

Sand to Skyrise: A History of the United Arab Emirates

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Objective

This lesson explores the early history of the Emirati people prior to the creation of the UAE federation in 1971 and traces its astonishing growth in this first 43 years as a country. Students will read a variety of secondary sources about the United Arab Emirates and then participate in small group discussions about the major challenges facing the UAE.

Appropriate for use in the following classes:

- AP Human Geography
- World Geography
- World History
- AP World History

TEKS

World History

(25) **World History Culture:** The student understands how the development of ideas has influenced institutions and societies. The student is expected to:

(D) explain how Islam influences law and government in the Muslim World

(29) **Social Studies Skills.** The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:

(F) analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, drawing inferences and conclusions, and developing connections between historical events over time

(30) **Social studies skills.** The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:

(C) interpret and create written, oral and visual presentations of social studies information

(31B) **Social Studies Skills.** The student use a decision-making process to identify a situation that requires a decision, gather information, identify options, predict consequences, and take action to implement a decision.

World Geography

(16) The student understands how the components of culture affect the way people live and shape the characteristics of regions. The student is expected to:

(B) describe elements of culture, including language, religion, beliefs and customs, institutions and technologies

Time Frame: 3 class periods of 90 minutes

- Day 1: Introduction to the geography of the United Arab Emirates and picture analysis
- Day 2: Research on one of four UAE topics with expert group
- Day 3: Small group discussions of the four UAE topics

Day 1 Lesson Plan

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Objectives

Students will: Read “*Part I - The Geography of the United Arab Emirates*”, and map the geography of the UAE. The students will then analyze photographs of present-day United Arab Emirates and formulate ideas about UAE life and society.

Resources

- Copies of “*Part 1 - Geography of the UAE*”
- Copies of “*Geography of the UAE Student Guide*”
- This lesson requires students to have access to a PowerPoint document of the photographs of the UAE. You will also need printed copies of the photographs to distribute to the student groups/partnerships. (see attached PowerPoint for photographs)
- Copies of “*Looking at the United Arab Emirates*” handout.
- Copies of “*Part 2 - History & Culture of the UAE*”
- Copies of “*Part 2 - Student Guide*”

Day 1 Instructions

1. **Reading - Part 1: Geography of the UAE** - Read together as a whole class.
2. **Mapping the UAE** - Once the reading is complete distribute copies of the map and geography questions. Have students work either independently or with a partner to complete the mapping and questions.
3. **Reviewing the Reading** - Briefly review with students what they now know about the United Arab Emirates. Have the students create one question that they would still like to know about the United Arab Emirates.
4. **Picture Analysis** - Divide the class into small groups or pairs and assign each group/partnership four photos and instruct them to examine the images closely and answer the questions on the “*Looking at the United Arab Emirates*” handout as they analyze the images.
5. **Class Discussion/Presentations** - After the groups/partnerships complete the questions, have the class come together in a large group and ask the students to share their observations about their assigned photos with the class. After the students present their observations, have students reflect on what they learned from the photos. Did the student’s ideas or observations about the UAE change because of the photos? What new questions have been raised about the UAE? What are the benefits and the limitations of using photographs as a resource for learning about other countries and societies? Did the photographer have a purpose in taking these photographs? How does the point of view of the photographer shape how we understand and analyze the photographs?

Homework

Students should read Part II documents and complete the accompanying student guide.

Part 1: Geography of the United Arab Emirates

United Arab Emirates People and Geography

The country borders the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf, between Oman and Saudi Arabia on the Arabian peninsula. The United Arab Emirates is a country of approximately 9 million people. Although 9 million people live in the UAE, less than 20% are Emirati citizens. The additional 80% of the population is defined as: other Arab and Iranian 23%, South Asian 50% and expatriates (Westerners and East Asians) 8%.¹

What are some important features of the UAE's geography?

Most of the country is flat desert land, both rocky and sandy, but coastal plains and dry mountains make up part of the terrain in the UAE. Abu Dhabi, by far the largest of the emirates, makes up 87% of the total land area of the country; Ajman, the smallest of the constituent emirates, controls only 100 square miles.

Sand covers the majority of the country's broad desert landscape, with occasional oases appearing in some areas. There is very little vegetation outside of the oasis areas. The UAE has no natural rivers, streams, or major bodies of surface water. The coastline has no deep natural harbors, but suitable harbors have been dredged in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah. The desert climate of the UAE is very hot and dry inland with generally high humidity along the Persian Gulf coast. Rainfall in the country is very low on average, with only four to six inches falling annually. There is considerable seasonal temperature variation throughout the year, with summertime highs often reaching 120°F in the inland deserts, while winter temperatures average 64°F.²

The United Arab Emirates possesses some of the world's largest oil and natural gas reserves, but unlike many of its oil-producing neighbors, the UAE also has well-developed fishing and farming resources. Nearly 98 billion barrels of oil—about 10% of the world's total deposits—lie within the emirates. The federation's rich fisheries, located in both its Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman waters, are nurtured by coral reefs, seagrass beds, and coastal mangroves.³

As with neighboring states in the region, the provision of water is a major concern. Fossil-fuel powered seawater desalination plants provide water for human consumption and irrigation. Wells also tap into the groundwater table. The UAE also shares with its Persian Gulf neighbors problems with beach and ocean pollution from oil spills in the Persian Gulf. With a large percentage of the world's petroleum passing through through the gulf, oil spills remain a grim inevitability.⁴

¹ "World Factbook: United Arab Emirates." Central Intelligence Agency. Central Intelligence Agency. Web. 5 May 2015.

² "United Arab Emirates: Landforms & Climate." *World Geography: Understanding a Changing World*. ABC-CLIO, 2015. Web. 6 May 2015.

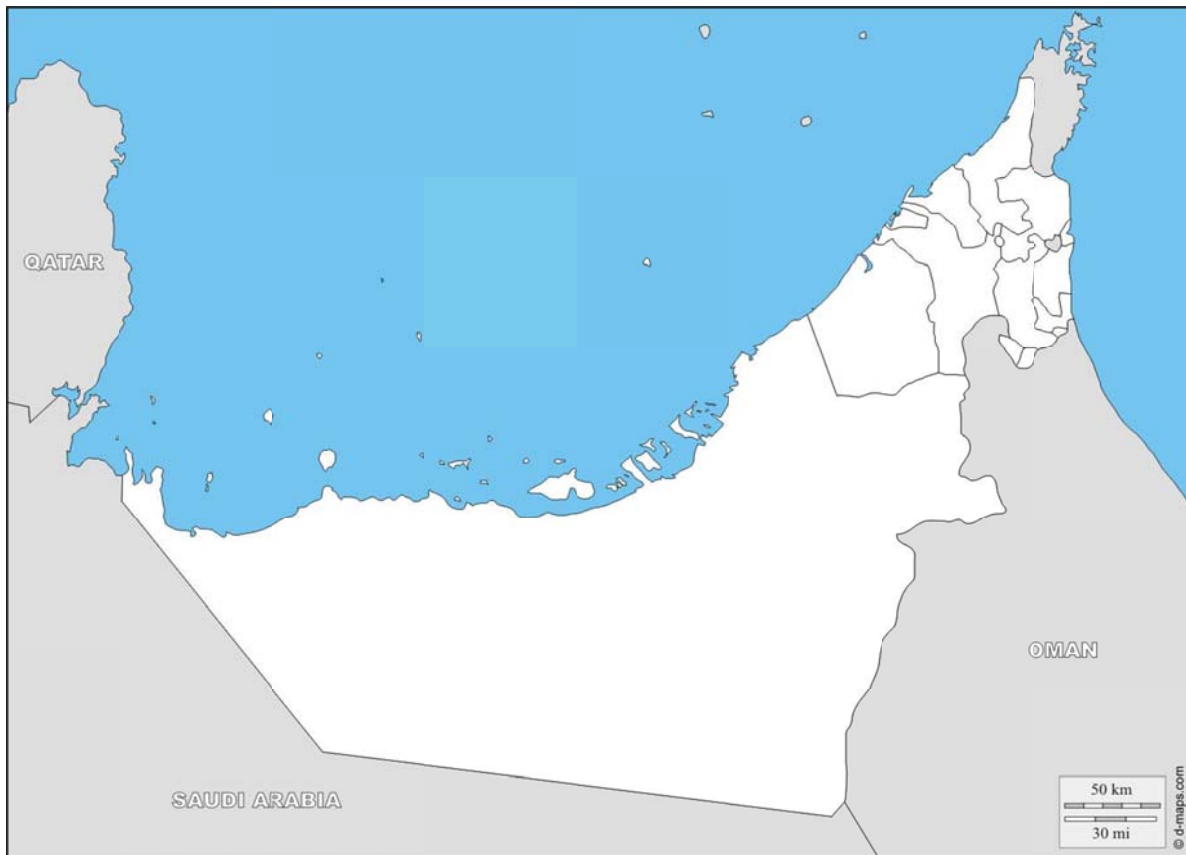
³ "United Arab Emirates: Natural Resources & Agriculture." *World Geography: Understanding a Changing World*. ABC-CLIO, 2015. Web. 6 May 2015.

⁴ "United Arab Emirates: Environment." *World Geography: Understanding a Changing World*. ABC-CLIO, 2015. Web. 6 May 2015.

Geography of the United Arab Emirates

Instructions: *Follow the directions below as you fill in the map. Use an atlas or other resources in your classroom to fill out your map.*

1. List the countries that border the United Arab Emirates.
2. With which country does the United Arab Emirates share the longest border?
 - a. Use the key to estimate the length of the border. _____ Length
3. Label the major body of water that borders the United Arab Emirates.
4. Mark the country's capital city with a star.
5. Based on the map and your reading, give two advantages of the UAE in terms of their geography? Give one disadvantage.



Looking at the United Arab Emirates

Directions: *Examine the photos and answer the following questions for each in the table below. Your group/partner will be asked to share their impressions with the class. The pictures cannot give a complete understanding about UAE society and culture, and so you should therefore be careful about drawing conclusions about the photographs.*

1. Describe what you see in the photo (landscape, architecture, action, setting, etc). If there are people in the photo, what are they doing? How would you describe their appearance? What type of interactions are happening?
2. How does the photo relate to what you know about the United Arab Emirates?
3. Does the photograph offer any clues about life in the United Arab Emirates? Can you learn anything new about the United Arab Emirates from the image?
4. Does this photograph raise any questions for you about the United Arab Emirates?

Picture #1	
Picture #2	
Picture #3	
Picture #4	

Part 2: History & Culture of the United Arab Emirates

Early History

Archeological excavations date the earliest civilization of people living in the area known as the United Arab Emirates between 5500 - 4000 B.C.E. and there is evidence to suggest that the people were connected to neighboring civilizations. Pieces of coloured pottery that have been uncovered were imported from Mesopotamia and date back to 3000 BC.⁵

The coastal areas of the UAE have always been central to the area's development, and became staging posts for trade routes to the interior of the Arabian peninsula. The earliest Christian site in the UAE, known as Sir Bani Yas Island dates to the 7th century. It is thought to be Nestorian. It forms a rare physical link to the diffusion of Christianity, which is estimated to have spread across the peninsula between 50-350 C.E.⁶

Islam is thought to have spread to the region shortly after 630 C.E., when a group of rulers traveled to Medina, converted to Islam and returned to the area. After the spread of Islam into the region, the people of the area became subject to the rule of the caliph empires that would emerge.

The harsh desert environment of the region led to the emergence of nomadic tribal society who subsisted on animal husbandry, agriculture and hunting. These nomadic and tribal groups often fought with each other and settled in oasis areas near water. These settled areas will become the seven states of the UAE—Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras al-Khaimah, Sharjah, and Umm al-Qaiwain.

British Influence in the UAE

During the 17th and 18th centuries, European countries such as the Portuguese often used force to gain access to coastal trade in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf regions. In addition, the region gained the reputation as the "pirate coast" because the inhabitants of the region were primarily interested in profiteering. In 1809 the British signed treaties with local rulers to help combat the piracy along the Persian Gulf coast. Subsequent treaties would be signed in 1843 and 1853. The term Trucial States, was used during this period to define the status of the coastal emirates and has been used until modern times to describe the region. In 1892 another major agreement was established between the Trucial States and the British which allowed the Indian government to handle issues in the region as an agent for the British Government. As part of the agreement, the sheikhs agreed not to dispose of any territory except to the British and not to enter into relationships with any foreign government other than the British without its consent. In return, the British promised to protect the Trucial Coast from all aggression by sea and to help in case of land attack. After India gained independence in 1947, the British Foreign Office took over handling the affairs.⁷

⁵ "History of the Country and Establishment of the Union." The UAE Government Official Website. UAE Government. Web. 5 May 2015.

⁶ "United Arab Emirates." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation. Web. 6 May 2015.

⁷ "United Arab Emirates." *World Geography: Understanding a Changing World*. ABC-CLIO, 2015. Web. 10 May 2015.

Pearl Industry

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, the pearling industry was one of their largest industries. The First World War had a severe impact on the industry, but it was the economic depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s, coupled with the invention of the cultured pearl in Japan, that wiped out the trade. The remnants of the trade eventually faded away shortly after the Second World War, when the newly independent Government of India imposed heavy taxation on pearls imported from the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. The decline of pearling resulted in extreme economic hardship in the trucional states. This economic hardship would provide the basis for the UAE's economic policy after oil was discovered in the 1960s and once the federation was created.⁸

Creation of the UAE

Following World War II, the British gave the emirates autonomy and suggested the seven states establish a more formal federation in the future. By 1966 it had become too expensive for the British government to administer and protect the area. The ruler of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, fearing vulnerability, tried to persuade the British to honour the protection treaties by offering to pay the full costs of keeping the British Armed Forces in the Emirates, but the British refused the offer. Earlier in the 1960s, oil was discovered. The influx of wealth due to the discovery of oil and the withdrawal of the British in the region, inspired Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, to begin to negotiate with the sheikhs of the other states to see if a federation could be formed. Qatar and Bahrain were originally going to join the group of states, but changed their minds and became separate states. December 2, 1971 the six states of Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Sharjah, and Umm al-Qaiwain officially became the UAE. Ras al-Khaimah was the last state to join the federation in February of 1972.⁹

Sheikh Zayed's Vision

Born around 1918 in Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Zayed was the youngest of the four sons of Sheikh Sultan, Ruler of Abu Dhabi from 1922 to 1926. As Sheikh Zayed grew to manhood, he displayed an early thirst for knowledge that took him out into the desert with the bedu tribesmen and into the sea with the fishermen and pearl divers, to learn about the people and the environment in which they lived.¹⁰

One foundation of his philosophy as a leader and statesman was that the resources of the country should be fully used to the benefit of the people. Within this framework, Sheikh Zayed believed that all of the country's citizens have a role to play in its development. Both men and women, he believed, should play their part. Recognizing that in the past a lack of education and development had prevented women from playing a full role in much of the activity of society, he took action to ensure that this situation was addressed rapidly and, under his leadership, the country's women came increasingly to play their part in political and economic life.¹¹

Sheikh Zayed worked tirelessly to conserve the environment and preserve the heritage of the UAE. In addition, he was a firm and dedicated opponent of those who sought to pervert the message of Islam to justify harsh dogmas, intolerance and terrorism. In the realm of the foreign policy of the state, his firmly-held belief in eschewing rhetoric in the search for solutions led the UAE to adopt an approach of seeking to find compromises, and to avoid, wherever possible, a resort to the use of force, whether in the Arab arena or more widely. Under his leadership, therefore, the country became an important

⁸ "United Arab Emirates." *World Geography: Understanding a Changing World*. ABC-CLIO, 2015. Web. 10 May 2015.

⁹ "United Arab Emirates." *World Geography: Understanding a Changing World*. ABC-CLIO, 2015. Web. 10 May 2015.

¹⁰ "History." History. United Arab Emirates Embassy. Web. 21 May 2015.

¹¹ "History." History. United Arab Emirates Embassy. Web. 21 May 2015.

provider of overseas aid, both for the development of infrastructure and for humanitarian relief, whether provided through civilian channels, as in the case of the reconstruction of Iraq following the defeat of the Saddam Hussein government in 2003 or, occasionally, by sending units of the UAE Armed Forces as international peacekeepers, such as to Kosovo in the late 1990s. At the same time, the UAE, under his leadership, showed its preparedness to fight to defend justice, as was seen by its active participation in the war to liberate Kuwait from occupation in 1990/1991.¹²

Government Structure

The arrangement between the seven emirates is a loose federation, in which each sheikh maintains absolute control over his territory, people, and income. The relative wealth of the seven emirates plays a primary role in the allocation of positions within the federal government: the sheikh of Abu Dhabi, the emirate with the most oil production and revenue, has always been the federal president, while the ruler of Dubai, the second-most wealthy of the seven and the federation's commercial center, occupies the vice presidency. There are no political parties, and each ruler governs his emirate by decree, in adherence to sharia, or Islamic law.

Sheikh Zayid died on November 2, 2004 at the age of 86. He was succeeded as UAE president by his son Sheikh Khalifa Nahayan the following day. Until recently, the UAE had not held popular elections (leaders were elected by the Supreme Council of Rulers, comprising the heads of the seven emirates). The country has no political parties. A permanent constitution (provisional since 1971) was adopted in 1996. In December 2006, UAE held its first Federal National Council elections as part of a three-step plan toward democratic reform.¹³

Current Status

Since the oil boom, the nation has become one of the world's wealthiest per capita, developed its infrastructure into that of a modern nation, and shaped its economy into one of the region's strongest. The Emirates have at least 100 billion barrels of oil under their deserts, reserves that are expected to last until the end of the 21st century at current production levels. A leading member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, the United Arab Emirates has nonetheless begun to diversify its economy, becoming a regional center for financial transactions and managing a national overseas investment portfolio of almost \$100 billion. Today, the United Arab Emirates conducts most of its foreign trade with China, Japan, the United States, and South Korea.¹⁴

Culture of the UAE

Despite the heterogeneous nature of the emirates' population, the dominate culture of the ruling classes traces its genealogy from nomadic Bedouins, who over the past two centuries settled and established houses of rule over the regions demarcated by the separate coastal villages. Traditional bedouin's were pastoralists, farmers, and traders. Bedouin tribal groups follow patriarchal lines and were nomadic until the 19th century. Today, more than 85% of the UAE's population is urban, with a large portion of the citizens and resident aliens living in Abu Dhabi and Dubai.¹⁵

¹² "History." History. United Arab Emirates Embassy. Web. 21 May 2015.

¹³ "United Arab Emirates." *World Geography: Understanding a Changing World*. ABC-CLIO, 2015. Web. 10 May 2015.

¹⁴ "United Arab Emirates." *World Geography: Understanding a Changing World*. ABC-CLIO, 2015. Web. 10 May 2015.

¹⁵ Travis, Charles. "United Arab Emirates: People." *World Geography: Understanding a Changing World*. ABC-CLIO, 2015. Web. 10 May 2015.

Religion & Language

The UAE is located in a cultural region of the Sunni sect of Islam, and most Emiratis adhere to this branch of the religion. Most Emirati law follows the dictates of sharia law. The UAE is quite tolerant of other religions and allows the construction of public places of worship for emigrants who follow other religions.

Arabic is the native tongue of the United Arab Emirates, and most citizens speak multiple languages and varieties of Arabic. Due to the country's large immigrant population many languages are spoken such as Farsi, Pashto, Balochi, Tagalog, and Turkish. Due to the UAE's strategic location and dominance in trade and tourism, English is the official language spoken for business.¹⁶

Traditions and Etiquette

Emirati society is divided between *al-muwateneen* (nationals/citizens) and *al-wafedeen* (incomers). In order to distinguish their culture the al-muwateneen wear traditional dress. Men wear the *kandoura*, a white robe and a *ghutra* (headcloth). Emirati women wear a *hijab* and a black cloak called an *abayah*. Emiratis generally stand close and hold hands whilst talking and upon meeting. A typical greeting includes the phrase *al-salam alaykom*, with a handshake and brief nose-to-nose touch. It is also customary to inquire about the health of the individual and their family. Segregation by gender is enforced and etiquette related to greetings and social spaces differs greatly across gender lines. The *majlis* (sitting room) serves as a social and meeting space for men.¹⁷

Marriage and Families

Marriage among Emirati nationals is still usually arranged between tribal kinship groups, and nationals are strongly discouraged from marrying immigrants. (A national marriage fund provides an incentive in the form of a large stipend to young men who marry another Emirati national). Men can take up to four wives, as supported by Islamic theology, but this practice has diminished substantially in contemporary society. Emirati families are now characterized less by extended family systems and generally mirror the nuclear family types prevalent in Western society. However, kinship groups tend to live in the same neighborhoods, and the emirates encourage couples to have large families. It is not unusual today for a woman to bear six or more children. Children are instilled with the values of courtesy and respect for elders, as well as the interpersonal skills to interact within their family's larger kinship group.¹⁸

¹⁶ Travis, Charles. "United Arab Emirates: People." *World Geography: Understanding a Changing World*. ABC-CLIO, 2015. Web. 10 May 2015.

¹⁷ Travis, Charles. "United Arab Emirates: Traditions & Etiquette." *World Geography: Understanding a Changing World*. ABC-CLIO, 2015. Web. 11 May 2015.

¹⁸ Travis, Charles. "United Arab Emirates: Traditions & Etiquette." *World Geography: Understanding a Changing World*. ABC-CLIO, 2015. Web. 21 May 2015.

Part 2: History & Culture of the United Arab Emirates - Student Guide

Vocabulary: *Be sure that you understand these key terms from Part 2 of your reading. Circles ones that you do not know and look up in the class dictionaries.*

Mesopotamia
trucial state
Sunni
ghutrah

Nestorian
federation
al-muwateneen
hijab

Medina
sharia
al-wafedeen
abayah

sheikh
demarcated
kandoura
majlis

1. Describe the government system of the UAE?
2. What were the most important features of Sheikh Zayed's rule?
3. What important changes to the United Arab Emirates society took place between the 1960s and the 1970s?
4. Describe how the UAE has evolved since the formation as a country in 1971?
5. What are some of the biggest issues facing the UAE today?
6. What are some of the elements of UAE culture? How does their culture shape their country?

Day 2-3 Lesson Plans

Sand to Skyrise: A History of the United Arab Emirates

Objectives

Students will analyze the issues that frame the debate about the United Arab Emirates future. Identify underlying values of the options, integrate the arguments and beliefs of the topics into a persuasive and coherent presentation, and work cooperatively within groups to facilitate effective presentations and group discussions.

Handouts:

- Copies of the topic articles for each group
 - Topic 1 – Economy
 - Topic 2 – Human Rights
 - Topic 3 – Education

Day Two Instructions

1. **Reviewing the Reading** - Begin class by reviewing the homework reading. Prompt students to recount what they learned about the UAE's people, history and culture. Ask the students what questions they still have about the UAE.
2. **Group Work** - Form students into three expert groups (groups should be made up of 5-6 students). Assign one topic to each of the groups and give them the relevant readings for their topic. Students are to read and annotate their documents and as a group come up with a minimum of five discussion questions they can use to facilitate a small group discussion with their classmates on day three. During the day three presentations, students will be divided from their expert groups, and so it is important that during this work time the groups prepare a summary of their topic, take notes on the essential information and create discussion questions that will be presented on day three.
3. **Day 2 Homework** - Students should review the work completed in class and make sure they feel confident to present it on day three.

Day Three Instructions

1. **Expert Group Check-in** - have students meet with their expert groups from day two for five minutes to review what information they will be presenting and discussing.
2. **Discussion Circles** - Students will then be shuffled into small discussion groups. Each discussion group will be made up of students from the three topic groups. Depending on the size of your class, there might be two students from the same topic group in the new small discussion groups. Students will be given 5-7 minutes to share/summarize their topic to their discussion group and then have 10 minutes to facilitate a discussion about their topic using the prepared questions from day two. Students will be filling out the discussion group chart during the presentation of the topics and the subsequent discussions.
3. **Assessment** - Students will be graded on their presentation of the topic during the small group presentations, the quality of the discussions prepared by their topic group, and the quality of their annotations of the topic readings.

4. **Discussion Debrief** - Following the small group presentations, debrief with the class about what they learned about the UAE.
5. **Lesson Extension** - As a follow-up assessment, have the student write opinion papers outlining which of the four topics they think should become the main priority for the UAE and argue why the country should pursue that option first.