

The Illustrator's Notebook

by Mohieddin Ellabbad



Creative Journaling Activities
for Students in Grades 5-8

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The Illustrator's Notebook Note to Educators ~ February 2008

This guide provides 30 activities related to the book by Mohieddin Ellabbad, *The Illustrator's Notebook* (Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2006), available at the publisher's web site: <http://www.groundwoodbooks.com>.

From the moment I picked up *The Illustrator's Notebook*, I fell in love with Mohieddin Ellabbad's innovative perspectives and his compelling invitations to the reader to dig below the surface of everyday life. I then embarked on developing these activities, based on Mr. Ellabbad's writings and illustrations, to encourage young readers to reflect on their beliefs and values as well as learn about the Arab world and Islam through art and writing.

Each activity in this guide is inspired by a page from Mr. Ellabbad's book (the corresponding page in the book is included in the heading of each activity). The activities are intended to stand alone, as individual projects related to the book, or can work together to allow each student to create her/his own journal. If the teacher chooses to use multiple activities, they could be formatted into a notebook or journal by: collating the pages in a binder; binding them into a book with simple bookmaking methods; or doing the activities directly in a special notebook.

The goal of this project is to encourage students to reflect on and express their ideas and experiences while increasing their awareness of different aspects of Arab culture. Some activities consist of questions that can be used in small or large group discussion, while others are intended for individual reflection; they may all be adapted to meet classroom needs and can be completed in class or at home. Students are encouraged to identify as writers and artists/illustrators through diverse activities that leave room for their personal preferences and abilities. In the process of this project, we hope that students will develop self-reflective skills while questioning preconceived notions about language, memory, culture, perspective, and the creative process. In addition, we hope that the activities will inspire students to continue exploring and learning about Arab culture and Islam.

Please note that figures and worksheets that are indicated within certain activities are included, full size, in the appendix. Underlined words are defined in the bottom left hand corner of the page where they appear, and in the glossary at the end of the unit.

This unit will eventually be uploaded to the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies' web site, <http://ccas.georgetown.edu>. Until then, we invite feedback that teachers may have about any part of it. Teachers and students may send messages to express what they liked or didn't like, ideas, suggestions, and any other feedback to me at seikalyz@georgetown.edu. I look forward to hearing from you!

I would like to extend deep thanks to Lucy Thiboutot, Research Assistant and student in Georgetown's Master of Arts in Arab Studies program, for her invaluable help in editing, designing, and producing this unit. We are also grateful for support from Georgetown's National Resource Center on the Middle East, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, which sponsored a workshop in October 2007 when this unit was first piloted.

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PRE-READING

The Illustrator's Notebook
Activity #1

OBJECTIVE: By asking your students the following questions as they first examine *The Illustrator's Notebook*, they will reflect on the experience of seeing a book written in Arabic.

When you picked up *The Illustrator's Notebook* with your hands, was the spine on the left side (as all books in English are)?

If yes, what did you think when you read, "This book opens on the other side"?

How does it feel to hold a book this way in your hands, with the spine on the right side?

Have you seen Arabic script before? Did you realize it is written from right to left?

You can talk about these questions with your classmates and compare your experiences.

Now look at the title page. The author/illustrator is Mohieddin Ellabbad; he is Egyptian and he has an Arab name. Here is how you pronounce his name:

Mo·ye·deen El·la·bad

Practice saying his name a couple of times, making sure you emphasize the syllables in italics.

GETTING YOUR NOTEBOOK READY

The Illustrator's Notebook title page
Activity #2

OBJECTIVE: By having students consider the following questions, they will make a self-to-text connection and use Arabic words, written in English script, to create the title page for their notebook.

FOR THIS ACTIVITY

The English title of this book is *The Illustrator's Notebook*, which is translated from the Arabic كشكول الرسام (*Kashkuul al-Rassaam*). "Kashkuul al-rassaam" literally means "notebook of the illustrator"; note that the preposition "of" is understood in Arabic and not written out. The direct meaning of "kashkuul al-rassaam wa al-kaatib" is "Notebook of the Illustrator and the Writer" (see vocabulary words below).

Would you prefer to be called an artist or a writer? Or both? Think about this and decide whether you would like your notebook to be mostly filled with drawings and other visual pieces, or whether you would like your notebook to be mostly filled with writing. If you are using a notebook, hold it so it looks like it is "backwards" with the spine on the right. On the title page of your notebook, write one of the titles below.

If you tend more to the visual arts, then the title of your notebook will be:

KASHKUUL AL-RASSAAM
The Illustrator's Notebook

If you tend more to words and writing, then the title of your notebook will be:

KASHKUUL AL-KAATIB
The Writer's Notebook

Or, if you would like to strike a balance between words and art, you can call your notebook:

KASHKUUL AL-RASSAAM WA AL-KAATIB
The Illustrator's and Writer's Notebook

Under that, include your first and last name, and the date you started your notebook.

al – Arabic prefix for "the"

kashkuul – Arabic word for "notebook, scrapbook, or album"

rassaam – Arabic word for "the illustrator, artist, one who draws"

wa – Arabic word for "and"

kaatib – Arabic word for "the writer"

CREATING THE PAGES OF YOUR NOTEBOOK

The Illustrator's Notebook p. 25, "A Welcoming Book"
Activity #3

OBJECTIVE: Students learn Arabic greetings and practice creating Arabic script.

Read the English text on the page, then think about how you might like to welcome the reader to your notebook, on the first page. Here are some suggestions:

One word for "Hello" in Arabic is "Marhaba" (the accent is on the first syllable, so it is pronounced *Marhaba*—the accented syllable here is italicized). In Arabic it is written as follows*:

مرحبا

Another way to greet your reader is "Ahlan wa Sahlan" (pronounced *Ahlan wa Sahlan*), which means "Welcome." This phrase is written as follows:

اهلاً وسهلاً

A third way to welcome your reader is with the phrase, "Assalaamu Alaykum" (pronounced *Assalaamu Alaykum*), which means "Peace be with you." (Note that the first part contains the word "salaam," meaning "peace" in Arabic.) This phrase is written as follows:

السلام عليكم

Once you have decided which of these Arabic words or phrases you will use to welcome the reader to your notebook, copy them (in Arabic, and from right to left!) on the first page of your notebook. It is up to you how large or small the script is, but be sure to decorate this first page either with an interesting border around your greeting, drawings around it, colors, or glued-on shapes or decorative items.

* Larger versions of all three greetings are found in the appendix to this unit.

Marhaba—Arabic word for "hello" or "hi"
Ahlan wa Sahlan—Arabic expression for "welcome"
Assalaamu Alaykum—Arabic expression for "peace be with you"
Salaam—Arabic word for peace

The Illustrator's Notebook p. 4
Activity #4a

OBJECTIVE: Students explore the Arabic language through visual observation and reflection on language variation.

FOR THIS ACTIVITY

To learn more about the Arabic language, visit the following sites:

<http://aataweb.org/Default.aspx?pageID=4>

<http://www.amideast.org/publications/arabic-language.pdf>

Look at the Arabic writing inside the yellow part of the page. This is the handwriting of the author-illustrator of the book, Mohieddin Ellabbad. What does it look like to you? Can you pick out the periods between sentences? (Note that periods in Arabic script, like in English script, are simple dots that stand alone at the conclusion of a sentence.)

Remember to train your eyes to follow the script from right to left!

Like English, Arabic also has commas, but to English speakers they look like they are written upside down, with the round part of the comma on the line, and the "tail" going upward. Think of a tiny number "6" in English. Can you find the commas in the Arabic script on p. 4? (Hint: there is a comma at the end of the first line of Arabic script at the top of the page.)

Examine the Arabic script closely and note the loops, dots above and below the letters, letters that go above and below the line, and the exclamation mark at the end of the paragraph. What other characteristics can you see in Arabic script?

Think about all the different languages that are spoken in the world. Which ones do you know? Which one(s) would you like to learn? Does anyone in your immediate or extended family speak a language other than English? If yes, who is that person? If you don't already know it, would you like to learn that language? Write the answers to these questions on the second page of your notebook.

script—the characters or letters used in writing by hand; any system of writing

The Illustrator's Notebook p. 4
Activity #4b

OBJECTIVE: Students learn to recognize and experiment with writing the Arabic alphabet.

FOR THIS ACTIVITY

For help on how to write Arabic letters, go to:

<http://www.arabacademy.com/download/alphabetwed7introchange5.swf>

THE ARABIC ALPHABET

أ	ب	ت	ث	ج
ح	خ	د	ذ	ر
ز	س	ش	ص	ض
ط	ظ	ع	غ	ف
ق	ك	ل	م	ن
هـ	و	ي		

Visit the web site above. You can click on each letter to see how it is written and what it sounds like! Note that there are two letters (P and V) in the English alphabet that are not present in the Arabic alphabet, and that there are many letters/sounds in Arabic that do not have equivalents in English.

Many people feel that learning Arabic is very hard and they get frustrated because it is so different from their own language. With ongoing study, however, they are able to develop a good understanding of Arabic.



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On the next blank page of your notebook, copy the 28 Arabic letters from the chart above. You can also use the blank chart from the appendix at the back. Remember to write from right to left!

equivalent—equal in value, measure, force, effort, significance, etc.

The Illustrator's Notebook p. 4, "Souvenirs"
Activity #5

OBJECTIVE: Students make a self-to-text connection by thinking about their personal culture through the idea of collecting "souvenirs."

"The world around us is filled with all kinds of souvenirs," says the author. Look at the souvenirs that Mr. Ellabbad features on this page, and read what he writes about them. Find 3-5 souvenirs—for example, small things that you have saved like an old photograph, a ticket stub to a movie or concert or game, a letter or postcard you wrote or received, a note a friend passed to you in class, a pressed flower in a book, an award, a birthday card, or an old report card. Paste these in your journal. Write a few sentences about why you saved these items and what they mean to you, or draw the places where you picked them up or the people who gave them to you.

Some people collect postage stamps, baseball cards, sports caps, special dolls, old coins, etc. Are you a collector of certain types of things? If yes, what do you collect? How do you display these items? Draw a picture of one of these items in your journal, and write one or more sentences about why you like to collect it.

souvenir—a reminder of something you have done or a place you have visited

The Illustrator's Notebook p. 5, "Look and Smell!"
Activity #6

OBJECTIVE: Students make personal and environmental connections to the text.

Do you agree with the author about the smells that these photographs evoke? Write down your reflections. Then, look through old magazines or newspapers and find 4-5 pictures that are interesting to you, and that make you think of certain smells. Cut them out and paste them into your notebook.

Write next to each picture what smell it makes you think of. Are these pleasant or unpleasant smells? Does each smell actually relate to the picture, or is it a smell that the picture makes you think about, but you don't know why?

You can do this same exercise for the senses of hearing, touch, and taste. Pictures and photographs can make us feel and think and remember a lot of things!

evoke—to produce or suggest

The Illustrator's Notebook p. 6, "A Childhood Dream"
Activity #7

OBJECTIVE: Students make a text-to-self connection, reflecting on their lives and dreams.

Throughout your years in school, a lot of people have probably asked you, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Perhaps you have thought about this a lot, or perhaps you haven't.

Read the paragraph on page 6 about the author's dream of becoming a streetcar driver. Do you have a dream like that? Think of what it would be like, for example, to be a firefighter, astronaut, school bus driver, computer game creator, doctor, chef, dancer, rock star, president of your country, or any job you might dream of. Decide on one job that seems interesting to you and draw yourself in that job. You can also find a picture of someone doing this job, and change it a little so it looks like you! Then write a short paragraph about why you think this job is interesting or exciting.

streetcar—a public vehicle for transporting people in a city, like a trolley car or trolley bus

The Illustrator's Notebook p. 6, "A Childhood Dream"
Activity #8a

OBJECTIVE: Students learn to recognize the numerals used in Arab countries and use them to make a clock.

FOR THIS ACTIVITY

Here are the numerals 0-10 with their Indian-origin equivalents (the numerals used in Arab countries):

Arabic numerals: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Indian numerals: ० १ २ ३ ४ ५ ६ ७ ८ ९ १०

Note that the ones, tens, hundreds, and thousands (etc.) digits are written in the same left-to-right sequence in both numeral systems, so that the number 10,973 is १०,९७३.

Notice the numbers in the picture that Mr. Ellabbad has drawn of the streetcar. These are the numerals used in most Arabic-speaking countries. The two numbers that are on this streetcar are 4 and 178, with their equivalents from Arab countries. Interestingly, in the United States we use the numerals called "Arabic numerals" because Europe (and later the United States) learned about this numeral system through the works of Arab mathematicians. Originally these numerals came from India, and that is why the number symbols used in the Arab world are commonly called "Indian numerals" (and look different from those used in the United States).

Practice writing Indian numerals using the information above. Here are some ideas:

- *your age and ages of other family members
- *your phone number
- *your zip code
- *your birth year
- *your favorite number

In the appendix you will find the Indian numerals 1-12 in a large format. Cut those out and paste them in a circle into your notebook, so that the page looks like the face of a clock. You can draw a circle around the numbers and decorate it with a border. Think about what time you wake up on school days, and draw the hands of the clock to show that time.

The Illustrator's Notebook p. 6, "A Childhood Dream"
Activity #8b

OBJECTIVE: Students explore time zones around the world, focusing on the Arab world.

FOR THIS ACTIVITY

For a listing of local times around the world, go to:

<http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/full.html>

Visit the web site above to see what time it is in other parts of the world.

What time is it in Cairo, Egypt, when you wake up? What do you think people are doing there, just as you are getting out of bed?

Look up the time in other cities in the Arab world, like Casablanca (Morocco), Beirut (Lebanon), Baghdad (Iraq), and Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates). Which cities are in time zones that are closest to you, and which ones are farthest from you? Write the answers to these questions, and what you have learned about world time zones, in your notebook, on the page next to your clock.

The Illustrator's Notebook p. 7, "The Stupid Hen!"

Activity #9

OBJECTIVE: Students make a self-to-text connection and recall stories that they have enjoyed.

Read the essay on this page. Think about a favorite book or story from your childhood, or one that made a big impression on you; you might look for it in the library so you can refresh your memory, or even find it at home. You might also ask someone who knew you when you were a child to tell you what one of your favorite stories was. Write a description of this book or story, and explain why you liked it so much.

Try to remember how you felt when you read it. Did the story remind you of yourself, or of someone you know? Was it funny, scary, happy, or sad? Was it a real story, or fictional? From your memory, draw a picture of one of the characters, or an important scene, that tells about the story.

Then imagine yourself at the age when you read this story, and draw a picture of yourself showing, through your facial expression in the picture, how much you enjoyed this story.

The Illustrator's Notebook p. 8, "Where Do Stories Come From?"
Activity #10

OBJECTIVE: Students explore the meaning of illustrations and the symbolism of personal objects.

Before reading the essay on this page, look at the picture and try to guess what it is about. Why do you think the illustrator of this book drew characters and objects coming out of the notebook?

Now read the essay on page 8. Although the author, Mr. Ellabbad, never actually wrote or drew in his little red book, it served as a way for him to imagine new characters and stories. It inspired him to be creative. Just looking at his book helped him dream about all the stories and drawings that he would like to put in there.

Look up the words "inspire" and "inspiration" in the dictionary and write some of the meanings of each in your notebook. What creative activities are you involved in, either in school or outside of school? Maybe you draw, paint, make pottery objects, sing or play a musical instrument, compose songs, sew, knit, bake, dance, make jewelry, or write poems or stories...What situations, people, objects, or stories inspire you, or help you be creative? Write in your notebook about your creative abilities.

Do you have something like "a little red book" in your life? Think of an object that inspires you to dream and imagine and create, then draw it in your notebook. Is it a book? A musical instrument? A paintbrush? Then, on the Internet or in some old magazines, find pictures that illustrate the kinds of things that you would like to create, print and cut them out, and paste them as coming out of your picture. Or if you would prefer, draw these imagined illustrations yourself!

The Illustrator's Notebook p. 9, "A Childhood Dream"
Activity #11

OBJECTIVE: Students reflect on their growth and change by comparing and contrasting images of themselves.

This activity is about sending a "postcard" to yourself across time! Find a photograph of yourself from the past; it can be from a few months ago, or from when you were a small child. Choose a photo that includes a place that you can still visit, or an object that you still have (like a toy, book, chair, etc.). Then find another photo of yourself in that same place, or one that includes the object that was in the first photo. If you have to return the photos to their original location, scan or make a photocopy of them. Then paste them side by side in your notebook.

Compare the two photos. How have you changed? How has your physical environment changed? Aside from generally looking older, describe the small changes in the way you look from the first photo to the second. Is your hair different? Do you look taller? What kinds of things were you thinking about in each photo? If there is an object in the picture, what did you think about it in the first photo? What do you think about it now?

The Illustrator's Notebook p. 10, "A Childhood Dream"
Activity #12

OBJECTIVE: Students reflect on the places they value while making a self-to-text connection, by creating their own postage stamp design.

FOR THIS ACTIVITY

The Smithsonian Institution's National Postal Museum has a template for making a stamp at:

<http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu/artofthestamp/>

After reading the text on page 10, you will realize that even the small pictures on postage stamps can inspire us! Think of a place that you would like to visit and the images that come to your mind when you think of this place. Is it a country? A city? An imagined scene of a place that you dream about?

Go to the website above and download the sheet from the "Activity" section to make your own stamp (or use the copy from the appendix titled "Design your own stamp"). After you have drawn and colored it, cut out the stamp from the sheet and paste it onto a page in your notebook. Write a short paragraph or poem about the place you drew. Later, you might choose to send your artwork to the U.S. Postal Service as a suggestion for a new U.S. postage stamp design!