

# Iraq Heart of The Middle East

## *Geographical Aspects of the Current Political and Economic Crisis in the Middle East: A Map Analysis Activity to Fulfill the Minnesota Graduation Standards*

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### **Overview**

This lesson is designed to enable secondary social studies and geography students to use a National Geographic Society map of Iraq and the Middle East to reach conclusions about the relationships between geography and the current political situation in Iraq and neighboring states. While the connections between this activity and the current political situation in the United States and the "war on terrorism" are direct and obvious this lesson is not about terrorism and the military policy being pursued by the United States and our allies in this region. The lesson is based on the map "Iraq and the Heart of the Middle East" published in January of 2003. This map is available in paper or on line at [www.nationalgeographic.org/Iraq](http://www.nationalgeographic.org/Iraq)

There are several assumptions about students incorporated in the lesson. First and most important it is assumed that the students understand the five fundamental themes of geography (place, location, human-environmental interaction, spatial interaction and region) before beginning. Second it is assumed that the students have had some exposure to map reading prior to this activity. Specifically the assignment assumes students understand map scale, latitude and longitude, and understand the conventions of map symbols. If these conditions are not met teachers will have to do some additional preparation before starting this project.

This exercise is deemed authentic because it involves several skills used outside the classroom and is focused on an aspect of the contemporary conditions of the United States that will involve students on a personal basis.

The activity relates to all aspects of the Minnesota Standards.

### **Preparation**

#### **MATERIALS NEEDED**

1. Inflatable globes or other globes for student use.
2. Copies of NGS map. These maps are available from NGS
3. Worksheet presented below
4. Pieces of string or thread for student to do great circle exercise

### **Narrative of Lesson -- Where is Iraq?**

#### **EXERCISE ONE -- "STUDENTS' MENTAL MAPS OF THE WORLD"**

1. Ask class members to close their eyes and point in the direction of Iraq. Do not make any judgmental statements just ask them to fill in the blank on the worksheet and to remember what direction they pointed to as the lesson proceeds
2. Ask class members to estimate the size of Iraq using some sort of relative term. Assuring them that this is not a test or even a graded activity, ask them to record their belief. (as big as Texas, the size of Minnesota etc – it is about the twice size of MN! -- 70,000 to 80,000 for MN, or about the size of California.)

3. Ask class members to estimate the distance between Minnesota and Baghdad percentage of the distance around the globe, i.e. one tenth, one quarter etc. Minneapolis is about 90 west and 45 north Baghdad is 33 north and 14 east.
4. Ask class members to list the countries that surround Iraq.
5. Ask class members to make some sort of statement about the shape of the country.

#### EXERCISE TWO -- GLOBE ACTIVITY

1. Students check their concept of directions. Pass out pieces of thread so students can do great circle distance and direction versus the direction they pointed to.
2. Have them use string to develop relative size of Iraq to parts of the United States and Europe or other places you have studied.
3. Have the class develop a list of countries surrounding Iraq. Collect globes.

#### Worksheet & Teachers' Guide (Attached)

*Note: While this lesson is written as if each student works alone it is possible and in some cases it may be advisable to have students work together.*

## “Middle East Crossroads of Faith and Conflict”

### NGS Map: Political and Cultural Maps - SIDE 1

1. What is the date of publication and who published the map? *January 2003; National Geographic Society*
2. Read the several text boxes about the countries.
  - a. The short descriptions of the countries tell us what about the interest of the cartographers? *They are interested in economic, political and military issues – some interest in culture.*
  - b. Which countries have the largest populations? *Egypt, Turkey and Iran*
  - c. Which countries have the largest armies? *Egypt, Turkey and Iran*
  - d. Why does Palestine not have an army? *It is not recognized as a state, several militias exist.*
3. Read the text box and map on the “Conflicts”.
  - a. What countries were involved in this geopolitical game? What were the stakes? Why were they interested in competing for this place? *Ottoman, English and French Empires. They believed that empires should be extended to full extent. The British wanted to protect their interests in India, and in the oil of region. The region was divided into English and French spheres of influence.*
  - b. What happened to English and French colonies and puppet governments? *The forces of nationalism resulted in revolutions and several new independent states emerged, others stayed under English protection. Map mis-identified Kuwait as state, it was a protectorate.*
  - c. What role did Israel play in the origination of modern conflicts? *The Jews moved into the British Colony of Palestine and later sought an independent state separate from the State of Palestine which was created after WWII.*
4. Read the text box on the current situation in Iraq.
  - a. What was the impact of the oil resources?
  - b. Why did the neighboring countries not support Iraq wars?
5. Read the text box and map about “Religions”.
  - a. What percent of the region's population is Jewish?
  - b. What percent of the region's population is Christian?
  - c. Where do the Shiite Muslims live?
  - d. How did the Jewish population grow? *Immigration*
  - e. Where did the Jewish immigration come from? *Russia, Europe, North and East Africa*
  - f. What is the effect of the diverse flows of immigrants on the culture of Israel? *Makes it a multi-cultural state even though they have the same religion*

6. Read the text box and map on "Oil and Water".
  - a. Define aquifer. *A layer of stone under ground that is porous and holds water as does a sponge.*
  - b. What land surface features correspond to the major aquifers? *large rivers; high mountain areas that are near oceans*
  - c. Where are the major oil fields? *Persian Gulf to most of southeastern Turkey; others in Egypt, Yemen and Oman*
  - d. What is the pattern of pipelines that connect the oilfields?
  - e. Pipelines major transportation system in region.
  - f. Why is water more important than oil?

### NGS Map: Iraq and the Heart of the Middle East - SIDE 2

1. Find the map legend.
  - a. Why do you think the mapmakers have included special symbols for oil fields and ruins? *Shows resources and indication of history of place. Note: For some reason the mapmakers did not include the symbol for dams in the key but they are obvious when seen on the map.*
  - b. How is elevation above sea level shown on this map? *Shadow method shows relief; numbers give elevation.*
  - c. Why is elevation shown with this technique? *It allows readers to visualize places without filling the map with contour lines.*
2. Location and Nature of Iraq
  - a. What is the relative location of the country, i.e. what are the primary features of its neighbors Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Syria Kuwait and Jordan?
  - b. What is the distance between Baghdad and Jerusalem? *approximately 550 miles*
  - c. What is the distance between Baghdad and the *No Fly Zone*?
3. What are the chief physical features of Iraq? *1) Low mountainous regions; 2) Large river valleys; 3) Reservoirs; 4) Marsh; 5) One narrow access to international waters; 6) High elevations at edge of nation; 7) Dry - (sand dunes, dry lakes); and 9) Interior drainage*
4. Locate the Shatt al Arub.
5. Describe and discuss the borders of Iraq.
  - a. Where are the borders geometric? *Southern and western where they run through the desert regions.*

- b. Where do the borders follow topographic features? *Northern and eastern where the mountains are high they seem to either follow rivers or ridgelines.*
- c. Where are the boundaries in dispute? Kuwait; and the two *No Fly Zones*