assumptions about a student’s background and beliefs or calling on a student to “represent” a certain group
* Practice to ensure correct pronunciation of unfamiliar people and place names
* Use a “choose to share/brave s[pace](https://www.adl.org/resources/lesson-plan/creating-brave-space)” framework to promote honest discussion and diversity of opinion (which does not equal creating a platform for hurtful or untrue perspectives)
* Counter unconscious bias by seeking input on your syllabus/feedback language/assessment structures

Quick Tip: When exploring a topic that your students may find possibly contentious, uncomfortable, or divisive, instead of launching into a discussion, try using ungraded free writes as a way to allow students to process their personal thoughts/opinions, think of questions, or consider new information. A thoughtful discussion can follow (using “brave space” guidelines), or you can just acknowledge that it's good to have different perspectives and to process what you think by writing, then move on to the next topic.

**Module Map**

**Lesson 1: Introduction to Algeria**

The first lesson of this module will begin by learning about the chronology and context of Algeria using credible online sources. The lesson focuses on the following core questions: Where is Algeria? Who lives there? And how far back does its history go? We will also begin to consider how the experience of colonialism may have shaped this place and the people who live there.

**Lesson 2: Invasion and Empire**

Lesson two begins to dive deeper into Algeria’s history, particularly the invasion of Algeria by the French in the 19th century. The core questions for this lesson are: How did Algerians react and respond to the arrival of the French army? How did the invasion impact Algerian political and economic systems? What was the experience of invasion like?

**Lesson 3: Experiencing Settler Colonialism, 1870-1900**

The next lesson will emphasize the impacts of French colonialism, and how people responded to it. We will consider the role of violence in colonialism (even after the invasion) as well as how colonial subjects resisted French imperialism. Lesson three’s core questions are: What was the experience of the colonial conquest like from the perspective of the colonized? How did colonized people resist and survive the violence of settler rule across generations?

**Lesson 4: Great War Transformations, 1900-1920**

Lesson four focuses on World War I, its causes, how Algerian people were drawn into the war, and its impacts on them. In particular, the lesson focuses on how the experience of the war reshaped the dynamics between colonizers and colonial subjects, focusing on these core questions: What does it mean for colonial subjects to become citizens?  Can Muslims become French citizens through participation in military service? How does the colonial experience of World War I change Algerians’ identity?

**Lesson 5: Visions of a New Nation, 1920-1930**

Lesson five will examine different ways the experience of French colonization and World War I produced differing ideas of Algerian identity, and the debates surrounding what exactly the Algerian nation was. The core questions for lesson five are: How did the experience of colonialism lead Algerians to develop new identities for themselves? How did it lead them to develop new visions for the future in the 20th century?

**Conclusion**

The conclusion to this module asks students to reflect back on the experiences of Algerians living under French settler colonialism, and what looking at this history can help us understand better about the historical processes of colonialism. The lesson also aims to consider how generations of human experiences build on one another, and to encourage students to think about the colonial era as one part of Algeria’s much longer story.