Telling the Tale: Teaching Egyptian/Arabic Literature at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond 2008 & 2009.

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This paper will delineate the various factors involved in teaching Arabic Literature to American students at both the under-graduate and graduate levels. It will focus on the teaching process as a collaborative effort to synthesize old and new ideas, question assumptions, and explore ways of developing cross-cultural awareness and understanding. Consequently, additional readings and research in theory, criticism, history, religious studies, current events, and popular culture were necessary to address key information in the literary works and help to understand and contextualize them. It will also show how the pedagogical approach has been primarily, but not exclusively, an anthropology of literature viewing the various writings with a cultural lens, to help identify, understand and analyze the cultural framework of the texts in question. The class examined issues of gender, class, education, nationalism and religion and applied various critical strategies for reading, discussing and writing about these texts, including exploration of multicultural online resources. Finally, the paper will show how the courses have served as an introduction to the Arab world and culture for students who have little or no background on either. It also expounded the richness of Arab culture and the diversity of Arab society through an examination of a number of novels by Arab women authors who have written themselves and their characters into the global community, adapting a wide range of environments, crossing both physical and virtual borders and exploring cross-historical and cross-cultural connections among Arab and American women.