

**NATIONAL ENDOWMENT
FOR THE HUMANITIES**

SAMPLE APPLICATION NARRATIVE



Summer Seminars for School Teachers
Institution: Swarthmore College



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE
HUMANITIES

DIVISION OF EDUCATION
PROGRAMS

1100 PENNSYLVANIA AVE., NW
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506
ROOM 302

SEM-INST@NEH.GOV
202.606.8463
WWW.NEH.GOV

National Endowment for the Humanities Division of Education Programs

Narrative Section of a Successful Application

This sample of the narrative portion from a grant is provided as an example of a funded proposal. It will give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. It is not intended to serve as a model. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with staff members in the NEH Division of Education Programs well before a grant deadline. This sample proposal does not include a budget, letters of commitment, résumés, or evaluations.

Project Title: *The Arabic Novel in Translation*

Institution: Swarthmore College

Project Director: Roger Allen

Grant Program: Summer Seminars for School Teachers

TABLE OF CONTENTS

NEH Seminar for High School Teachers: “The Arabic Novel in Translation”

Project Director: Dr. Roger Allen, University of Pennsylvania Professor of Arabic and
Chair of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations

Host Institution: Swarthmore College

Date of submission: March 1, 2008

Dates of Summer Seminar: July 7 to August 1, 2008

	PAGE
Table of Contents.....	i
Narrative Description.....	1-11
Budget Form.....	12
Evaluations (from previous NEH-funded summer seminar [2005]).....	13-19
Appendix (CV of Project Director).....	20-36

NEH SEMINAR FOR HIGH-SCHOOL TEACHERS

THE ARABIC NOVEL IN TRANSLATION

TEXTS AND APPROACH:

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this seminar will be to introduce the participants to a literary tradition with which relatively few teachers in this country are familiar, that of Arabic, and more specifically to modern Arabic fiction and its cultural context.

We currently live and work within a national context in which the many and varied consequences of the tragic events of September 2001 and the current state of our relationship with and knowledge of the Middle East region and Islam writ large seem increasingly important and indeed relevant to our present and future lives. Those scholars and teachers who specialize in Middle Eastern, and in this case, Arabic, studies have for several years now found themselves in a situation in which they have been asked to respond to a tremendous need felt by educators at all levels of the US system for the provision of opportunities that will enable and encourage a closer investigation of almost every aspect of the Middle East region, its history and its cultural manifestations. Bearing in mind the continuing importance of the Arab World now and into the foreseeable future, and from economical, cultural, religious, and political perspectives, this seminar (which has been offered previously on seven occasions) perhaps retains or even increases its importance as a means of introducing American teachers to a culture and literary tradition about which many of them are (as they have habitually acknowledged to me) disarmingly uninformed.

Beyond such global and political perspectives that have recently come to occupy such a prominent place in the American psyche, the literary tradition of the Middle East region has been given relatively increased prominence in recent decades (at least, in the realms of fiction) since the award of the Nobel Prize to an Arab (Egyptian) novelist, Najib Mahfuz in 1988 (and whose recent death in 2006 has again drawn attention to the central role of fiction in the life of the peoples of the Arabic-speaking region). Fiction being such an accurate mirror of a culture's sensitivities and aspirations, the opportunity afforded by such an increase in interest (small though it may be in comparative terms) needs to be exploited to the maximum extent possible in the larger cause of breaking down barriers of ignorance and distrust. There is thus an urgent and ongoing need to provide teachers who work in the American educational system with materials that will assist them in the project of introducing the cultures of the Arabic-speaking segments of the Middle Eastern region into curricula at various levels and in a number of disciplines.

It is thus the purpose of this seminar to introduce a group of teachers to the literature of the Arab World through examples of the modern Arabic novel and therefrom of other

literary genres. If this proposal is successful, it will be the eighth time that I have offered this seminar (the others were in 1993, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003, and 2005).

PROCEDURE

The primary mode of access will be a close reading of six examples culled from the tradition of the Arabic novel, a literary genre which, like its counterparts in the West, has addressed itself to many of the pressing cultural and social issues of the region and to the complex relationships between contemporary inhabitants of the region and their forebears.

Each novel will be examined first and foremost as a work of fiction, a contribution to world fiction, including an examination of its particular techniques (such as the uses of the narrative voice, manipulation of time, and metafiction--fiction about fictionality). The aim of this seminar is to integrate these examples of the novel genre into courses involving comparative readings of fiction from various world literary traditions (this is a feature of this particular seminar from which I myself, as a specialist in the literature of one region and language, have profited enormously in the previous seminars of this type). Discussion will also focus on the different origins and careers of the authors concerned, and the variety in language usage caused both by the breadth of the Arab World itself and the differing registers of language available to the writer of fiction. Full usage will be made of multi-media materials and films in providing such background as will be necessary to undertake close readings of the materials, as well as the wealth of materials that is available via the INTERNET.

I have selected these particular novels from an increasingly large repertoire of Arabic fiction available in English (and to which process I myself am a frequent contributor) also because each can be seen as addressing itself to a particular topic whose applications transcend the particular context of the Arabic-speaking world. I explore the particular features of each novel below. The identification of these topics areas has also allowed me to incorporate into the seminar readings further examples from other literary genres—the poem and short story, for example. The aim in supplying these supplementary readings is also to provide some introduction to the various literary genres of Arabic, classical and modern, both in order to provide some perspective both on contemporary literary creativity in the Arab World and on the lengthy and illustrious heritage of the past, and as extra material for teachers who may wish to use a topic-based approach in integrating some of these materials into their courses on world/comparative literature within their own school systems.

ORGANIZATION OF SEMINAR SESSIONS

I will lead the discussion of the first novel by Al-Tayyib Salih, Season of Migration to the North (the theme of which provides an excellent opportunity to discuss contacts

between the West and Middle East during recent times from a historical perspective). While I intend that the discussions themselves should involve reference to environments, customs, characters, and even styles that will be very unfamiliar to the participants, I will hope also to place these contributions to world literature (including, of course, one by the 1988 Nobel Prize-Winner, Najib Mahfuz) into the larger context of the novel and of recent narratological scholarship.

I have arranged the seminar schedule in such a way as to make it feasible to read two novels each week. I propose to invite several of my colleagues to attend sessions at which particular works are to be discussed: Brian Spooner (Department of Anthropology) to talk about the ecology of the Middle East region and the environmental issues raised by Munif's novel) Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet (Department of History) to talk about women's writing, a primary feature of Hanan al-Shaykh's novel; and Heather Sharkey to talk about the Sudan, the setting of the first novel we will read.

As part of the course, each participant will participate in a collaborative classroom-presentation of one of the novels. The five novels (once I have presented the first myself) will be assigned to groups of participants (if there are fifteen participants, this will involve groups of three, which is ideal for the purpose). The planning for these sessions will involve not only the provision of a bibliography on the work itself, its author, and other relevant information about its topic, but also ideas for different modes of discussion of the themes and techniques of the novel in question. I will meet separately with each group in order to help in the planning and content of each presentation. I have found over the years that the seminar has been offered that such an approach not only gets the group involved in the works concerned but also stimulates a good deal of discussion.

Seminar participants will also complete a paper or project on a topic that will be chosen in conjunction with myself. Examples of the approach adopted in this paper include the following: critical discussion of a single work that we have read, a comparison between more than one work covered in the seminar, a comparison of a work covered in the seminar with a piece of literature from another world tradition, a discussion of the way in which a particular topic is broached. The final versions of these papers will be collected and reproduced as a volume of studies and sent to the participants following the completion of the seminar (collections of papers from previous NEH Seminars should be available in the NEH offices in Washington).

The Novels and Rationale for Selection

These are the 6 Arabic novels/novellas in translation that will form the core of the seminar. The short narratives on each are intended to describe briefly their topic but also to suggest discussion points and other features that have led me to select them. I should also point out that an all too practical criterion for selection for the purposes of this seminar has been the availability of the novel in question and in a relatively inexpensive edition:

Al-Tayyib Salih, Season of Migration to the North, Washington: Three Continents Press.

This novel, set in the Sudan and England, is a wonderful study of the cultural ambivalence which results when a brilliant young Sudanese student is educated in England and then returns to his homeland. His cultural disjuncture in both countries is severe and leads to dreadful consequences. The way in which the novel is narrated, with extreme ambiguity about the relationship between the narrator and major character, allows for excellent discussion of narrative voice. The Orientalist image of the East is another powerful topic of this novel.

Najib Mahfuz, The Journey of Ibn Fattouma, New York: Doubleday

A somewhat different selection by the Nobel Laureate. A novel in allegory form--thus linkable to examples from numerous other literary traditions--that involves a journey of discovery. The narrator visits a number of "havens" where different belief systems and governmental organizations hold sway. He is challenged by what he sees to re-examine the bases of his own [Islamic] beliefs and the underpinnings of his moral posture towards life and his fellow humans.

'Abd al-rahman Munif, Endings, London: Quartet Books.

I choose this novel because its topic, a community living on the edge of the desert, allows for an investigation of that entity to which the whole of the Arabic literary heritage looks back as its supreme "classical" era: its nomadic origins in the Arabian peninsula. This is a novel by a brilliant Saudi writer (three volumes of his Quintet, Cities of Salt, have been published in English by Random House). This is a more compact work, about a "liminal" community (a topic about which Professor Spooner of our Middle East Center is an acknowledged expert). Almost a novel without characters or names, it gives a fascinating insight into the kind of community that the novel as a mostly urban genre has completely ignored.

Hanan al-Shaykh, The Story of Zahra, New York: Doubleday

This work is already acquiring an enormous reputation. One of the most graphic accounts of the civil strife in Lebanon in the 1980s, it is also one of the frankest statements yet by a modern Arab woman of total disgust and dissatisfaction with the mores and customs of Middle Eastern society. I use this text in a course on Middle Eastern Literatures in translation that is taught every year at Penn, and it never ceases to arouse the most intense discussions regarding traditional and non-traditional roles, the position of both father and mother in feminist critical perspectives, the relationship between sexuality and war, all set in the insane environment of Lebanon as it self-destructs.

Muhammad Barrada, The Game of Forgetting, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996.

I choose this novel, first of all, because its author is from Morocco. Thus it introduces its readers to that part of the Arabic-speaking world to which English readers have had little exposure through translations. Barrada is French trained, and this novel—a wonderfully nuanced study of the lives of a Moroccan family--makes use of all the devices of the modern novel including a severe scepticism on the narrator's part regarding the author's intentions!). A reading of this book simultaneously introduces readers to the very different cultural milieu of North-West Africa and challenges the very methods that fiction has used to tell stories through time and to portray characters and actions.

Emil Habibi, The Secret Life of Saeed the Ill-fated Pessoptimist New York: Vantage Books, 1982

The recent republication of this wonderful novel makes it possible for me to include it once again in this seminar. A Candidean romp through the complexities and absurdities of the lives of the Palestinian community living in Israel, told in a tragic-comic way that uses the antics of the main character, Saeed, in his desperate attempts to be “cooperative” as a metaphor for the Palestinian tragedy on the one hand and as a backdrop for considerations about the future of the other. The novel, its theme(s), and its techniques (not the least being the use of a number of different types of text) readily serves as a trigger for discussion about the complexities of modern texts, the tension of relationships with the past and its heritage, and, needless to say, the theme of Israeli-Palestinian relations.

Supplementary readings will be taken from:

Desert Tracings trans. Michael Sells, Middletown, Ct.: Wesleyan University Press
Egyptian Short Stories trans. Denys Johnson-Davies, Washington: Three Continents Press

In the Eye of the Beholder, ed. Roger Allen, Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1978.

TIMETABLE

July 7th-August 1st, 2008.

WEEK 1:

Mon Seminar organization:
session format, book availability, library, study space,
lectures, films, paper topics [classroom presentations &
written versions]

Opening Discussion:

TOPIC 1: CULTURES IN CONTACT: MIDDLE EAST & WEST / NORTH & SOUTH

NOVEL: A1-Tayyib Salih, Season of Migration to the North

Tues Continued discussion of Salih novel and cultures in contact,
along with further texts [modern poetry]:

Khalil Hawi, "The Mariner and the Dervish" Nizar Qabbani, "Bread,
Hashish and Moonlight"

Thurs Guest lecture (Prof. Heather Sharkey): "Al-Tayyib Salih's Sudan"

"The Power of the Word" [video]: a survey of modern Arabic
literature, its genres & heritage

TOPIC 2: JOURNEY AS ALLEGORY: RELIGION & POLITICS

Fri NOVEL: Najib Mahfuz, Journey of Ibn Fattouma

Initial discussion

WEEK 2:

Mon Continued discussion of Mahfuz novel and religious and social values, with further texts [short stories]:

Najib Mahfouz, "Zaabalaoui"

Yusuf Idris, "House of Flesh," "The Greatest Sin of All"

Tues Issues connected with the Arabic language as a literary vehicle
Introduction to bibliographical sources for Arabic literature; transliteration issues, availability of library resources, etc.

Open Discussion:

The integration of Arabic literary genres into the framework of World Literature studies in school, especially in the period following Mahfuz's award of the Nobel Prize; advantages and disadvantages of the historical and generic approaches in non-Western literature studies

TOPIC 3: ENVIRONMENT AND TRADITION

Thurs NOVEL: 'Abd al-rahman Munif, Endings

Fri Continued discussion of Munif novel, with further texts [ancient poetry]:

Desert Tracings: The mu'allaqah of Labid (6th cent. Desert ode)

WEEK 3:

TOPIC 4: WOMEN'S ROLE: TRADITION & CHANGE

Mon NOVEL: Hanan al-Shaykh, The Story of Zahra

Tues Continued discussion of al-Shaykh novel and literature on/by women, with further texts [short stories]:
Zakariyya Tamir, "Face of the moon"
Edward al-Kharrat, "Within the walls"
Salwa Bakr, "The Wiles of Men"

Thurs Guest Lecture on women's literature in the contemporary Arab World
Discussion of feminism in Arab World and its literature (Prof. Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet)

Selected participants' initial presentations of seminar paper topics [I]

TOPIC 5: MAGHRIBI SOCIETY AND MODERN FICTIONALITY

Fri NOVEL: Muhammad Barrada, The Game of Forgetting

WEEK 4:

Mon Continued discussion of Barrada novel and his portrayal of Moroccan life with further texts [novella & stories]: Moroccan short stories

Selected participants' initial presentations of seminar paper topics [II]

TOPIC 6: THE ISSUE OF PALESTINE

Tues NOVEL: Emil Habibi, The Secret Life of Saeed the Ill-fated Pessoptimist

Thurs Guest Lecture on the question(s) of Palestine Continued discussion, with further texts:

Ghassan Kanafani, Men in the Sun and other stories Palestinian poetry

Selected participants' initial presentations of seminar paper topics [III]

Fri General discussion:

Review of the literary texts discussed in the seminar Brief presentations of other novels available in translation and other topic areas

The relationship of contemporary Arabic literature to other literary traditions: links and ruptures

MY OWN INTERESTS

I have been teaching Arabic literature at this university since 1968 and hold the rank of Full Professor. I have also previously served as chair of the Program in Comparative Literature for four years. I believe that it is fair to say that I am acknowledged as one of the best known experts on Arabic fiction in the English-speaking world. At the time of application I am serving as Chair of the University of Pennsylvania's Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations (2005-2008).

Most relevant to the theme of this seminar, my book on The Arabic Novel (Syracuse University Press, 1982; 2nd enlarged edition, 1994) is the only general introductory work of its kind in English and has been translated into Arabic (both editions: Beirut, 1986; Cairo, 1998).

I have written a large number of studies on all aspects of Arabic literature, both classical and modern (see the appended curriculum vitae). In May 1998 my one-volume work for Cambridge University Press on the entire literary tradition in Arabic, The Arabic Literary Heritage, was published, and in 2002 a paperback version, Introduction to Arabic Literature was also published (it has recently also appeared in an Arabic version in Cairo [2003]). I have also recently edited the 6th and final volume of the Cambridge History of Arabic Literature (devoted to issues connected with the pre-modern period—13th-18th centuries).

Each fall semester, I alternate two courses at UPenn, both taught in English: one is on Arabic Literary History; the other is on Arabic Literature and Literary Theory (including a number of aspects in the study of narratives--orality, point of view, time, autobiography, and so on). In the Spring semester, I teach a course for the English and Comparative Literature Departments, under the title "Narrative across Cultures," a survey of short narratives from across the globe and in different genres and time-periods.

EXPERIENCE WITH TEACHERS

I regularly make presentations at numerous schools and colleges all over the country on Islam and Middle Eastern Literature. Following the Nobel Award in 1988 I found myself requested to talk about Najib Mahfuz at many institutions (I am one of his translators and was also involved in his nomination). The experience has been repeated recently, following his death in 2006 (at the age of 94!); I appeared on both "Talk of the nation" (NPR) and the "Lehrer Newshour," and have given lectures at Georgetown University, the World Bank, and other universities. These talks have involved not only academic groups, but a variety of community organizations, schools, and clubs. The events of September 2001, as noted above, produced a national atmosphere of interest within which I have found myself giving lectures, workshops, and even sermons to an astonishing wide variety of clubs, faith communities and educational institutions in the Delaware Valley.

In Summers 1993, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003, and 2005, I conducted this seminar under NEH auspices. At the preliminary meeting of seminar leaders in Washington in 1992 before I held my first seminar, I was told by the NEH staff and by experienced directors of NEH Seminars that the seminar itself would be an intense and exciting experience, but I was not prepared either for the incredible level of enthusiasm and the

desire to learn that the now seven sets of teachers have brought to the previous seminars, nor for a situation in which as seminar leader I have found myself participating in critical investigations of the texts with 15 expert listeners who actually manage to engage each other in a genuine discussion. The atmosphere both inside and outside the seminar has been incredibly stimulating and enjoyable.

I have maintained contact with many of the teachers since the completion of each seminar; to aid in that endeavor, we have recently set up an ongoing website for the Seminar (ccat.sas.upenn.edu/neh/index.html) and are trying to get in touch with all the previous participants all the way back to 1993.

If I am given the opportunity to offer this seminar in 2008, I intend to continue my efforts to ensure that the study of these literary texts is placed into the larger framework of the Middle East, past and present, and to make participants as aware as possible of the enormous diversity of the region subsumed under those titles and headings. That will, incidentally, include the North-West Africa region, that being the focus of most recent research activities within the broader field of modern Arabic literature studies.

HOUSING, LIBRARY, COMPUTERS, STUDY SPACE

I am delighted to be able to hold this particular seminar at Swarthmore College, in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, a beautiful suburb of the city of Philadelphia, and, of course, one of the nation's most renowned liberal arts colleges.

For that reason, I am profoundly grateful to the authorities at Swarthmore for giving me the opportunity to hold the seminar on their campus.

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

The city of Philadelphia is a short train ride from Swarthmore and is, of course, world famous for its historic place in American history. It also boasts a number of museums: the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the University of Pennsylvania Museum being just two of the more prestigious. New York is 80 minutes away by train, and Washington DC two hours away.

On previous seminars we have indulged in some Middle East dining; in particular, going as a group to eat in a Moroccan restaurant in the historic quarter of the city ("Society Hill"). In addition to the guest-lecturers listed in the proposal, I will be hosting a reception involving the Middle East Center at the University (of which Professor Kashani-Sabet, one of our guest-speakers, is the Director) and the near Eastern Languages department of which I am currently the Chair.

During previous seminars, I have also arranged through musical friends for the participants to hear the Philadelphia Orchestra during its summer open-air season at the Mann Music Center in Philadelphia.

GUEST LECTURERS

Professor Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, University of Pennsylvania: Women in the Middle East

Professor Heather Sharkey, University of Pennsylvania: Al-Tayyib's Salih's Sudan

Professor Brian Spooner, University of Pennsylvania: The Desert and Its Communities