

# **A Missing Necessity**

- Emily Bitar; Senior Persuasive Essay

Hunter S. Thompson once said, “Walk tall, kick ass, learn to speak Arabic, love music and never forget you come from a long line of truth seekers, lovers and warriors.” It is extremely fitting that Thompson would group learning Arabic with walking tall and kicking ass. Learning to speak Arabic means tearing down barriers, revealing truth, and dedicating oneself to one of the most difficult tasks with one of the most rewarding outcomes. Arabic is the official language of over twenty countries and it is also an official language of the United Nations, the Arab League, the Organization of Islamic Conference, and the African Union (Why Learn Arabic?).

As a result, Arabic-speaking countries are fast growing markets with abounding opportunities for both natives and foreigners. There is an extremely high demand for Arabic speakers from the western world. Unfortunately, because very few schools offer this language, a minute number of Americans speak it. If American high schools offered Arabic as a language, this problem will be solved, the youth will have abounding career opportunities, and intercultural growth and understanding with the Arabic speaking world will flourish. There is a clear necessity; American high schools need to offer Arabic.

The Middle East, where most native Arabic speakers reside, is a rapidly increasing market. The Arab region, with its hastily growing population, provides a huge export market for goods and services. With a GDP of over 600 billion dollars annually, this region also has much to offer the world market. In order to do business effectively, one must understand the language and culture of the people with whom one hopes to negotiate and conduct trade (Why Learn Arabic?). In addition, conflicts in the Middle East, such as the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict, are constantly bubbling up. Imbroglios like that are easier to approach and work through when more Americans learn the common language of the Middle East, Arabic. Without a common language, many language barriers arise and create irreversible damage. The American high school system needs to recognize the endless opportunities presented to students by offering Arabic as a language course. Relatively few Westerners ever venture to learn Arabic. With the growing importance of

the Middle East in international affairs, there is thus an extreme shortage of workers in the West who are versed in Arabic language and culture.

Those who study Arabic find careers in a variety of fields: journalism, business and industry, education, finance and banking, translation and interpretation, consulting, foreign service and intelligence, and many others. Only one percent of the United States' 12,000 FBI agents have any knowledge of Arabic at all, and this includes those who know only a few words (Why Learn Arabic?). Knowing Arabic provides many opportunities to reach new markets and find new business partners. Furthermore, the United States government has designated Arabic as a critical language. Any language for which more trained speakers are needed than are available may be considered critical. A main reason for the inadequate number of Arabic speakers is American high schools simply do not offer the language. Because so few Americans study this language, someone who is well-trained in Arabic has a skill that is very precious in the job market. An increasing number of high-paying jobs are available for those with advanced, graduate study in this language. The sooner high schools start offering Arabic, the sooner students are set on a more lucrative and prolific path for their future (Branner).

Learning Arabic in high school not only increases one's understanding of the language, but also enhances one's understanding of the Arab culture and social mores. In addition to having limited exposure to authentic Arab culture, Westerners are presented with one-dimensional, negative stereotypes of Arabicspeaking peoples through the news media, Hollywood films, and other sources. At the same time, events in the Middle East constantly affect one's life as an American citizen. These mendacious images have inculcated mistrust and miscommunication into our minds. Those who learn Arabic gain deeper insights into the cultural, political, and religious values that motivate the people in the Middle East (Why Should I Learn Arabic?). High school is the ideal time in one's life to begin the journey with Arabic. By doing so, one learns the truth about the Arab people at a young age, before ill feelings and assumptions that Arabs are inimical can be made. People who know Arabic bridge the cultural and linguistic gap between countries and help to avoid intercultural conflict (Why Learn Arabic?).

One may think that offering Arabic as a language in high school is too costly to achieve. However, the overwhelming financial support to implement Arabic learning courses is clear when one looks closer. The United States government is

in full support of teaching Arabic and, therefore, provides many grants and scholarships to do so. The National Strategic Language Initiative, instituted in 2006, promotes the learning of Arabic among Americans through numerous scholarships and supported learning opportunities. These include support for language courses from beginning to advanced levels, study abroad programs, intensive instruction opportunities, teacher exchanges, and professional development ( Why Learn Arabic?). Under this program exists the high school student focused exchange program known as National Security Language Initiative for Youth, which provides merit-based scholarships, sponsored by the State Department, to students interested in learning less commonly studied foreign languages overseas (NSLY-Y). The United States government generously encourages Arabic becoming more commonly taught among American high school students.

Arabic is an absolutely beautiful language that is spoken by many throughout the world. When people endeavor to learn Arabic, they realize its astounding intricacies and expand their horizons. Unfortunately, there is a shortage of American Arabic speakers. With the Middle Eastern markets quickly escalating and an increasing number of Americanbased companies needing Arabic speakers, the obvious answer is for American high schools to provide an Arabic language course. When an American high school offers Arabic, cultural barriers are broken down, a whole new level of understanding is achieved, new friendships are made, and "asses are kicked."