ABOUT THE BOOK

Olivia had always heard stories about Algeria from her maternal grandmother, a Black Foot (a “Pied-Noir,” the French term for Christian and Jewish settlers of French Algeria who emigrated to France after the Algerian War of Independence). After her grandmother’s death, Olivia found some of her grandmother’s journals and letters describing her homeland. Now, ten years later, she resolves to travel to Algeria and experience the country for herself; she arrives alone, with her grandmother's postcards and letters in tow, and a single phone number in her pocket of an Algerian, Djaffar, who will act as her guide. Olivia’s quest to understand her origins will bring her to face questions about heritage, history, shame, friendship, memory, nostalgia, fantasy, the nature of exile, and our unending quest to understand who we are and where we come from.

RATIONALE FOR USING ALGERIA IS BEAUTIFUL LIKE AMERICA FOR SOCIAL STUDIES GRADES 9-12

*Algeria is Beautiful Like America* is a fascinating journey of a search for identity from the point of view of Olivia Burton who was born in France of a French settler family from Algeria. Her family were known as Pieds-Noirs (“Black Feet”); this is the name for French settlers and those born to French settlers in Algeria. This engaging English translation of the original French story discusses several generations of Olivia’s family from 1898 to 1962 and their lives in Algeria. She explores her family's roots in France and Algeria, their decision to flee Algeria for France, and the remarkable hospitality she received during her search of family identity in Algeria four decades after her grandparents and mother left Algeria for France. This engaging story prompts questions about identity and cultural place, who decides who belongs where, and intriguing intercultural comparisons between the frontier expanse of Algeria beyond the Mediterranean coastline with the frontier expanse of the inland American West during colonization.
LEARNING STANDARDS

This teachers' guide, with connections to the Common Core, provides a variety of ways for students in grades 9-12 to interact with this illustrated memoir. Activities and discussion questions are provided for differentiated teaching and learning strategies thematically linked for a multidisciplinary social studies and English unit.

PREREADING ACTIVITIES

**Geography**
Introduce students to maps of Algeria from the 19th century to today.

**History**
Introduce students to 20th century Algerian history and French history in relation to the Pieds-Noirs.

**Algerian War of Independence**
Discuss the different sides of the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962) and have students read the following based on reading level:

For readers below grade level: “Algerian War” [https://www.britannica.com/event/Algerian-War](https://www.britannica.com/event/Algerian-War)

For readers at or below grade level: “Algerian Independence” by Jim Jones [http://courses.wcupa.edu/jones/his312/lectures/algeria.htm](http://courses.wcupa.edu/jones/his312/lectures/algeria.htm)

For readers above grade level: “Footprints of pieds-noirs reach deep into France” by Michael Kimmelmen [https://nyti.ms/2kzwglA](https://nyti.ms/2kzwglA)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Common Core Connections for Discussion Questions
These questions correlate to Common Core Literacy in History/Social Studies Standards for Key Ideas and Details RH.9-10.3, RH.11-12.2; Craft and Structure RH.9-10.5, RH.9-10.6; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas RH.9-10.8.

1. On pages 10-15, Olivia discusses her French family’s place in Algeria. Why do you think she captions a photo on page 13 with the following question: “In Corneille, in the Aurès, 1949. My mother as a child, dressed as a woman of the East. What did the goodly Algerian woman beside her think?”

2. Why do you think people created pejorative terms and stereotypes in Algeria? Olivia brings this up on page 15.

3. Who were the Pied-Noir (“Black Foot”)—French-born Algerians—and what was their role and identity?

4. Why does Olivia’s grandmother say: “My life simply ended in 1962?” (page 15). She does not mean that literally, but she is referring to something symbolic.

5. Why do you think Olivia mentions hearing of “heroic stories” on page 16 of French colonists who wanted to maintain French Algeria and Algerian Arab pro-independence individuals helping each other?

6. Discuss the section that begins where Olivia says: “It was on one of those nights that I started feeling like the daughter of a Black Foot” (p. 21-37). How was Olivia’s self-awareness of her family’s history developing?

7. Discuss the analogy on page 31 in which Olivia makes a cross-cultural comparison between French colonists in Algeria and an indigenous group in North America.

8. Why was Olivia’s grandmother so emotionally attached to her town in Algeria? (see story from beginning to page 39)

9. Discuss what Catholic priest Leclerc says on page 54: “I have no desire to go back to the insane individualism in Europe. I’ve found common ground with Islam here, where sharing and helping your neighbor are respected.” Does this surprise you? What are the implications about European culture today that he is criticizing?

10. Why does Djaffar refer to the Museum of Martyrs as “propaganda”? (p. 61)

11. Why do you think Djaffar says the following to Olivia: “You can’t just show up out of nowhere out there [the Aurès]. You have to know someone. That’s how things work around here” (p. 63). Also, in reference to this, discuss Olivia’s grandmother’s letter excerpted on page 65 where she refers to herself as a pioneer.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS CONTINUED...

12. How do the photos and imagery on pages 72-75 begin to support the theme that “Algeria is beautiful like America”?

13. Why did Olivia's ancestors (great grandparents) move from France to Algeria around 1900? (see pages 76-77 to begin conversation)

14. On page 79, Olivia's grandfather says that he refused to leave “his” (she uses quotes) country Algeria despite the war in Algeria, though he does ultimately leave for France with his family for safety. Do you think Algeria was his country? (Note: On page 82, Djaffar says, “Black Foots are Algerians.”)

15. Who were the Algerian independence movement? What did they want? And why were they attacking the French settlers in the 1950s and 1960s?

16. Djaffar says that the Pied-Noir (Black Foot) identity is a “made-up identity. It covers a lot of very different experiences” (p. 81). What does he mean by this?

17. Djaffar says, “But really, you couldn't be pro-independence if you were a colonist. Unless you had some exceptional political consciousness, it was unthinkable” (p. 116). Discuss this in the context of the following questions: What is a colonial mentality? Were settlers, including their children born and raised in Algeria, legitimate residents? What are the implications of yes or no to that question?

18. Olivia says on page 138, “there was at least one thing that no one misrepresented or idealized: the beauty of this part of the world.” What was idealized?

19. Discuss Olivia's questions that she philosophically poses on page 138 referencing her French settler grandparents from Algeria: “When you’re fifty years old, how do you accept the fact that you’ve been on the wrong side of history? That your entire life has been built on a deep injustice?” Also, do you agree with Olivia's assessment of her grandparents as Pied-Noir?

20. On page 151, Olivia is talking to an individual in her family's former Algiers apartment about why she is visiting Algeria to see where her family came from, and the individual replies: “I understand perfectly. We have a proverb that says: 'When you don't know where you're going, take a look at where you came from.'” Consider this as you answer the question: Why is studying or exploring history important for individuals?

21. Consider the statement by the native Algerian woman in Olivia's family's former apartment: “It was the war. It made everyone crazy. Neither you nor I are to blame for any of it. We must simply move on. And you were right to come back” (p. 153). How is her understanding of history informing her conciliatory and magnanimous acceptance of Olivia?

22. What is the connection that Olivia is making between Algeria and America? (reference pages 31 and 165).
CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

READING
1. Present a selection of articles and book chapters that contextualize *Algeria is Beautiful Like America* with the histories of the French settlers in Algeria (see Asseraf; Fisher & Taub; Hubbell; Jones; Kimmelman; Markham; Schofield).

For Readers Below Grade Level: Students independently read, annotate, and define key terms in each article and primary source document. Students synthesize the texts.

For Readers at Grade Level: Students independently read, annotate, and define key terms in each article and primary source document. Students synthesize the texts.

For Readers Above Grade Level: Students independently read, annotate, and define key terms in each article and primary source document. Students synthesize and examine the texts to form a cohesive understanding that they can present independently.

2. Have students create a timeline of Algeria’s history from 1830 to 1963.

3. Have students individually choose three of the most memorable quotes from Olivia Burton’s book and explain a thematic link between them.


WRITING
1. Have students write an essay that analyzes how the authors identify, develop, and communicate the main theme, points of view, and audience of *Algeria is Beautiful Like America*. Students should provide evidence from the text and illustrations for support of their thesis statements. Students should also use at least one chapter from Hubbell’s *Remembering French Algeria: Pieds-Noirs, Identity, and Exile* for additional historical context.

For Readers Below Grade Level: Have students write a report that summarizes the anthology.

For Readers at Grade Level: Have students write a 5-paragraph essay to identify, explain, and argue a point of view based on this book and one secondary source (see Hubbell) and one primary source (see Asseraf).

For Readers Above Grade Level: Have students write an extended essay that includes two secondary sources (see Hubbell) and two primary sources (see Asseraf). Also, for extra enrichment, include a speech from a politician in the 1950s to 1962, such as a speech from Charles de Gaulle.

2. Have students get into pairs to co-author a creative essay that has prose and poetry to identify how Algeria and the USA have similar and different settler histories based on Olivia Burton’s *Algeria is Beautiful Like America*.

SPEAKING
1. Assign students into groups of two to four to create an audio version of *Algeria is Beautiful Like America*. This audio compilation should include a unique introduction and conclusion.

2. Have students transform their essay from the Writing section into three- to five-minute multimedia presentations using images from *Algeria is Beautiful Like America*.

3. Assign students into groups for Socratic seminars utilizing the discussion questions as well as their own questions.
INTEGRATING

1. As a class, create a poem in a modified “chain” format in which all students contribute to the poem utilizing quotes from *Algeria is Beautiful Like America* and articles and primary sources about the history of Algeria. The prompts for this modified chain poem: How is Algeria beautiful like America? How were/are Algeria and France connected?

2. Assign students individually to gather information about the different sides in the Algerian War for Independence. Using the jigsaw technique, place students into groups of three based on their assigned theme—Pieds-Noir, National Liberation Front, or Charles de Gaulle—and put together each of their “puzzle pieces” in their groups and present to the class what they can say about the two organizing questions: What were the differences between the Pieds-Noir and National Liberation Front in what they each wanted for Algeria? Did they have similarities? What role did Charles de Gaulle play in the Algerian War for Independence?

3. Have students write and illustrate their own short evaluation of Algeria's 20th century history. Have students choose between themes for focus: history of the settler mentality, multicultural identities, and/or post-colonial reconciliation.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT ACTIVITIES

1. Using Burton's *Algeria is Beautiful Like America* and Hubbell's *Remembering French Algeria: Pieds-Noirs, Identity, and Exile* as common texts, have students write a 500 to 1000-word summary of both. Next, have students search for additional reputable secondary (e.g. Kimmelman) and primary sources (e.g. Asseraf) about Algeria from 1830-1962. Students should use those sources to create a detailed outline of Algeria's history, especially in relation to France.

2. Have students get into groups of three. Each group has a member who will research Pieds-Noir, the Algerian National Liberation Front (NLF), and Charles de Gaulle. Each group then compiles their information to create a PowerPoint, Prezi, or Sway presentation and present to the class.

3. Have students read newspaper articles, speeches, and/or letters from people at the time of the Algerian War for Independence (1954-1962). Students should write summaries of each aligned to the who, what, when, where, why, and significance to the history of Algeria and France.

4. Focus on how the Pieds-Noirs view themselves and how others view them. Prompts: How have the Pieds-Noirs perceived themselves and their identity and rights? How has perception changed over the years? Students should read the following four articles (at least) and create a mind-map or outline in which each year includes a paragraph and image to address the prompt. Students should also include a final summary paragraph linking each of the years together for evaluation and presentation. Students should identify each of the following for each year and article in addition to their paragraph summaries: who, what, where, when, why, and intended audience of the news article.

1988: “For Pieds-Noirs, the Anger Endures by James M. Markham (https://nyti.ms/2NE03Pc)
2017: “Echoes in Colonial Conflict in Algeria Reverberate in French Politics” by Max Fisher and Amanda Taub (https://nyti.ms/2pplsBS)

5. Using Asseraf's primary source excerpts, Burton's *Algeria is Beautiful Like America*, Hubbell's book, and Kimmelman's article on Pieds-Noirs, have students write a response and prepare a presentation, seminar discussion, or poster presentation to answer one of the following prompts: What is the legacy of the pieds-noirs and French settler culture? Describe the pieds-noir culture. What did it mean to be both French and Algerian? Why was pieds-noir identity contentious?
Common Core Connections for Differentiated Classroom Extensions

These questions and activities correlate to Common Core:

- Literacy in History/Social Studies Standards for Key Ideas and Details RH.9-10.3, RH.11-12.2; Craft and Structure RH.9-10.5, RH.9-10.6; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas RH.9-10.8.
- ELA Reading: Literature Standards for Key Ideas and Details RL.9-10.3, RL.11-12.1; Craft and Structure RL.9-10.5, RL.11-12.6.
- ELA Reading: Informational Texts Standards for Key Ideas and Details RI.9-10.2, RI.11-12.1; Craft and Structure RI.9-10.6; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas RI.9-10.7.
- Arts Standards for Visual Arts—Responding Anchor Standard #7 to Perceive and Analyze Artistic Work VA:Re.7.2.1a.

REFERENCES


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Olivia Burton is a playwright and theater director and has written and directed documentaries in addition to graphic novels.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Mahi Grand trained at the Met de Pennington workshops, then moved on to set design at the Arts Décoratifs in Paris. In addition to his work as a set designer for theater, film, and dance performances, he has pursued painting, illustration, and sculpture.

GUIDE WRITTEN BY

Adam Attwood, PhD, is an experienced teacher with certification in social studies, English language arts, and visual arts. He is currently chair of the social studies department at Whitfield School in Saint Louis, Missouri where he has taught tenth grade world history since 2015. He was a teacher educator at Washington State University College of Education from 2012-2015 where he taught arts integration theory and methods to preservice K-8 teachers while completing his PhD in education with specialization in cultural studies and social thought. He has also taught at the community college level and in public schools in Washington state. He most recent publication is Social Aesthetics and the School Environment (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

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