

*History*  
UNFOLDING

# THE RISE OF THE MODERN MIDDLE EAST



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**MindSparks**  
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

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# Introduction

## The Middle East in the Modern World

This MindSparks set is the third and final set in our series on the history of Islam and the Middle East. The first set is *The Rise of Islam* (HS819); the second is *Islam and the West in the Age of the Ottomans* (HS835).

This final set focuses on several key themes in the history of the Middle East since the end of the Ottoman Empire during World War I. That demise left behind more than a political vacuum—the Ottomans had ruled the last of the great unifying Islamic empires. Their passing left the region spiritually and culturally disoriented as well as politically fragmented.

Into that vacuum stepped the Western imperial powers who had triumphed in World War I. The nations assigned to them as “mandates” by the League of Nations all won independence within 20 years or so. But in the meantime, Western control reinforced a sense that the very heart of Islam was at the mercy of outsiders—a sense soon to be focused on the new Jewish state of Israel. Pan-Arab nationalism and Islamic radicalism each offered a dream of renewal. And the factor adding to the high-stakes nature of the region’s turmoil was petroleum.

This set uses 12 visual displays to focus on all of these themes in this complex story. Each lesson uses three visual displays to explore one broad topic. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

### **From the Ottomans to the Turkish Nation**

Under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal (later Kemal Atatürk), the Ottoman empire was buried and the new, secularized nation of Turkey emerged. To this day, Turkey still offers one viable option for the rest of the Islamic nations of the Middle East.

### **Decolonization and the Pan-Arab Dream**

Two of the three illustrations here focus on Egypt’s Gamal Abdul Nasser. However, he was only the most prominent and important in a line of key figures who offered Arabs a new dream of empire as a substitute for the fragmented societies left after the demise of the Ottomans.

### **Israel: Big Issue or Big Distraction?**

The founding and building up of Israel is a story of heroic triumph. It also engendered lasting grievances on both sides of a huge divide. But has it also been a big distraction for other Arab leaders, a way to divert the attention of their people from more pressing problems at home? That’s the issue raised in this lesson.

### **Islam and Islamic Radicalism**

The failure of pan-Arab nationalism created another vacuum in the Middle East, especially after Arab defeats in wars with Israel in 1967 and 1973. Since then, a bitterly anti-Western form of Islamic radicalism has grown in strength. It is opposed, often courageously so, by moderate Muslims in the region. It poses a challenge to the Islamic world and to the West alike, and it will undoubtedly do so for some time to come.

## Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

## How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

**A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET** This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

**DIGITAL IMAGES** The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

### **DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS**

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.

*The Rise of the Modern Middle East***OBJECTIVE**

1. Students will understand the drastic changes made by Mustafa Kemal in founding the modern nation of Turkey on the ashes of the Ottoman Empire.

# From the Ottomans to the Turkish Nation

*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Illustrations 1A & 1B**

By the eve of World War I, in 1914, the once-mighty Ottoman Empire had already lost most of its European territory. Egypt had fallen under British control. Much of North Africa was in French or Italian hands. During the war itself, the British helped other Arabs rebel against their Ottoman Turkish rulers, thereby taking much of what was left of that empire outside of Anatolia. Illustration 1B shows British General Edmund Allenby's forces entering Jerusalem in 1917. The Ottoman sultans had long claimed to be caliphs as well—i.e., the heads of all Islam. The Ottoman Empire was the last to provide Islam this kind of political unity. Its collapse created a spiritual as well as political crisis for all of Islam.

**Illustrations 2A & 2B**

After World War I, Greece, backed by the major Western allies, sought to take over much of the Ottomans' Turkish homelands in Anatolia. But army officer Mustafa Kemal rallied the Turks, drove out the Greeks, and founded a new Turkish nation. Kemal, seen in both photos here, was a remarkable leader. His goal was to transform his country totally. He ended both the sultanate and the caliphate, replacing them with a Turkish republic. Religion and government were strictly separated, a radical step in any Islamic land. Many aspects of Western culture were adopted, including a Western alphabet. This alphabet, it was believed, would make spreading literacy to the masses much easier. In Illustration 2B, Kemal himself is seen teaching the new alphabet in an Istanbul park.

**Illustrations 3A & 3B**

The changes Kemal worked for were meant to make Turkey a modern, Westernized nation. Some were major changes for an Islamic land, such as allowing women to remove the veil, vote, hold public office, and take on other new roles—as both illustrations here show. Other changes only seem small, such as adopting Western-style dress or hereditary family names. Kemal himself took the name “Atatürk” (or “Great Turk”). But Kemal did not submit to the West slavishly. For example, he imposed high tariffs to keep out Western imports and encourage his nation's own industries. He sought to use the West's knowledge and cultural heritage to strengthen Turkey, not to make it more dependent on the West.

## Lesson 1—From the Ottomans to the Turkish Nation

# Illustrations 1A & 1B

1B

1A



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

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### Discussing the Illustrations

1. This map tells the tale of the last centuries of the Ottoman Empire. Using the map and your knowledge of history, explain what the Ottoman Empire was and approximately when it was at the height of its power.
2. At its height, the Ottoman Empire was feared by all of Europe. But by the 1800s, it was called the “Sick Man of Europe.” Using the map, explain this change.
3. As one historian put it, “World War I was the end of the road for the Ottomans.” What did he mean?
4. Illustration 1B shows British General Edmund Allenby entering Jerusalem victoriously during World War I. The British and French fought the Ottomans mainly in Arab lands still under Ottoman control. Can you name some current Arab nations located in lands under Ottoman rule in 1914?
5. How does the photo convey the spirit of triumph the British must have felt when the photo was taken?

### Follow-up Activities

1. In 1914, the Ottomans decided to enter the war on the side of the Central Powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary) against Britain, France, and Russia. Why? What if the Ottomans had remained neutral in the war? Read more about the Ottoman decision to enter the war. Pretend you are a former advisor to the sultan who favored joining the Central Powers. It is now 1925; you are in exile in France. Write a long letter to another advisor, also in exile, explaining why you advised the sultan as you did, as well as your views now on that fateful decision.
2. The map (Illustration 1A) shows the Ottoman decline up to 1914. Create a second map showing the results of World War I itself. Show key battles during the war, and draw boundaries for the region as they were finally fixed by the various treaties in the years after the war, especially the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. Use your map along with a copy of the above map in bulletin-board display called “From the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Nation.”