



About the USA – Virtual Classroom Newsletter for English Teachers

In this issue:

Celebrating Ramadan in the U.S. | Back to School | 50th Anniversary of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* | Teaching Literature: Arab American Writers | This Month: September 11 | New e-Journal: Dynamic English | Web Chat Station: Independent and Responsible Media | Talking About Media: de.icio.us

Celebrating Ramadan in the U.S. Ramadan Begins on September 13

An estimated two to seven million Muslims live and worship freely in America, the majority of them considering themselves equally Muslim and American. Many Muslim Americans are African-American converts and descendants of converts; 25% of Muslim Americans come from the Arab region. Citizens from virtually every Islamic country are part of the diverse fabric of the United States. Because the U.S. Census does not measure religious affiliation, there is no official estimate of the Muslim population. With the growing number of Muslims has come a growing awareness of Islam's customs. Just a few years ago, Ramadan was practically unknown in the U.S., but today Americans are quickly becoming aware of its importance to their Muslim friends and neighbors. Many newspapers list community Ramadan activities, sometimes noting Christian churches where members are asked to remember their Muslim neighbors and to be mindful of their holy celebrations. Millions of children in public schools learn about Ramadan and come to understand its importance to their Muslim classmates.

Muslims in the United States - Religious Tolerance

Muslims in America: "Assimilated and Moderate" - A recent Pew Center Study ("[Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream](#)") says Muslims living in America are well integrated and largely assimilated. Seventy-one percent of American Muslims said they believe that one can succeed in America if one works hard. The survey of Muslim Americans finds them to be largely moderate with respect to many of the issues that have divided Muslims and Westerners around the world.

Links

- The [Arab American Institute](#) (AAI) represents the policy and community interests of Arab Americans throughout the United States.
- Council on Islamic Education: [Information for Educators](#)
- Harvard University: [Pluralism Project](#)
- PBS: [Muhammad - Legacy of a Prophet](#)

Articles

- USINFO: [American Muslims Embrace Diversity and Decry Stereotypes](#)
- USINFO: [America's Extensive Islamic Heritage Detailed in Exhibitions](#)

Pew Report: American Dream Still Alive and Well for Immigrants

USINFO: Immigrants to the U.S. continue to find a land of opportunity both for themselves and for their children, according to a new report. "America offers dramatic mobility for immigrants. The great story of America is that it still offers a job to first-generation immigrants and better jobs to their children." Report by the *Economic Mobility Project*.

Link [Economic Mobility of Immigrants in the United States](#)
(Pew Charitable Trust: Economic Mobility Project)

Essay "[What Has Happened to the American Dream?](#)"

"No single individual ... and no single group has an exclusive claim to the American dream. But we have all, I think, a single vision of what it is, not merely as a hope and an aspiration, but as a way of life, which we can come ever closer to attaining its ideal form if ..." (Former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, 1961)



© At the Islamic Center of New Mexico, women worship at an interfaith prayer service. (AP/WWP)

Ramadan is the 9th month of the Islamic lunar calendar during which Muslims fast daily from dawn to sunset as part of an effort towards self-purification and betterment. The holiday at the end of Ramadan is known as *Eid al-Fitr*. Ramadan is believed to be the month in which the first verses of the *Holy Qur'an* (the divine scripture) were revealed by Allah to Prophet Muhammad (570-632 C.E.). [More](#) (Council on Islamic Education)

Article

- [Want to Understand Islam? Start Here.](#) By John L. Esposito, Washington Post, July 22, 2007

Who Are Arab Americans?

Arab Americans are as diverse as the national origins and immigration experiences that have shaped their ethnic identity in the United States, with religious affiliation being one of the most defining factors. Arab Americans constitute an ethnicity made up of several waves of immigrants from the Arabic-speaking countries of southwestern Asia and North Africa that have been settling in the United States since the 1880s. More than 80 percent are U.S. citizens and over half of them are Christian Arabs. ([Arab American Institute](#))

Links

- [The American Dream in 2004:](#) A Survey of the American People. Nat. League of Cities.
- [American Dream Through the Decades & What is the American Dream?](#) LOC Learning Page:
- [The American Dream](#) British Association for American Studies
- [Who Wants to Be a Millionaire: Changing Conceptions of the American Dream](#) American Studies Today online:

Article

- [In Search of the American Dream](#) (The Atlantic Monthly, May 2007)



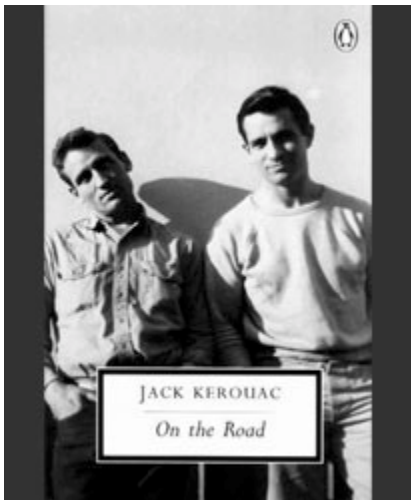
© U.S. Census Bureau

Immigrant Children at School

Article A Different World. Adele M Brodtkin, Scholastic Parent & Child, Nov 2006. Brodtkin discusses ways how to help a child adjust to new life in a foreign place, especially at school. For better or worse, school has historically helped immigrant children adjust and assimilate into American society. In the best case, these children achieve a balance between feeling they belong with their peer group and retaining pride and loyalty to family.

* [Download article](#)

Facts In the United States, 10.5 million school-age children speak a language other than English at home (one in five in this age group). 7.5 million of them speak Spanish at home. (2005 American Community Survey)



© Penguin

For the 50th anniversary of its publication, Kerouac's *On the Road* scroll is on the road.



© NPR - Legend has it that Kerouac wrote *On the Road* in three weeks, typing it almost nonstop on a 120-foot roll of paper. The truth is that the book actually had a much longer, bumpier journey from inspiration to publication, complete with multiple rewrites, repeated rejections ... [More](#)

Back to School

For most elementary and secondary school students in the United States, the Labor Day weekend heralds the end of summer vacation. (Labor Day is the first Monday in September.)

This fall, 55.8 million students will be enrolled in the nation's elementary and high schools (grades K-12). While 18 million students are projected to enroll in U.S. colleges and universities; up from 12.8 million 20 years ago. In 2006, there were 6.8 million teachers in the United States. Some 2.7 million taught at the elementary and middle school level. The remainder included those teaching at the postsecondary, secondary and preschool and kindergarten levels. (U.S. Census Bureau: [Facts for Features: Back to School 2007-2008](#))

Back-to-school time is eagerly anticipated by most students — catching up with friends, making new ones and settling into a new daily routine.

But what would life be like without an education? Over a hundred million children learn the answer each year. One in four children in developing countries does not complete five years of basic education and there are nearly one billion illiterate adults – or one sixth of the world's people. 46% of girls in the world's poorest countries have no access to primary education.

Through the **Millennium Campaign: [Achieve universal primary education](#)**. 191 nations have set a goal of free and compulsory education for every child on earth by 2015. Investigate the status of primary education worldwide in the [Interactive Map](#).

50th Anniversary of *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac

One of American literature's landmark novels, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* turns 50 in September 2007. Reading *On the Road* - which has been called "the bible of the Beat generation" – has become a rite of passage.

On September 5, 1957, the New York Times published a lengthy review of *On the Road*, the second novel by Jack Kerouac. The reviewer, Gilbert Millstein, called it "the most beautifully executed, the clearest and the most important utterance yet made by the generation Kerouac himself named years ago as "beat", and whose principal avatar he is."

In [America's First King of the Road](#) (The Observer, August 5, 2007), Sean O'Hagan recalls how "fifty years ago Jack Kerouac's dazzling novel *On the Road* became the blueprint for the Beat generation and shaped America's youth culture for decades. It influenced scores of artists, musicians and film-makers, but how does it resonate with young people today?"

Articles

- [Road Rules](#) By David Gates, Newsweek, August 13, 2007: "This book has stayed [...] forever young."
- [Hit the road like Jack: Retracing Kerouac's novel on its 50th anniversary](#). By Jerry Shriver, USA Today, June 14, 2007: Shriver wants to "see what's out there and give armchair Kerouac fans an update on the state of roadside culture."
- Biography Resource Center: [Jack Kerouac](#) (Contemporary Authors Online, Thomson Gale, 2007) – "Spontaneous prose" was Kerouac's name for the high-speed writing method he was developing."

The Beats (beatniks): This term refers simultaneously to the rhythm of jazz music, to a sense that post-war society was worn out, and to an interest in new forms of experience through drugs, alcohol, and Eastern mysticism. Beat writers consisted at first of a small group of close friends, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Neal Cassady, and William S. Burroughs; however, the term "Beat Generation", which was reportedly coined by Kerouac, gradually came to represent an entire period in time.

- Links** PBS: [The American Novel - Timeline](#)
 The Beat Museum in San Francisco: [Official Website](#)
 Blues for Peace: [Beat Writers](#)
 RocketNet: [The Beat Page](#)
 USINFO: [US Literature in Brief](#)

Teaching Literature: Arab American Literature

There is a thriving Arab American literary tradition. It goes back to the early years of the 20th century. Arab-American authors draw from both their Arab and American identities in their writings.

To learn more about Arab American literature read **Children of Al-Mahjar: [Arab American Literature Spans a Century](#)** by Elmaz Abinader.

Selected Works by Arab American Writers

Elmaz Abinader has been an influential voice in American literature for the past two decades. Her work— from her memoirs to her poetry to her performance work— resonates with the complexities of U.S. history and America's relationship to other cultures and itself. ([More](#)) *In the Country of My Dreams*, Abinader explores identity, belonging and alienation, and life under occupation or in migration. In *Children of the Roojme: A Family's Journey from Lebanon*, the author presents the story of her family in Lebanon and their emigration to the U.S.

Links Elmaz Abinader's [Homepage](#)
In the Country of My Dreams: [Selected excerpts](#)

Essay **Writers on America:** Elmaz Abinader, [Just off Main Street](#) - "When I was young, my house had a magic door. Outside that door was the small Pennsylvania town where I grew up ..."

Dinarzad's Children: An Anthology of Contemporary Arab American Fiction

by Pauline Kaldas and Khaled Mattawa (Editors)
This anthology offers a mix of new and previously published works, creating a literary road map to Arab American literature today. The nineteen authors represented are of Lebanese, Palestinian, Syrian, Egyptian, and Libyan descent. They tell tales of Muslims and Christians, recent immigrants, fully assimilated Americans, and some who refuse to speak Arabic. Ultimately, this compilation of Arab American stories underlines the similarities between recent immigrants and their American neighbors. It emphasizes all that human beings have in common beneath the veneer of culture.

Naomi Shihab Nye, the daughter of a Palestinian father and an American mother, describes herself as "a wandering poet." Nye gives voice to her experience as an Arab-American through poems about heritage and peace that overflow with a humanitarian spirit. About her work, the poet William Stafford has said, "her poems combine transcendent liveliness and sparkle along with warmth and human insight. She is a champion of the literature of encouragement and heart. Reading her work enhances life." Nye is the author of two acclaimed novels for teens, *Habibi* and *Going Going*.

Links Interview: [One on One with Naomi Shihab Nye](#) for Pif Magazine.
An essay by Nye: [Lights in the Windows](#)

The Language of Baklava, **Diana Abu-Jaber's** vibrant, humorous memoir weaves together stories of being raised by a food-obsessed Jordanian father with tales of Lake Ontario shish kabob cookouts and goat stew feasts under Bedouin tents in the desert. These sensuously evoked repasts, complete with recipes, in turn illuminate the two cultures of Diana's childhood – American and Jordanian – while helping to paint a loving and complex portrait of her impractical, displaced immigrant father who, like many an immigrant before him, cooked to remember the place he came from and to pass that connection on to his children. (Book Description)

Links Diana Abu-Jaber's [Official Website](#)
Reviews of [The Language of Baklava](#)
Read an [excerpt](#)
Listen to the author discuss [The Language of Baklava](#) on NPR
The Language of Baklava - [Discussion Questions](#)

"Times have been challenging for Arab-Americans because our countries of origin are often embroiled in conflict and political controversy. The more difficult it becomes, the bigger role my good story and my beautiful poem play in contributing to a perspective of the events and the people. Readers will often trust literature more than speeches or articles, and I find that my love of writing is interwoven with my responsibility to write." - Elmaz Abinader –

Links

- Arab-American Cultural Institute: [Writers and Literary Works](#)
- PBS - [Arab American Literature](#)
- PBS – [Caught in the Pressfire: Arab Americans](#)

Articles

- **This Hyphen Called My Spinal Cord: Arab-American Literature at the Beginning of the 21st Century.** By David Williams, *World Literature Today*, Jan/Feb 2007, v81, #1, pp55
Arab-American literature offers complex, sometimes excruciating, expressions of how the "old" and "new" worlds are related.
* [Download article](#)
- **Arab American Literature: Gendered Memory in Abinader and Abu-Jaber.** By Salwa Essayah Cherif, *MELUS*, Winter 2003, v28, #4, pp207-229
- Through memoir and fiction, the two women writers explore the transformative power of narration and interfere to break the confining construction of Arabness, which rests on a combination of socio-historical factors and contemporary political events.
* [Download article](#)

"I believe the immigrant's story is compelling to us because it is so consciously undertaken. The immigrant compresses time and space-starting out in one country and then very deliberately starting again, a little later, in another. It's a sort of fantasy to have the chance to re-create yourself, but it's also a nightmare, because so much is lost." - Diana Abu-Jaber –



© NPR - Diana Abu-Jaber and her father, Gus – the cook in her family.

"I don't care how many Bonanzas you watch, nothing gets your brain ready for real America!"

Matussem Ramoud in *Arabian Jazz* (1989)



World Trade Center site in 2006. (© AP/WWP)

USINFO: [StoryCorps Turns Ordinary People into Oral Historians](#) and preserves their stories for future generations through the use of story booths. To honor the victims of 9/11, StoryCorps will preserve at least one personal story about each of the 2,979 people who died at the World Trade Center, at the Pentagon in Washington and on UA Flight 93. The interviews are on the [Library of Congress website](#). Audio files are available on the [Story Corps website](#).



Ginormous is one of about 100 new words to be added to the next printing of *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. © AP Images/Charles Krupa

Webchat Station

Emmy Award-winning journalist Elizabeth O. Colton discusses independent and responsible media
Date: Friday, 31 August 2007, 15:00

An independent and responsible media is critical to healthy democracies. Colton, press attaché to the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad and a former professor of mass communications and journalist, will discuss the relationship between government and the media and good journalistic practices. [ENTER CHAT](#)



usa.usembassy.de

About the USA is a digital collection of background resources on American society, culture, and political processes. In addition to featuring selected websites, it provides access to documents in full text format (E-Texts) on topics ranging from the history of German-American relations, government and politics to travel, holidays and sports.

This newsletter is produced by the Information Resource Centers/U.S. Diplomatic Mission to Germany.

*Request password to download articles: usa.usembassy.de/classroom/newsletter_reg.htm

**Order articles via the IRC in your consular district. See: usa.usembassy.de/classroom/

Questions? Contact: classroom@usembassy.de

THIS MONTH: 9/11 Anniversary

Six years after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States, the world continues to witness the effects of terrorism. Significant security concerns remain in this post-9/11 world. Despite the efforts of terrorists to disrupt peace, the resilience of people around the world has demonstrated that the human spirit will always triumph over tragedy. Reaching out to other religions and religious leaders have brought communities together since the 9/11 attacks.

Since September 11, 2001, a spotlight has been shone on Arab Americans. See [American Dreamers](#), a series of articles on Muslim Americans by *Newsweek* and [Healing the Nation: The Arab American Experience After September 11](#), a report by the Arab American Institute.

Links

- The White House: [Remembering September 11](#)
- Federal Resources for Education Excellence: [September 11](#)
- e-Journal USA: [Rebuilding and Resilience Five Years After 9/11](#)
- US Embassy Berlin: [Side by Side](#). The German reaction to 9/11

Countering Misinformation

The following resources are useful for countering 9/11 misinformation:

- USINFO ["Identifying Misinformation"](#)
- USINFO [The Top September 11 Conspiracy Theories](#).

Dynamic English

An Electronic Journal of the U.S. Department of State, August 2007

"If you think the English language is getting shorter, you may be right. From newsbytes to text-messaging to famously shorter attention spans, we're saying less — and relying on slang more." This edition of eJournal USA, *Dynamic English*, discusses the forces that are shaping and changing everyday English. From cultural, technological and international influences to movies, music and sports, the authors present examples of ways English changes daily. Other articles describe the process of language change, and tips for deciphering slang.

- [About This Issue](#) [Video Feature](#)
- [Download Adobe Acrobat \(PDF\) version](#)
- [PBS: Do You Speak American?](#)

TALKING ABOUT MEDIA



del.icio.us is a **Social Bookmarking Website**

Keep links to your favorite articles, blogs, music, reviews, recipes, and more. **Access** them from any computer on the web. **Share** favorites with friends, family, coworkers, and the del.icio.us community. **Discover** new things. Everything on del.icio.us is someone's favorite — they've already done the work of finding it. So del.icio.us is full of bookmarks about technology, entertainment, useful information, and more. **Explore** and **enjoy**.