The Middle East is not the only arid region in the world, nor is its diverse topography exclusively arid. In this region there are rivers, snowy mountain ranges, and marshlands, as well as deserts and steppes. However, in a world with intensifying fresh water impacts of agriculture, industry, and 7 billion humans to provide for, the Middle East, as a region, is showing signs of acute stress on its freshwater resources: rivers, streams, springs, lakes, and ground water.

How do we account for increasing freshwater scarcity, either worldwide, or in a particular region? Fresh water, or sweet water, is necessary for all of us to live. Saline water, or sea water, makes up 97% of the water on the planet; salt water is not good to drink for humans or animals; it is not acceptable for most industrial uses and sea water does not make crops grow. The process of desalination, also called desalinization, requires a tremendous amount of energy input – usually generated by fossil fuels or nuclear energy. At the beginning of the 21st century, the country with the world’s largest desalination plant capacity is Saudi Arabia.

Aside from salt water, the remaining 3% of all water on Earth is fresh water, but not all of it is accessible for human use: some of it is locked up in glaciers; some has percolated through geological layers, out of reach. Some of this is fresh water in geological layers of permeable rock that are accessible to humans; this ground water is delimited by the ‘water table’ for well withdrawals. These layers of permeable rock holding fresh water locked in the pores of the rock, like a giant sponge, are aquifers, which can be made available for human use by drilling a well; or by finding a spring bubbling up at the surface; or by drawing fresh water from a stream, river, or lake (‘surface water’) fed by springs emerging from underground. Ground water and surface water are connected to each other: taking too much from one eventually depletes the other. Water seeps into the aquifer, or water-bearing layers...
President’s Message

Dear MEOC Members and Perspectives Readers,

Most people have heard the prediction that the next war in the Middle East will be fought over water. While that thankfully hasn’t been borne out yet, disputes over water rights and usage continue to bedevil inter- and intrastate relations in the region. Still, on a recent trip to the region that I was privileged to share with Perspectives editor Greta Scharnowebre and a fine crew of teachers from New York City, I was gratified to discover that while water issues can lead to conflict, they can also be an issue around which people from various “sides” in a conflict zone can work together for the common good.

Scarce water resources in the region simply must be shared and protected. Those human and ecological imperatives can either cause parties to fight over their share of the water or to cooperate in keeping water clean, conserving it, and finding more effective ways to share. A cooperative project like the rehabilitation of the Jordan River basin encourages water neighbors to think about shared long-term needs and benefits rather than short-term competition.

Such a project can also inspire and enable a wonderful kind of active and cooperative learning here in the United States that is not based on learning about others—and in today’s Middle Eastern context, that sort of learning is too often in negative and pessimistic terms—but instead is based on learning and problem-solving with others. It is the perfect opportunity for students to engage in projects across space, to engage with students in the Middle East as equals on local projects, to consider their environments and how to solve them. It is the perfect opportunity for students to engage in projects across space, to engage with students in the Middle East, to think about how to solve analogous problems. It is the perfect opportunity for students to engage in projects across space, to engage with students in the Middle East, to think about how to solve analogous problems.

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Barbara Petzen
MEOC President
Fall 2011

Freshwater Continued from p. 1

of rock, from the surface. Depending on the type of soil and rock, an aquifer can take days, months, years, or millennia to saturate with fresh water. When humans withdraw fresh water from a well, it is easy to see how these groundwater savings could be ‘overspent’ by eager withdrawals. When humans withdraw what seeped into the local aquifer ten, fifty, one thousand, or, in some cases, almost 1 million years ago, this is a ‘non-renewable’ withdrawal. There won’t be enough rain to replenish the aquifer, certainly not in our lifetimes. The groundwater wells watering the farming settlements of Saudi Arabia, the Western Desert of Egypt, and the Libyan Desert are all using non-renewable ground water, sometimes called ‘fossil water’ because it won’t be renewed on a human timescale -- just like fossil fuels.

For each human, an estimated 50 liters of clean fresh water per day would be enough to live well, including drinking, cooking, washing, and sanitary hygiene. My own daily experience of opening a tap with clean, fresh water coming out of the faucet is not shared by the have-nots; of the 7 billion of us, an estimated 2.6 billion live without adequate clean water for human hygiene and sanitation, and nearly 1 billion without clean fresh water to drink. The results are an estimated 2 million preventable child deaths per year, or more than 5 thousand children dying each day, because of contaminated water. This number is truly shocking. In July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly declared “Clean Water and Sanitation as a Human Right,” meaning access to genuinely affordable water and sanitation is part of a universal expectation of human rights. As with all universal human rights, practical and legal implementations of the July 2010 resolution have not yet happened. To watch some negotiations between governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), corporations, and human rights activists, tune into the 6th tri-annual World Water Forum in France, March 12-17, 2012: www.worldwaterforum6.org.

Contaminated water can kill, but the lion’s share of fresh water isn’t used for drinking: it’s going to agriculture. Basic human requirements of clean domestic and drinking water (50 liters per day, per person) cannot compare with the amount of fresh water used for agriculture. To calculate the fresh water that goes into 1 kilogram of beef product, take into account not only the water fed to the animal, but also the water fed to the plants, which are then fed to the animal: that’s somewhere between 15 and 70 thousand liters for each kilogram of beef. Worldwide, an estimated 70 percent of all the fresh water used by humans goes into irrigation and agriculture, making plants and animals grow. Every plant has a natural appetite for water. If it’s hot and dry, the evapotranspiration (evaporation + transpiration) of crops accounts for even more of the fresh water that gets used. In the Middle East region, it’s higher than the world’s average: an estimated 85 percent of freshwater withdrawals in the Mideast go to agriculture.

It’s easy to see how humans could ‘overspend’ this ground water in favor of the here and now, and in favor of agriculture. Agriculture is tremendously thirsty, and the unprecedented growth in population, and intensification of resource use in the late 20th century particularly relied on groundwater supplies. The groundwater ‘balance’ is running disastrously low in some of the regions that saw the most promising increases in the 20th century. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations classifies 12 out of 18 countries in the Middle East as ‘water stressed,’ with more than three-fourths of the ‘renewable’ resources are being used, setting the scene for ‘spending’ non-renewable groundwater. Fresh water is not negotiable – we can’t conjure more than our 3% on Earth-- but somehow it needs to be negotiated better than this.

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<th>Percentage of Total Renewable Water Resources Withdrawn by Region</th>
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<td>Middle East and North Africa                               70</td>
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<td>Sub-Saharan Africa                                          15</td>
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The Dead Sea is dying. One of the most unique natural sites on Earth, famous for its buoyancy and lofty salt and mineral contents, the Dead Sea is on most world travelers’ checklists. Yet many of the Dead Sea’s visitors are unaware that this amazing body of water is in dire environmental crisis. Indeed, the water level in the sea is shrinking at the shocking rate of about a meter every year. This has led to a dramatically receding water line and the appearance of dangerous sink holes on the banks of the sea, among myriad other drastic environmental effects. In and of itself, this is a major story and indeed most of the people that live near the sea in Israel, Palestine, and Jordan, are aware of its rapid decline. However, few are aware of the root source of the sea’s demise that lies just to the sea’s north—a small but vital ecosystem that might be more famous than the Dead Sea itself. I am of course referring to the Jordan River, which holds great religious significance for the Abrahamic faiths and for many Christians in particular. The mere mention of its name conjures up images of the baptism of Jesus and a sense of the sacred. Its connection to the Sea of Galilee and the other holy sites (including Mt. Nebo) that pepper the banks of the river valley are a testament to the ecosystem’s religio-cultural heritage. Yet many pilgrims would be surprised to learn that except for a few meters at the mouth of the Sea of Galilee, no clean water flows through the lower Jordan. Indeed, visitors to the historical baptism sites, when they immerse themselves in the water of the Jordan, are likely unaware of the fact that they are bathing in industrial wastewater and sew-
Ironically, this flow of pollutants is the only thing keeping the riverbed of the lower Jordan alive during dry months.

How does something like this happen? About 95 percent of the Jordan’s water flow (and its associated springs and aquifers) has been diverted, the lion’s share of which goes to support subsidized unsustainable agriculture in Jordan, Israel and the West Bank. In other words, to play on a commonly touted phrase in Israel, much of the water goes to “making the desert bloom.” Hence a domino effect is created; since the river is no longer flowing into the Dead Sea, its water level shrinks. The communities that reside near the river and its feeder springs are polluted and experience water scarcity. The Jordan river also happens to be a protected border zone—a so-called “natural border” between Jordan and Israel/West Bank. While we can certainly contest the “naturalness” of this border (long historical evidence proves centuries-long interaction among communities on both sides of the river), the fact that it currently serves as a border means the general population does not have access to the river and therefore does not understand the extent of its ruin. As such, there is no public outcry, allowing the situation to perpetuate itself. Most significantly, because fresh water is already so scarce throughout the region, the social, political, and economic costs of rehabilitating the river seem too high for the governments concerned to bear.

This story is a sad but familiar tale with echoes in many river systems throughout the world. However, what makes this particular story so special is that its rehabilitation has become an opportunity to connect ordinary communities across the borders of Palestine, Israel and Jordan (the geographic heart of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict) to enact what might be called environmental peacemaking. It is this point of intersection that makes this story invaluable to us as educators and teachers of Middle Eastern history and society. As good students of science, we know that the environment knows no borders. And it is on this point where we can take a lesson from the river and not only open our minds to understanding this piece of land and water as something larger than nation states and disputed territories, but also view the conflict in new ways. We begin to see what might have looked like a battle over religion and culture as a struggle to control valuable and scarce natural resources, both water and land. The story of the Jordan River is

The Jordan valley is filled with historical evidence of a time when the river was easily and frequently crossed—challenging the notion of the river as a natural (closed) border. This abandoned bridge, located where the Yarmouk River joins the Jordan, recalls an earlier time when the busy Ottoman Hejaz Railway connected Damascus to Haifa.

Evapotranspiration and Virtual Water: Farmers in the arid Arava Valley go to great lengths to protect their thirsty crops from the elements. These extreme farming practices, subsidized by governments, are depleting more than 60% of the already scarce water supply at great cost—and often for crops for export.
one that can help your students understand the myriad dimensions of the conflict in a way that introduces new information rather than inciting the flash points of religion and ethnicity that seem to bubble just beneath the surface for most Americans when it comes to this topic. Looking through this lens, the practicalities of daily life in this region also come into view, as few things in life can be accomplished without water.

Last year, a group of teachers from the Friends Seminary in New York City (www.friendsseminary.org) traveled to the Jordan River and the Dead Sea with New York University’s Middle East Studies outreach program under the leadership of a pioneering organization called EcoPeace—Friends of the Earth Middle East (FOEME) (www.foeme.org). Like the teachers from Friends, many of you will find the work of FOEME inspiring and their findings useful for the classroom for a variety of disciplines. With offices in Tel Aviv, Ramallah, and Amman, and project sites and local advocates along the Jordan River valley, FOEME is an example of a rare cross-border collaboration. They connect communities that likely would never have come in contact with one another (because they are separated by the border/stream) in order to solve local environmental problems, advocate for the river’s rehabilitation, and educate the general public about environmental issues in the region. By working together in this distinct way, they forge the challenging path of getting ordinary Palestinians, Israelis, and Jordanians to work together and respect one another on a very practical level. While it remains to be seen whether or not their work will reverse the colossal damage that has been done to the river and the Dead Sea, it is evident that they have affected the lives of the people they work with. Perhaps their story can be equally effective in inspiring your students. And who knows—maybe these collective efforts can someday bring the Dead Sea and the Jordan River back to life.

For teacher reflections on the Jordan River, see: www.friendsseminary.org/politicsofwater.
Water Glossary

**Freshwater**: water for drinking, hygiene, agriculture and industry, and comprises only 3% of the world’s water. Freshwater includes: precipitation (rain, snow); mountain glaciers (ice, permanent snow); wetlands (marsh, swamp); surface water (streams, lakes, rivers); **groundwater** (springs, aquifers, water table).

**Aquifer**: a wet underground layer of water-bearing permeable rock or unconsolidated materials (gravel, sand, or silt) from which groundwater can be usefully extracted using a water well.

**Water table**: the planar, underground surface beneath which earth materials, as soil or rock, are saturated with water.

**Virtual water**: refers, in the context of trade, to the water used in the production of a good or service. Tony Allan, the creator of the term/concept stated: “The water is said to be virtual because once the [crop] is grown, the real water used to grow it is no longer actually contained in the [crop]…. In semi-arid and arid areas, knowing the virtual water value of a good or service can be useful towards determining how best to use the scarce water available.”

**Evapotranspiration**: an important part of the water cycle. Describes water loss by evaporation as well as transpiration (the water appetite of plants). Evaporation accounts for the movement of water to the air from sources such as the soil, canopy interception, and waterbodies. Transpiration accounts for the movement of water within a plant and the subsequent loss of water as vapor through stomata in its leaves.

**Renewable vs. Nonrenewable Resource**: water is a renewable material when carefully controlled usage, treatment, and release protocol are followed. If not, it would become a non-renewable resource. For example, groundwater is usually removed from an aquifer at a rate much greater than its very slow natural recharge, and so groundwater is considered non-renewable. Removal of water from the pore spaces also may cause permanent compaction (subsidence) that cannot be renewed.

**Fossil Water**: groundwater that has remained sealed in an aquifer for a long period of time. Fossil water is **non-renewable**. Water can rest underground in “fossil aquifers” for thousands or even millions of years.

Resources

**FAO Water**
www.fao.org/nr/water/index.html
In the face of increasing water scarcity, and the dominance of agricultural water use, FAO Water is seeks to enhance global agricultural performance while promoting the sustainability of water use for food production.

**FAO AQUASTAT**
AQUASTAT is FAO’s global information system on water and agriculture, developed by the Land and Water Division. Users can find comprehensive and regularly updated information at global, regional, and national levels.

**USGS (U.S. Geological Survey)**
http://www.usgs.gov/water
USGS collects hydrologic and water-quality information and provides access to water data, publications, and maps.

**Pacific Institute: The World’s Water**
www.worldwater.org
Provides information and resources to help protect and preserve freshwater around the globe. This site is a companion to the biennial book, *The World’s Water*, and also provides links to a wide range of water resources.

**International Water Management Institute (IWMI)**
www.iwmi.cgiar.org
Targets water and land management challenges faced by poor communities in the developing world.

**World Water Forum**
www.worldwaterforum6.org
Every three years, the World Water Forum convenes stakeholders to keep water sustainability high on the international agenda. Convenes March 2012.

**UN Water**
www.unwater.org
UN Water is an inter-agency group for information-sharing between UN agencies and outside partners.

**Friends of the Earth Middle East**
www.foeme.org
A unique organization that brings together Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian environmentalists.
MEOC Announces 2011 Middle East Book Award Recipients

The Middle East Outreach Council (MEOC) announced its 2011 Middle East book awards recipients at the Middle East Studies Association conference held in Washington DC in December 2011. Established in 1999, the Middle East Book Award recognizes quality books for children and young adults that contribute meaningfully to an understanding of the Middle East and its component societies and cultures. Books are judged on the authenticity of their portrayal of a Middle Eastern subject, as well as on their characterization, plot, and appeal for the intended audience. For the purposes of this award, “The Middle East” is defined as the Arab World, Iran, Israel, Turkey, and Afghanistan. Past recipients of awards can be viewed at the MEOC website: www.meoc.us. Nominations for the Middle East Book Award are made by publishers, educators, librarians and the general public. If you would like to nominate a book, please contact bpetzen@mepc.org.

**PICTURE BOOK WINNER**

*Mirror*

by Jeannie Baker (Candlewick Press)

Without words but through creative binding and exquisitely detailed collages, *Mirror* provides parallel accounts of the lives of two families: one Moroccan and one Australian. Despite their differences, both families have similar routines and needs, therefore, the metaphor of a mirror. Reviewers were highly impressed with the book’s message, layout, and subtle teachings as well as the opportunities it presents for comparison, cultural analysis, and countering stereotypes.

**PICTURE BOOK HONORABLE MENTION**

*Time to Pray*

by Maha Addasi, illustrated by Ned Gannon (Boyds Mills Press)

*Time to Pray* provides a clear explanation of Muslim prayers as well as aspects of Islamic practice. The story revolves around a loving relationship between a girl and her grandmother and is enhanced by beautiful illustrations, including calligraphy. Reviewers commented that the book will help readers learn about Islam in the daily rhythm of life, has a strong educational value, and is a good story with females as the main characters.

**PICTURE BOOK HONORABLE MENTION**

*The Secret Message*

by Mina Javaherbin, illustrated by Bruce Whatley (Disney/Hyperion Books)

Based on a true story by Rumi, *The Secret Message* describes an encaged parrot who finds a way to freedom and enlightens his keeper. The book will appeal to younger readers through its gorgeous presentation and a tale that could lead to discussion of the Silk Road and comparison with other folktales. Reviewers commented that the story makes the Silk Road personal; raises questions about captivity, loyalty, and fairness; and makes Rumi relevant for 21st century youth.
YOUTH LITERATURE WINNER
Where the Streets Had a Name
by Randa Abdel-Fattah (Scholastic Press)
Where the Streets Had a Name offers an intriguing story set in today’s Palestine, where political realities affect daily life. The narrative is real, sensitive, and often very funny. The young main characters (both Muslim and Christian) are well-developed and easy to relate to, and their adventures on the way to Jerusalem will appeal to young readers. One teacher reviewer commented, “I appreciated the fact that the author’s telling showed multiple perspectives on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, but did so without sounding preachy from any one perspective.”

YOUTH NON-FICTION CO-WINNER
The Genius of Islam
How Muslims Made the Modern World
by Bryn Barnard (Alfred A. Knopf Books for Young Readers)
The Genius of Islam is an excellent introduction to the inventions and innovations of the medieval Muslim world. Rather than attempting a general overview of the subject, author Bryn Barnard highlights a few representative topics – for example, optical science, the development of paper, and calligraphy. Reviewers noted that late elementary, middle school, and even older readers will love the book’s wonderful illustrations and organization into short, manageable topics.

YOUTH NON-FICTION CO-WINNER
How to Understand Israel in 60 Days or Less
by Sarah Glidden (Vertigo)
How to Understand Israel in 60 Days or Less is a graphic “novel”/true account. The author, a Jewish-American, describes her heritage trip to Israel and her attempts to come to grips with the complex social and political situation in that country. High school readers will appreciate the colorful illustrations and the travel story; more discerning readers will also respect the thoughtful, balanced look at modern Israel.
Lisa Adeli
University of Arizona (Tucson, Arizona)

Where, what and whom do you teach?

Since 2007 I have been the Outreach Coordinator for the Center for Middle Eastern Studies (CMES) at the University of Arizona. Before that, I was a full-time high school World History/English teacher. I continue to regard myself as a K-12 educator, and much of my current position involves working with teachers, students, school personnel. As part of my work at CMES, I have remained a current – and not just former – teacher by co-teaching a Middle East Studies class at a Tucson high school, a school where the students are mostly Hispanic, low-income, and very bright. My job as Outreach Coordinator allows me a lot of flexibility and the opportunity to grow as both an educator and a learner.

How has your work supported the goals of MEOC?

My work is exactly the same as the goals of MEOC: “disseminating apolitical and nonpartisan information, resources, and activities furthering understanding about the Middle East.” I work with K-12 teachers, college instructors, and community members, informing them about resources and professional development opportunities, creating educational programs – both local and abroad – and writing grants to fund them, organizing the Speakers Bureau and Outreach Scholars program which send speakers into schools and the community, developing and encouraging the development of curricular materials, organizing public events such as our annual photography exhibition and our participation in the Festival of Books, and giving presentations.

How and when did you first become interested in learning and teaching about the Middle East?

By educational background, I am a Balkan historian. However, early on (as a senior at Georgetown University), I became interested in Middle Eastern history as well. In graduate school (MA from Indiana University, PhD from the University of Arizona), Middle Eastern history became my minor. I also studied the Persian language for 2½ years, for personal rather than academic reasons.

How have you obtained first-hand knowledge of the Middle East?

Much of my first-hand knowledge of the Middle East has come from family and friends from Middle Eastern countries. In particular, I have been married for more than 30 years to someone originally from Iran, and his mother has lived with us for half of each year over the past 11 years. (So I get live-in language and cultural practice!) I have also traveled to Turkey three times, including a wonderful Fulbright-Hays study-tour that I helped organize. As part of an IREX teachers’ program, I spent two interesting weeks in a school in Vanadzor, Armenia – though it’s up for debate whether Armenia counts as being in the Middle East. Unfortunately, my only time in the Arab world was a brief visit to Dubai (hardly “typical;” the month-long Teach Syria program scheduled for last summer had to be cancelled).

What do you find most challenging and rewarding in teaching and outreach?

I LOVE both teaching and outreach! Working with young people – and assisting other educators in working with their students – is so rewarding, especially when you see their minds open to new ideas and their horizons expand. Co-teaching my own class has been the most heartwarming activity,
giving me a chance to get to know the students well, help them to develop a love for history/culture, and encourage them to continue their education. (Already, four of the students I have worked with have gone on to the university – the first in their families to do so – with a major or minor in Middle Eastern Studies. Two have scholarships from CMES; another works for us; all are studying a Middle Eastern language!) In addition to teaching my own students, I enjoy going into schools to give presentations as well as attending/presenting at teachers’ conferences. Most of all, of course, I like it when my interests in teaching, learning, curriculum development, and travel all come together, such as when I got to help plan and lead our Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad curriculum-building trip (Teach Ottoman) to Turkey and the Balkans. I worked with gifted teachers, learned about the Ottoman Empire, and traveled to some of my favorite places on the planet! What “job” could be better?

The only part of teaching and outreach that I dislike is dealing with limitations caused by shortage of funds. Grant-writing is time-consuming – though often helpful in clarifying objectives and plans. I don’t really mind doing it except when I spend all that time for nothing. In this economy, that is an increasing frustration as more and more of us compete for ever decreasing funding.

What upcoming projects are you most excited about?

I am working on two upcoming summer projects – though sometimes I despair of getting funding for either of them.

My biggest dream is to organize a Fulbright-Hays curriculum-building trip centered around the Black Sea region. The trip would take 12-13 teachers and two trip leaders (one of them me) along the great trade routes/cultural sites in northern and northwestern Turkey with short excursions into Georgia in the east and Bulgaria and Romania in the west. We would look at the Black Sea region throughout history as a crossroads of world trade, a place where different civilizations (both nomadic and settled, great empires and small city-states) came into contact, an area of scientific (medical, ecological) interest.

Also this summer, CMES would like to hold its third biennial summer institute with parallel programs for teachers and for high school students. This year we will focus on “War, Conflict Resolution, and Reconstruction in the Modern Middle East,” looking at modern developments, such as international relations, recent or ongoing conflicts, peacebuilding, human rights, and refugee issues. If we are able to get the funding, the 8–9 day intensive program would be free for 20 teachers and 20 high school students; dormitory housing would also be free to participants.
Join the Middle East Outreach Council!

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