Cultural Literacy Awareness Kit

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**Cultural Literacy Awareness Kit**

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Dedication

To my parents

‘We never know the love of our parents for us till we have become parents’

Henry Ward Beecher
I would like to thank every one who supported me during this time of year. I want to thank all family members for their continuous help in every step I took. They were a source of inspiration that provided me with the motivation as well as the will to carry on with my tasks. My friends also encouraged me and helped me keep my self-confidence during stressful times. Last but not least, a special gratitude and appreciation for Dr. Rima Bahous and Dr. Layla Harmoush who gave me the advice needed to present my work in the best possible way.
Cultural Literacy in schools

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Abstract

This is an eye opener regarding the importance of literacy, be it cultural or critical in a grade 6 classroom. It defines literacy, cultural literacy and critical literacy as well. It reveals their significance, how they are interrelated and how individuals critically learn about their culture. Moreover, the study briefly reflects on some cultural conflicts in the classroom and discusses the teacher’s, the administrator’s and the parent’s role in enhancing cultural awareness. As for the methodology, several interviews will be conducted with grade 6 teachers from different schools in Lebanon to learn more about their perspectives towards cultural literacy. The interviews focus on whether or not cultural awareness is enhanced during classroom practices, and if it is, how it is enhanced and what kind of practices, games or activities are implemented to help grade 6 students be more attentive to their cultural traditions, customs and values. The interviews will also focus on the parents' role in enhancing cultural literacy. Accordingly, a cultural awareness kit will be created. Grade 6 students will have the opportunity to learn about their culture through the novel activities, the various games and the enjoyable practices the kit contains.

Key words: literacy, culture, critical literacy, cultural literacy, cultural awareness, language, culturally responsive teaching
Chapter One

Introduction

We are what we say and do. The way we speak and are spoken to help shape us into the people we become. Through words and other actions, we build ourselves in a world that, in return, builds us. Such a world offers us various opportunities to learn, to discover, to explore, to experience, to develop, to choose, to act, to interact, to react and to change as well. However, how do we learn? With what means? How do we grasp the opportunities to construct ourselves in society and in the world too? The answer is, simply, through literacy. Literacy has to do with language and knowledge of one’s everyday social practices. Literacy is a kind of social action through language use that develops us as citizens inside our society, our culture.

On the other hand, how are we able to understand the world around us? How do we interpret messages in language and in society as well? How shall we discuss and reflect on the different meanings of a certain message? We can say that critical literacy is the ability to look critically at written, visual and spoken texts, to challenge the intent and content and to get the deepest meaning out of a text. Critical Literacy is often related to thinking in three dimensions, solving problems and as well as in communicating. Thinking in three dimensions is a decisive step in order to predict and to be aware of the weaknesses and strengths and gaps as well, consequently, expanding reasoning, offering multiple perspectives and constructing one’s self.

Once we are “literate” and “critically literate”, it is essential for us to be “culturally literate”. Why?

How can we be in a society without being aware of its history, disciplines and norms? To be part of society is to be a part of a certain culture. Thus, a culture obliges us to be accustomed to specific
regulations that create our identities and shape our personalities. So, what is culture? How do we define it? Culture is a broad concept that embraces all aspects of human life. Learning about culture is learning about several elements in society. Such elements that form a certain society are traditions, beliefs, values, customs, behavior, music, food, art and of course, the indispensible element, language. From here, being culturally literate is a fundamental characteristic in every individual. Yet, how do we get culturally literate? From where do we start? How do we teach our children about our culture? How can schools be a part of such awareness? What kind of role do teachers have in the classroom? How do they teach their students about culture? Why is it important for parents to be involved in such an experience?

It is imperative for students to learn about their culture within their schools, since schools are considered to be samples of the communities outside. Students, in schools, meet people from various backgrounds, different socio-economic statuses and many cultures. Such communications help students examine cultural diversities, biases, assumptions, explore the differences as well as the similarities between their culture and the cultures’ of others and simply respect the diversities among cultures regardless of their opinions.

*Purpose of the Study*

Since we live in a multi-cultural society, it is vital for Lebanese students to learn about their culture not only from their parents, but also from their teachers in schools. For this reason, this study is based on the research that was conducted by many educators, authors and researchers on literacy, cultural literacy and critical literacy. Throughout the research, the reader will learn about literacy in general and about the significance of cultural literacy in the individual's life. The study, furthermore, focuses on the applications that are implemented by teachers in the classrooms in order to educate their students and teach them about their culture.
Students between the ages of 11 and 12 usually start to explore the world around them. They tend to interact and communicate with different kinds of people, go through various social experiences and learn from many sources. Because students at this age haven’t fully developed their personalities, both teachers and parents pay close attention to them. It is at this critical stage that students choose what they like, dislike and what they aim for in general.

It would be an enriching experience for grade 6 students to learn about their Lebanese culture, to discover the values of their Lebanese society and to appreciate whatever cultural differences they may encounter through their lives.

Since the study targets grade 6 students, a cultural awareness kit will be provided at the end of the research as a final product. In spite of the different backgrounds of students, all grade 6 Lebanese students have the chance to learn about their Lebanese culture, including the various traditions, values, beliefs and customs. The kit also teaches grade 6 students to appreciate what they are learning, to be aware of their cultural practices, to accept individuals from different backgrounds and to respect those from different cultures as well.

**Methodology**

This study is research based. It closely examines literacy, cultural literacy and critical literacy from different perspectives. After the research, several interviews will be conducted with several grade 6 teachers in order to figure out how cultural awareness is implemented in the classroom, how teachers are equipped to help students learn about their culture and what kind of cultural practices do those teachers
provide for the students. Finally, various exercises, activities, games and practices will be provided as a package with the required instructions for grade 6 students to enhance their cultural awareness.

This chapter introduced the topic under scrutiny. It gave the reader a general overview of what the whole project is about. In the next chapter, a thorough literature review will put the points more into perspective and show the significance of literacy as well as cultural awareness in grade 6 classroom.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

Definition of Literacy

Defining “literacy” has always been a compelling challenge to educators, scholars and researchers as well. Therefore, one definition can be quite limiting. Many have discussed the term “literacy”; however, each had his/her point of view towards it.

In 2001, LeMoine stated that literacy not only involves competency in reading and writing, but goes beyond this to include the critical and effective use of these in peoples’ lives and the use of language (oral and written) for all purposes. Similarly, Scott and Marcus, in 2001, viewed literacy as an individual’s ability to read, write, speak in English, compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual and in society.

The definition of literacy has evolved from the exclusive focus on reading and writing to a more expanded perspective. For example, Langer (1991) interpreted literacy within a particular society. In other words, Langer argued that the development of literacy in a certain society is crucial. As for Venezky (1990), “literacy requires procedural knowledge-the ability to do something, as opposed to declarative knowledge-the knowledge of something” (p.4). Venezky affirmed that knowing about a thing is much different from having the ability to do it.

The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2005) considered that literacy is closely linked to both community and individual development. According to the UNESCO, literacy is more than reading and writing—it is about how we communicate in society. It is about social
practices and relationships, about knowledge, language and culture. In *Literacy for Change*, UNESCO (2003) assures that literacy is freedom and can be a source of social change. Learners are encouraged to challenge their own communities and use literacy in order to develop their society. Gee (1990) acknowledged that “Different societies and social groups have different types of literacy, and literacy has different social and mental effects in different social and cultural contexts” (p.168).

Lyth and Wolfe (1990) categorized literacy in terms of metaphors: literacy as skills, literacy as tasks, literacy as practices and literacy as critical reflection.

The first metaphor, literacy as skills, refers to basic academic skills of reading, writing and math measurable through standardized achievement testing. For this reason, a person is literate when he/she can pass a given level on a literacy skills assessment test. In many countries around the world, the ability to write a simple sentence or the completion of 4 or 6 years of schooling qualifies individuals as literate. According to this view, it is fair to say that literacy is essentially a collection of discrete academic skills which build one upon the other to produce a literate individual.

The second metaphor, literacy as tasks, depends on the individual’s life context or “functional domains” of existence. Work is one important functional domains of life together with family, life, health, civics and economics (UNESCO, 2006). Literacy here can be defined as the ability to function effectively in these contexts and as the application of such skills in order to negotiate various practical tasks of day-to-day life in a given domain and in the process promoting individual and community development. Thus, literacy is not only the ability to read and write, but also to perform calculations.
The third metaphor, literacy as practice, expands the concept of literacy to include understanding of the social and cultural contexts within which literacy is used. Hence, literacy depends on linguistics, social and cultural background of those persons using it rather than on the demands of a specific social environment. Literacy is a culturally-bound phenomenon which varies over settings and time. According to this metaphor, literacy consists of the acquisition of skills for individuals, the knowledge of the norms and protocols for how and when to use these skills. For instance, lawyers must possess knowledge of precise protocols in drawing up and interpreting legal documents. Health care professionals must know the proper procedures to generate and understand medicine documents. Academics learn to subscribe to certain accepted formal conventions in writing and reading scholarly work and so on.

The fourth metaphor, literacy as critical reflection, is seen, by Lytle and Wolfe (1990), as a process of interpreting the world and developing a consciousness towards values, behaviors and beliefs as constructed by both society and culture. Consequently, literacy is reflecting critically on a certain situation and acting to change it. Therefore, what is fundamental to mention is that literacy is the process of gaining a new perspective towards society.

In brief, literacy can be defined as a set of instrumental reading, writing and math skills, as the ability to perform various life tasks using skills, as a set of cultural practices including calculation or as a process of obtaining critical knowledge of and reflecting on the world and one’s place within it.

*Definition of Culture*

Culture is the result of the learned patterns of behavior that people experience. It refers to the set of shared attitudes, values, goals and practices that characterize a group of people. It consists of all the ideas,
objects and ways of performing certain tasks created by a group of people and includes the arts, beliefs, costumes, inventions, languages, technology and traditions that are shared by a group of people. Culture can be defined as the learned and shared behaviors of a community of interacting human beings whose shared patterns of behavior identify the members of culture group and distinguishes among another culture group. According to Chin & Gollnick (2009), culturally determined norms guide our language, behavior, emotions and thinking; they are the dos and don’ts of appropriate behavior within our culture. Chin confirms that the norms that are defined within a culture describe the individual aspects of the culture and enable the patterns to become a culture.

In 2001, Thanasoulas stated that culture establishes a context of cognitive and affective behavior for each person. It influences individual estimation and attitudes and can also have an effect on practical aspects of life such as hobbies. Thanasoulas, moreover, acknowledged culture as a matter of habit. According to him, culture is a habit that becomes a tradition and a tradition that gives rise to culture. Local people begin with habitual actions and go on to create common stereotypes. Such cultural stereotypes affect how people think, speak, act and interact with one another. On the other hand, Nieto (2002) stated that culture is the values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created, shared and transformed by a group of people bound together by a common history, geographic location, language, social class and/or religion. Furthermore, researchers have examined culture as a factor to help ethnically diverse learners bridge their understanding and adapt to the academic needs of schools and schooling (Banks & Banks, 2003).

Without culture, we can not understand the lives and motivations of others and connect with their concerns and interests. Culture is inherent in our being and a powerful human tool to develop our society,
add to our knowledge and establish the relationships between people. However, culture is fragile. The traits of culture are constantly changing and easily lost. If we do not value it, we will eventually lose it.

**Definition of Cultural Literacy**

We have ignored cultural literacy in thinking about education…We ignore the air we breathe until it is thin or foul. Cultural Literacy is the oxygen of social intercourse.

(Hirsh 1987)

Cultural literacy is the ability to understand and appreciate the similarities and differences in the customs, values, and beliefs of one’s own culture and the culture of others. Cultural Literacy is also the awareness of specific cultural sensibilities that might affect the way people think or behave. Moreover, cultural literacy is the appreciation and acceptance of diverse beliefs, appearances and lifestyles. As a result, culturally literate individuals are aware of the similarities between groups of different cultural backgrounds and are acceptant of differences between them. In addition to that, such individuals understand the dangers of stereotyping and other biases and are aware of and sensitive to issues of racism and prejudice. Moreover, culturally literate individuals can communicate, interact and work positively with individuals from other cultural groups.

According to Hirsh (1987), to be culturally literate is to possess the basic information needed to thrive in the modern world. The breadth of that information is great, extending over the major domains of human activity from sports to science. Hirsh discussed the significance of cultural literacy since it is the “fund” of
information possessed by all competent readers belonging to a certain culture. He added that cultural literacy is a shared knowledge that enables educated people to take up any general text and read it with an adequate level of comprehension and to grasp the central message as well as the unstated implications of the underlying context that give full meaning to what is read. In 2000, Stiger, Gallimore and Hiebert introduced two benefits for understanding other cultures. The first benefit multiplies our access to practices, ideas and people that can make positive contributions to our own society and the second benefit helps us understand ourselves more deeply. By understanding a range of alternatives, we become aware of our own beliefs that we often take them into granted.

Culture and Language

Culture might mean different things to different people however, culture is a way of life and in order to interact with the people around us, we need to communicate with them. Culture and communication are inseparable because culture not only dictates who talks to whom, about what and how the communication precedes, it also helps to determine how people encode messages and interpret it, so what is a better way than communicating through language? Language is a means by which we communicate, but it is more than just a means of communication. Language has multiple functions. We use language to exchange ideas, share ideas, report and define experiences. We can say that culture and language are linked together naturally, unconsciously and closely in our daily social lives.

According to Sue & Sue (2003), language structures meaning, determines how we see things and it also affects our worldviews. As the use of language is generally related to social and cultural values, language is considered, by many researchers, to be a social and cultural phenomenon since it involves certain features and characteristics of culture. In 2006, Tang agreed with the view that culture is language
and language is culture. He confirms that to speak a language well, one has to be able to think in that language, and thought is extremely powerful. Thus, language is the soul of the country and people who speak it. Similarly, Brown (2007) added that language is a part of culture and culture is a part of language. Brown explained that language, the means for communication among members of one culture, is the most visible and available expression of the concerned culture. Furthermore, Kuang (2007) indicated that “Language is the carrier of culture and culture is the content of language. There is no language without culture content” (p.75). He also said that learning a foreign language is not only learning its pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary, but it is also the learning of its culture.

Language affects Culture

Language is formed to present our ideas and concepts which might be altered depending on which cultural elements are dominant at any given moments. Douglas (2000) interpreted two important points concerning language. The first one is that language has infinite flexibility and the second one is that whenever language expands, culture changes. This means that the meaning of a word can be changed and then a new symbolism is created. Douglas presented an example to support his two ideas. The English word “nice” now generally means pleasing, agreeable, polite and kind. However, in the 15th century “nice” meant foolish, wanton, lascivious and even wicked. This simple example reveals that languages can evolve in response to the changing historical and social conditions. As we know, the culture of the United States is made up of many different cultures and languages. Each of these individual cultures is shaping and redefining the American culture. Many new words are being added to the daily American speech. For example, the sentence “long time no see” is not standard English; it was simply translated from the Chinese language. People accepted and understood them because these adaptations have already become a part of the “local” culture and blended into people’s lives.
Culture not only changes people’s values and habits, but also affects people’s language and behavior. According to Douglas (2000), cultural knowledge is crucial in achieving linguistic proficiency, and the culture of a society can be changed depending upon the language used. Douglas also presented an example to defend his point of view. New words emerge as they become identified with particular cultural activities. The slang words used by our parents were very different from those we use today. Different eras often have differing “pop languages”. Douglas believes that these languages are most likely to be influenced by TV programs, politics and even music and little by little they create their own cultural trend. Examples of this can be seen with the Beatles and most recently in Hip Hop music. In brief, language is always cultural in some respects. It should be conceptualized an integrated as part of a society and its culture.

Since language and culture are deeply connected, and every language is deeply rooted in its culture, it is extremely important and necessary to involve cultural context in language teaching and learning. Cultural context also plays an important role in helping students overcome their difficulties in understanding culture, enhance their cultural awareness and lower their cultural shock when immersing in different countries and contacting diverse people.

Some Cultural Challenges in the Classroom

Schools are seen as the repository of “standard” English, which is assumed to be the proper element of communication for advancement in both the marketplace and the academy. However, many researchers have found some conflicts in the classrooms where learners from more than one culture are present. Such conflicts are mostly related to the various methods of understanding and using language.
Culturally literate practices involve socialization in the ability to decode messages and to reason in patterned ways. People reveal their memberships in literate communities through the ways they use language—knowing the right vocabulary words, the structure of the appropriate genres as well when, where, and how conversations should begin, proceed and end. According to Hammer (2001), in reading and writing, such cultural models may be influenced by ethnicity, nationality, disciplines, religion, identity and professions. Hammer added that reading literature requires one to infer motives, goals and internal states of characters based not only on clues from the text, but also from one’s reading of the social world.

“It is me” is not considered “improper” English (as opposed to the “standard form “It is I”), whereas “It be me”, a marker of African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) is seen as “incorrect”. Phillips (1990) documented conflicts between norms for talk in the Navajo Nation and ways Anglo teachers expected Navajo students to participate. Using Anglo norms, teachers interpreted long stretches of silence by Navajo students as evidence that students are not learning. Similarly, in 1993, Cazden, John & Hymes explained how oral language practices by low-income African-American primary level students were interpreted as deficits rather than resources. Teachers viewed the African-American children’s stories as ill formed and saw the students’ language as a deficit.

Champion (1998) identified an array of narrative genres used by African-American children. Champion’s findings illustrate how children across different communities “take up various narrative styles, structures, and content that include formal instruction, informal instructional contexts, family contexts and others” (p.72). One can understand the ways students pass through multiple cultural communities. In the process, students adopt and adapt a variety of oral and textual genres that become part of their literate repertoires. They learn to engage such repertoires in different contexts with people from different cultures and for different purposes.
The above examples might be just samples on cultural conflicts in the classroom. Cultural conflicts are dangerous realm, so how can we help learners to be more exposed to their culture without hindering their beliefs and their own perspectives towards their culture.

**A Critical Literacy Model of Multicultural Teacher Education**

Using Critical Literacy in a multicultural classroom is beneficial as well as entertaining. First, what is critical literacy? There are a variety of definitions of critical literacy. For example, Shannon (1995) offered a concise understandable explanation:

Critical perspectives push the definition of literacy beyond traditional decoding or encoding of words in order to reproduce the meaning of text or society until it becomes a means for understanding one's own history and culture, to recognize connections between one's life and the social structure, to believe that change in one's life and the lives of others and society are possible as well as desirable, and to act on this new knowledge in order to foster equal and just participation in all the decisions that affect and control our lives (p.83)

Critical Literacy is also rooted in the work of Freire, who calls for radical pedagogical change in the ways of thinking. Freire (2000) believes that teachers must treat students as active receptacles of information instead of passive individuals and must encourage them to question their worlds focusing on the use of dialogue. Briefly speaking, cultural literacy is an instructional approach that advocates the adoption of critical perspectives towards a text. It encourages learners to actively analyze what they are reading, to reflect on and criticize what they have understood. In addition to that, critical literacy assists individuals in make-meaning of texts and relating them to each other.
The following model was established by Martin in 1999. Such a model assists students in relating to differences, similarities, and educational equity and empowers them to write new messages and meanings that better fit their understanding of how the world is or ought to be. The Critical Literacy Model of Multicultural Teacher Education includes four steps, or four levels of thinking: description, analysis, vision and strategy. An example about “race” and “whiteness” is given for further illustrations.

**Description**

In this level, learners describe what they are working on through discussing physical appearances, color or shape. For example, what are the physical properties of race? What are the physical properties of whiteness? Learners have to describe such properties.

**Analysis**

Analysis is the level where individuals try to break down, examine, figure out, and investigate. For example, what is the social meaning of “race”? What are the consequences of “race”? From here, they understand that there is a “white culture” which differs from another culture which is the “black culture”.

**Vision**

During this level, learners articulate a vision for the future. In other words, students are asked to express their ideas towards “race” and “whiteness”. They might be asked the following questions: Are we satisfied by the way “race” has shaped our world, if not, how would we like our world to be? Here, several points of view might be discussed. Thus, learners are aware of the culture around them.
Strategy

After experiencing all the previous levels, learners are now ready to develop their own strategy as a resolution for “racism” if asked “What are some steps you can take to help achieve the kind of world you envision? Such a step provides them with the possibility of claiming for themselves a positive white anti-racist identity.

Such a model is applicable in all classrooms during the discussion of any cultural topic. From here, it is essential to highlight on teacher’s role in the classroom. After all, the teacher is the one who is able to provoke and motivate students to learn and to enjoy learning as well.

Generally, Kuang in 2007 indicated various teaching strategies to help teachers design curricula integrating multiple cultures into their language teaching. First, Kuang mentioned that a well-prepared lesson plan, an appropriate material selection and an organic framework of the syllabus will be the fundamental elements to conduct a good cross-cultural course which relates to foreign language learning. In addition, Kuang stated that applicable and feasible strategies also need to be implemented in the language through various activities or cooperative learning. Such strategies include: discussing and contrasting exotic cultures, playing dramas related to culture in and out of class, displaying cultural photos, teaching different English songs from different cultures, using authentic materials and using audio-visual media to present diverse culture. Finally, to better cultivate students to be equipped with global perspectives and a broader multicultural spirit and to inspire students maintain adequate culture interest in language learning, language teachers will also need to consider these important strategies for cultural awareness.
Cultural Literacy

*Enhancing Cultural Literacy*

*Cultural Awareness*

Cultural Awareness involves the ability of standing back from ourselves and becoming aware of our cultural values, beliefs and perceptions. Cultural awareness becomes noticeable when we have to interact with people from other cultures. We see, interpret and evaluate things in different ways. What we consider an appropriate behavior in one society might be inappropriate in another society. Fenner (1997) believes that misinterpretations occur when we lack awareness of our own behavioral rules. In the absence of knowledge, we tend to assume instead of finding out what a certain behavior means to the person involved. For example, a straight look to the eye during a dialogue is considered a respectful step towards a person in Lebanon, whereas, it is regarded disrespectful in Japan. So, what exactly is cultural awareness? How do we approach it?

According to Byram & Zarate & Neuner (1997), cultural awareness entails an understanding of how people might reflect their own values, beliefs and basic assumptions through their behavior. Byram believes that we are all shaped by our cultural backgrounds which influence how we interpret cultural issues, how we perceive ourselves and how we relate to other people. Increasing our cultural practices assists us in increasing our cultural knowledge by providing an overview of cultural characteristics and issues. Yet, it is always important to identify individual needs and preferences and remember that no individual can be reduced to a set of cultural norms.

Most of us might be aware of our cultural values; however, are Lebanese students well aware of their culture? Can teachers work with students to develop cultural awareness?
As students tend to explore the world around them, support is needed during the learning process from two different sides in the school: teachers and school administrators. However, what kind of support should each side provide when students learn about their culture?

The teacher’s role in the classroom

Students spend most of their time at school interacting and communicating with friends. Students learn to read, write, listen, share, exchange ideas, work in groups and develop all their skills. Teachers play a central role in guiding students in the classroom using the appropriate instructions. However, what is the teacher’s role in enhancing cultural literacy? How can teachers educate their students about culture? From where shall they start? What kind of knowledge should they have? How should they use such knowledge in order to deliver the required information?

Knowledge bases needed by teachers

Rosen (2000) described five basic knowledge bases for language arts and English teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Rosen declared that these five bases are the core for teaching cultural literacy. These five knowledge bases are self-knowledge, cultural knowledge, linguistic knowledge, culturally informed teaching knowledge, and knowledge of materials and methods for multicultural literacy education.
Self-Knowledge

Rosen (2000) explained that self-knowledge can be gained through “inquiry into cultural consciousness” (p.254). Rosen also added that teachers with self-knowledge are capable of reflecting on their own knowledge, consequently, respecting the various literacies and languages students have. Haberman & Post (1998) noted the importance of teachers having both self-knowledge and self-acceptance. When teachers are aware of their own cultural backgrounds and values, then they have the opportunities to recognize any bias or preconceived notions that they weren’t able to tolerate in the past.

Cultural Knowledge

Cultural Knowledge is mostly related to the knowledge of how cultures affect students in general. In other words, teachers, with cultural knowledge, should be aware of such effects, thus, they should work with students perceptions to avoid any negative effects, on the students' self-esteem, values, behavior and learning as well. Moreover, Cultural knowledge gives teachers the opportunity to be aware of the diversity of cultures in the classroom, consequently, being aware of the similarities as well as of the differences between cultures. From here, teachers tend to unite all cultures in order to teach students that even with cultural differences, respect is obligatory.

Linguistic Knowledge

It is well-known that different students learn in different ways. When children speak varieties of English other than standard academic English, it is easy to encounter misunderstandings, misconceptions and miscommunications. Furthermore, literacy experiences may differ from the expectations of culturally and linguistically diverse children. For this reason, educators need to understand how students' patterns of
communication and various dialects affect their classroom learning. Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez and Turner (1997) suggested that instruction should build upon the linguistic strengths that children bring with them to school. Thus, educators can foster children's literacy development by supporting and scaffolding the languages that children bring to the classroom and moving them to a more standard form of English.

_Culturally Informed Teaching Knowledge_

According to Rosen (2000), knowledge base of culturally informed teaching knowledge enables educators to create "collaborative and culturally sensitive classroom environment, cultural patterns in classroom verbal interactions and other cultural dimensions of interactions between the instructor and students"(p.255) that encourage the participation and the engagement of all the students in the classroom. Such kind of knowledge prepares teachers to be respectfully sensitive to the cultures of their students, to learn about and know such cultures and to use understandings about how culture influences learning in their day-to-day planning for teaching students. Culturally Informed Teaching Knowledge also supports the learning needs of children regardless of their cultural or linguistic background. Teachers with such kind of knowledge are able to detect any problem in the classroom, look for the causes and determine the appropriate solution that best suits the student as well as the classroom as a whole.

_Knowledge of Multicultural Materials and Literacy Methods_

This kind of knowledge is fundamental for the students' learning in the classroom since it is directly related to the methods for using the proper material in culturally sensitive ways that help dissolving stereotypes rather than motivating them. Such knowledge improves students' self-esteem, involvement and engagement and academic performance in literacy. Researchers have found that the level of involvement in
the classroom of African-American students has increased because of the teachers with the knowledge of multicultural materials and literacy methods. Such kind of knowledge can be considered a novel kind of literacy since it focuses on building up students' awareness of their culture through discussing human differences and other topics that relate to issues of diversity.

In brief, it is obvious that such kinds of knowledge are interrelated, thus, teachers who have the five of them are able to transform their classroom into an interesting learning environment by which students learn from each other about their different cultures, consequently, learn to respect each other's points of view as well as their traditions, values and customs. These five knowledge bases are extremely important in assisting teachers address the literacy needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. They help them develop a collaborative and culturally sensitive learning environment that encourages meaningful engaged learning for all students in the classroom. This is why, as previously mentioned, classroom teachers need to acquire these knowledge bases through teacher-education programs or staff development opportunities. Furthermore, the five knowledge bases will support teachers’ efforts to nurture the literacy skills of their students and promote high academic achievements.

*Teachers as Mediators*

Having the knowledge is just a part of the teacher’s role. Osterling and Fox (2004) described teachers as “cultural brokers” and “cultural mediators” in this process of second language learning. Bennett (2003) also viewed teachers as mediators. According to Bennett, teachers have the responsibility to create a learning environment that establishes continuity between home and school. He stated that mediators are individuals in certain cultures who serve as providers of information for those who
may not have access to learning about their culture or might misinterpret certain beliefs. As cultural mediators, Gay (2000) stated that teachers have to engage in practices that use “cultural knowledge, prior experience, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p.29).

In 2007, Bennett added that teachers help culturally diverse students to “retain their own cultural identity while functioning in a different cultural milieu; for example, the school” (p.9). According to Bennett, teachers who develop multicultural competences also learn about their cultural awareness. Multi-culturally competent teachers bridge the gaps between the school and home cultures. Similarly, Collier and Thomas (2004), Hadi-Tabassum (2006), and Freeman (2004) indicated that when teachers develop the students’ home language, they also develop the students’ cultural competence. Furthermore, such teachers aid their students to navigate between their home and school cultures while learning to use bicultural identity as the tool to lead them through the educational system successfully (Nieto, 2002).

Paris and Lung (2008) said that one of the important roles of teachers is to develop responsive, respectful and effective teaching. Teachers who teach in culturally diverse settings find themselves as “creators of curricula” (p.254) because they are continually developing curriculum and instructions that meet the strengths, needs and values of a particular group of students. As a result, the role of the teacher becomes an essential element of teaching.

Moreover, lesson plans and activities should be planned with recognition, acknowledgement and integration of the cultural ethos of children in the classroom. In 2004, Chin & Gollnick interpreted the term culturally responsive teaching. They both agreed that such kind of teaching reflects students’ cultures and
experiences and views them as strengths. Culturally responsive teaching uses various implicit and explicit ways of knowing and understanding in educating students from diverse populations.


*High teacher expectations*

Most teachers have high expectations for their students, however, not all of them fulfill such expectations, as a result, students might lose their confidence and tend to be less motivated to learn. This is why it is necessary for teachers to have positive expectations towards all students and work accordingly with them in the classroom.

*Student voices*

Teachers, as cultural mediators, must encourage students to speak out and talk about their own experiences by which they make sense of the subject matter within their own realities. Culturally responsive pedagogy requires teachers to recognize any kind of disconnection between the student and the parents so they can have the chance to help out if possible.

*Varied Instructional Formats*

Because students have different learning styles, varied forms of engagement are necessary for students to learn and to apply what they know as well. For many students, learning is an active process; this
is why using a variety of teaching methods that suit all kinds of students, from different backgrounds and from different academic levels.

The above three features might seem as habitual steps for many teachers since they consider that such steps should be implemented in all cases and not only when teaching about culture. However, according to Bennett (2003), Chin & Gollnick (2004) confirmed that these indispensible features have a significant impact on how students learn about their culture, how they understand it, how they communicate with the people around them.

*The administrator’s role in the schools*

In schools, administrators should support students learning about their culture. Such support can be in different ways. Rosen (2000) assured that administrators have a major role in enhancing cultural literacy in schools. He suggested that administrators should learn about the communities of the children in the school and become involved in the needs and concerns of those communities, respect the multiple cultures and languages of the families and children in the school, and ensure that the school provides a culturally responsive education. Moreover, administrators, according to Rosen, should work and coordinate with teachers. Administrators must acknowledge the importance of educating teachers for diversity. In other words, sponsoring on going staff development to improve the learning environment and academic progress of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds should be a main objective for administrators to enhance cultural literacy. It is also necessary for administrators to encourage all teachers and staff to have positive and respectful attitudes for all cultures through demonstrating anti-racist and anti-bias behaviors. Above all, Rosen described administrators as facilitators when they emphasize developing
language proficiency and connecting school to student’s lives to assist student learning. Briefly, administrators are those who ensure that schools provide a rich learning experience for all students.

Rosen explained that the administrator’s role isn’t only coordinating with teachers and providing students the suitable atmosphere to learn about their culture, but it is also related to the coordination with parents. Administrators must model and encourage and reinforce two-way communication between school personnel and parents. Such communications build trust, develop relationships and encourage dialogue with parents and community leaders from diverse cultural groups. Administrators can also invite parents to participate with their children in the cultural activities done in schools so parents from different cultures meet and learn about each other. Rosen also declared that it would be a step forward to take the parents’ opinions into consideration and include them in the decision-making process for the cultural literacy curriculum and material as well.

_Six Recommendations as instructional strategies for teaching second language within a cultural framework_

Second language learning involves a number of different dimensions, including grammatical competence, communicative competence, language proficiency and cultural understanding (Thanasoulas, 2001). Teaching a second language is not simply about giving speeches, syntactic structures or learning new vocabulary, but should incorporate cultural elements. Cultural activities and objectives should be carefully organized and incorporated into second language lesson plans to enrich the teaching context content. Thanasoulas suggested six different strategies that include cultural items in the second language classrooms.
Strategy I: Provide culturally learning materials

The use of appropriate materials can help students engage in real cultural experiences. These materials can include films, news, broadcasts, television shows, web sites, magazines, newspapers, menus and other printed matters. Teachers can adapt their use of cultural materials to suit the age and the language proficiency level of the students. Teachers might supply students with a detailed translation or give them a chart, diagram or even an outline to complete while they listen to a dialogue or watch a video. Using the suitable audiovisual resources can strengthen students’ images of the targeted culture and enhance their language learning as well.

Strategy II: Use common proverbs as transferred tools

A discussion of common proverbs in the targeted language can help students to understand how the proverbs are different from or similar to proverbs of their language. In 2001, Thanasoulas stated that this strategy helps students understand how such differences create different cultures and emphasize the historical and cultural background of a country. Using proverbs as a tool to explore two different cultures can guide students to analyze the similarities and dissimilarities of cultures. It is also an essential method for students to explore the values that are often represented in the proverbs of both the targeted culture and their own.

Strategy III: Apply role play as socio cultural approach

Although the concept of role play is not new, it is a useful instructional technique in a socio cultural approach. A socio cultural approach is the most useful method currently applied in language instruction
(Wertsch, 1991). The major objective of a socio cultural approach is to prepare learners for intercultural communication and dialogue between cultures. According to Savignon (1997), socio cultural strategies can be seen as one of the most efficient ways for learners to achieve socio cultural competence within second language communicative competence. Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) further indicated that role play activities can examine cultural behavior and patterns of communication. For example, students can dramatize an incident that happened to them and caused cross-cultural misunderstanding. In this way, it will enable them to develop communicative strategies to overcome similar problems in real second language communication.

*Strategy IV: Encourage students search and present through the cultural capsules*

The use of culture capsules is one of the best-established and well-known methods for teaching culture. The concept of cultural capsules was developed by Taylor and Sorenson in 1961. It is a brief description of some aspects of the targeted language culture alongside contrasting information from the students’ native language cultures. The contrasting information can be provided by the teacher, but it is usually more effective to have the students themselves point out the contrasts. Tylor and Sorenson further suggested that students can present objects and images that originate from the targeted culture. The students are then responsible for finding information about the concerned object or image, either by conducting research or by being given clues to investigate. Students can also write a brief summary or make an oral presentation to the class about the cultural relevance of the item.
Strategy V: View students as cultural resources

Students in the classroom are also considered cultural resources. Teachers can invite students to talk their culture and present what is unique about it, such students might be immigrant or international students. In this learning activity, students not only learn about the diversity of cultures, but they also have the opportunity to organize and make connections between their native culture and the targeted language culture through these presentations.

Strategy VI: Use computer technology to help students gain cultural information

According to Rost (2002), educators indicated that the current computer technology has many advantages for learning a language and learning about a culture. The use of computer technology can provide multicultural interactivities that teach students what they are required to know about various cultures. Through the computers and the internet, learners can link to anywhere and at anytime to access the needed material to discover, explore and learn about the traditions, values, customs, beliefs and norms that different cultures have. Learners can even find resources written in the targeted language and learn about other countries’ cultures.

This chapter reviewed the extensive literature available on literacy. It mainly focused on cultural and critical literacy and set the stage for the next chapter which is what grade 6 teachers believe the role of literacy should be in the classroom.
Chapter Three
Interviews & Discussion

As the main aim of this project is to create a literacy awareness kit for grade 6 students in Lebanon, I decided to divide my study differently. Thus, this chapter reports the results of the interviews conducted with 6 teachers in Lebanon.

In chapter two, I briefly discussed what educators and researchers examined and studied concerning literacy, culture, cultural literacy, language and cultural awareness. I used semi-structured interviews so I can comprehend teachers’ opinions towards cultural literacy, cultural awareness and how they are applied in the classroom. I tried to extract certain information from teachers in order to build up my own perspective after comparing what I read to what teachers stated in the interviews.

*Semi-Structured Interviews*

According to Fraenkel and Wallen, in 2006, semi-structured interviews are “verbal questionnaires” that are made for the purpose of eliciting certain and specific answers from the interviewee. They stated that such interviews are done at the end of the study in order to compare and contrast the information obtained from the interview to what educators and researchers examined throughout history. Moreover, such interviews tend to test a specific hypothesis that the researchers has in mind. This is why semi-structured interviews are used in this study.
Reporting Interview Questions

The following questions were asked in the various interviews. Teachers answered as follows:

1- “Language and Culture” are interrelated. Do you agree or disagree? Why? Why not?

- Language and culture are definitely interrelated. A person should know about the culture of the other as he/she tries to speak their language. Learning about the other’s culture and language simultaneously makes it easier to avoid possible conflicts.

- I think language and culture are strongly interrelated and we can see how they are related whether in literature or from discussions in class or from the way students behave towards each other.

- I think that language and culture are interrelated as language deals with different aspects of student’s lives and aims to instruct student’s knowledge as well as teach them language skills.

- Culture is a learned way of living that is shared by a group of people. Language is a means that enables a group to communicate.

- Basic languages are spoken and used around the world but they change as different cultures use and embrace them.

- Language and Culture are interrelated. Students should be able to understand the language in each culture, not only the culture they are living in.

2- How do you relate “culture” to your classroom?

- Discussing differences in backgrounds, ethnicity or race relates culture to the classroom automatically.

- Basically, I like to give examples from different cultures using different books, different examples, relating them to student’s background, students experiences so they can understand how their culture affects their discussions and the themes they like, so basically, it is through group activities or discussions in class.

- Using American series of books makes relating our Islamic and Arabic culture to classroom a hard task, but by highlighting morals and relating them to Islam I think this task is a little bit easier. For example, if the character of the text is honest, helpful, and obedient and so on, we might relate these morals to Islamic beliefs.
-I relate culture to my classroom by introducing students to their culture through studying about traditions, different religions and important values.

-I promote culture by living the local culture and demonstrating to students a sincere interest and knowledge of the country.

-Teachers should expose students to the diverse cultures in the world. Students should be familiar with the way of living, the holidays, traditions, rituals, government systems in both eastern and western cultures.

3- Why do you think it is important for grade 6 students to learn about their culture?

-It is important for students to learn about their culture because only then they would be able to learn about other cultures, appreciate them, and compare/contrast them with theirs.

-We live in a society and they need to know about this society. They need to know about the cultural differences so they can understand others and respect their differences. Students should also know themselves and their identity. Culture is a part of ourselves and I think we should enhance this and not only academically, but also through helping students for a better life which is knowing ourselves, knowing our culture, traditions, respecting them and knowing what to change and what to keep.

-Grade 6 students might be passing through the hardest time because of the changes that take place during this age, so working on their cultural awareness at schools is a very important step as they should learn the social manners in the first class. This age is a turning point in children’s life and our Arab children lack the proper social behavior. Our children should be taught how to respect elders, how to bear their responsibilities, how to greet others properly, how to learn from others’ mistakes without mocking them, how to respect differences between them and their friends, and how not to question parents’ orders as they are the only ones that they should listen to.

-It is important because of their age (preparing to be teenagers) to teach them how to accept others who are different from them. It encourages students to critically think about and analyze information themselves.

-It is a two-sided sword. The benefits are mostly positive when it comes to shading information and knowledge, but nations should make an organized effort to develop, honor and encourage accepting cultures. Students, parents, communities and countries need to be proud of who they are and where they are going.

-Grade 6 students learn about their culture from social studies and English classes. They should learn what’s going on in their culture before learning about the other cultures.
4- What kind of cultural conflicts do you encounter in your classroom? How do you solve such conflicts?

-Cultural conflicts emerge whenever students are exposed to certain texts in language that include information about different cultures, or different perspectives. There is no single way of solving the problem; yet there could always be a need to accept others as they are.

-They are not called conflicts. Most of my students are Lebanese, most of them come….they are mainly from Beirut or Uh…..they come from known cities but….uhhh…we had a problem in another class because there was a student coming from abroad and he found it different here in Lebanon, so we had a problem in another class because there was a student coming from abroad and he found it different here in

-Lebanon, so we had….actually, we did a workshop about friendship. I wanted to help this student because he was finding it difficult to deal with the others because they were making fun of him….so I attended a workshop about friendship regarding how we should understand and respect the others uh…..sometimes we encounter some fights in the playground between different age groups. This is why we need to sit with them and let them discover how the others think sometimes, we use the “I” statement (this is what I think and this is what I expected from you and then the other has actually explain how they feel and why they reacted in this way, so basically it is by communication and by facing each other. Sometimes, we use short stories like ….I once used a story called ”What I do and What I do not do”. It is a small book, but I like the illustrations it shows students how to accept different orders that are part of our society. One other problem I faced is the language. The student had difficulty in understanding the language we used in the classroom. He kept on asking me language questions. At first, I thought that he was just being silly, but later, I understood that he had a serious problem with the language since the language he learned in his country is different from our language here in Lebanon.

-As I said before, our students lack the knowledge of simple manners in addition to lacking the knowledge of their own identity, they are always concerned about imitating others, watching t.v. and using the language and surfing the net. I work on such conflicts by raising responsibility in my students and guiding their concerns. For example, I might give them a homework which needs information from the internet to be solved. This way they spend their time beneficially doing something they like to.

-I usually do not have cultural conflicts since all of my students are Lebanese, but if I ever have such problems, I would probably talk to the students privately and help them realize that although they might have different opinions, each one is special in his/her own way. Respecting one another is very important and students should be taught that. However, we can not forget that in some classrooms, there could be students from different cultures or even coming from outside Lebanon and who are used to different language skills. This is why it is essential for teachers to discuss the culture with students and to talk privately with them, if necessary so they can accept one another as human beings.

-Religious conflicts occasionally enter classroom discussions, mostly from home misconceptions or lack of exposure to other people’s thinking.
- Students come from different backgrounds, have different point of views and are of different religions. As a teacher, I teach students to respect each other’s opinions and if any problem rises, all students should try to propose solutions for it.

5- How do you view your role as a mediator between the school and the student’s home?

- Teachers involuntarily play the role of a mediator between the school and the student’s home because he/she is usually aware of any problems that the student might encounter at home or at school, and some students are even capable of turning their teachers into a confidante.

- I think the teacher needs to reinforce the communication between the two sides: the parents and the school. Now… what we have…we can have student-teacher meetings, we can have student-parent-teacher meetings. We can also have newsletters that include tips to enhance social skills, so there should be communications between home and school.

- The teacher’s role is very important since it is the connection between the student and his/her home. In addition to that, the teacher has a big influence on the student’s thinking, on the way the student behaves, on the student’s motivation towards learning and on his/her life in general.

- Such a role is one of the basics roles for the teacher since it is the connection between the school and the parents. Students spend most of their time in the school, so consequently, teachers have a main role just as parents. Teachers have a direct impact on the student’s thoughts, ideas, skills and everything that is related to his/her life.

- I try to be an example at all times especially when students exhibit strong opinions. I like to challenge their thinking and experiences with people from other religions. I like to get students to think about what they are usually repeating from home or even from environments that do not accept other religions. I have discovered that all religions have balanced believers and extreme believers.

- As a teacher, I act as a facilitator who guides the students and don’t spoon-feed them. I believe also that parents should be involved in the school’s activities.

6- What kind of characteristics should the language instructor have in order to teach the students about their culture?

- The Language instructor should be knowledgeable about the subject matter he/she is teaching. He/she should be open to all cultures and know what to integrate from activities, group work and projects that meet the students’ interest and needs.

- The language instructor should have the basic knowledge of the student’s culture, and above all, he/she should keep his/her opinions out of the classroom, unless the opinions are positive in nature. I think foreign teachers who are married to locals have more influence and more responsibilities to promote the local culture.
The language instructor should understand, lenient, tolerant, wise, and respectful. Teachers also should foster a feeling of emotional safety by respecting every student’s opinion and encouraging all students to be respectful to each other.

I think a language instructor should start by himself/herself, he/she should learn how to show good manners and not to teach them. Instructors should not oblige students to follow certain manners without believing in the importance of following it. He should use active learning strategies.

A language teacher is expected to be fluent, culturally aware, and patient.

Personally, I think that culture can be enhanced from the way we use the language, the pragmatics. For example, if I respect the students. …also the…maybe the ….use of sentences… the readings, so there are ways in discussions …. if we are respectful , if we respect others and are open to different opinions and if we are good models for students to follow what they see and what they hear.

7- **How do you enhance cultural awareness in your classroom?**

-Extra reading about random cultures might help. The reading should also entail discussions and comparisons.

-Other than stories, I usually use small parts of articles from magazines…that describe how music can help people to communicate with each other….I think this is a part of cultural awareness ….we can also talk about different culture and give examples on other countries and other societies. We can also ask students to write their journal…what they see around them, so cultural awareness is about small activities in class, it is not only about the activity, but also about the whole day…..

-It is important to relate stories and book’s content to everyday life and approving or disapproving certain actions done by the characters.

-Cultural awareness might be difficult somehow especially for grade 6 students, but if teachers do it in the right way and at the right time, a sense of responsibility will grow with students as they are explored to their culture and as they learn to appreciate not only their culture, but the culture of others too.

-I explore with my students local stories, old sayings, and current events which relate to lessons.

-Students should know the different features occurring in the different cultures, and if a problem exists in a culture, they should be able to suggest some solutions or learn from other cultures in order to avoid the same problem.

8- **What kind of activities, games, and exercises do you implement in your classroom?**

-Role playing, competitions between groups, hangman.
-Story telling…for example, we had a story about how people Uh…have festivals in their country, so I changed this and find ways of different festivals and carnivals in Lebanon….so I am working with the students on “Lebanon Day” for 2 hours. Some of them decided to do Taboli and Homose…others from Baalbak and from the South talkd about the traditions and others will talk about how people used to wear before. This is actually nice, because we changed the whole theme and related it to Lebanon. For Christmas, I asked my students to choose a country and talk about how this country celebrate Christmas and what it means to them, and at the end we read in the class and we come up with a conclusion that each country has its own ways, traditions and beliefs in celebrating Christmas. Although each country see things differently, at the end it has its own ways of communications.

-Some of these activities might be critical thinking strategies and acting (role play).

-Some activities might be musical recordings for different cultures and nations. Proverbs from different cultures displayed on the bulletin boards and paraphrased. Students can compare them to proverbs from their own culture. A third activity is folktale read inside the class, students have to know the moral lesson behind them. Passport activities, displaying on cardboards the months of the year, each month students will travel to a country by studying its culture and traditions. We also work on projects that reflect costumes and traditions of different countries.

-Field trips would be a nice idea for students to get acquainted with what is around them. Language activities such as writing about certain cultural topics, riddles, and language games would also help students learn about the Lebanese culture.

-I ask students to compare two cultures by looking at the different forms of government in each, social problems if any, and global issues. I some times divide the students into groups and focus on each heading by doing some research. They could gather information and see how any of these issues could be applied in their cultures. Finally, I ask students to do presentations and run an open discussion with their classmates.

Discussion

The sections below include language and culture, cultural conflicts, the teacher’s role, the characteristics of the language instructor, cultural awareness and cultural activities.

Language and Culture

All teachers agreed that there is a strong relation between language and culture. They explained that culture is a part of language and language is a part of culture as well. This is consistent with Brown’s (2007) findings. Two teachers stated that language is important for the student’s knowledge

_Cultural Conflicts_

Teachers discussed several cultural conflicts they encounter in their classrooms. The results are similar to Philips (1990) Champion (1998) and Hammer (2001) study results. Hammer (2001) pointed out that the major cultural conflicts teachers face in their classrooms are language, identity, and religion.

One teacher explained that when students learn about different cultures, they should be learning about different languages and here is the conflict. Some students will not be able to understand the texts that include information about different cultures. Other teachers talked about the student’s identity. In other words, teachers said that it is important for students to differentiate between their identity and the identity of people that belong to other cultures.

One other teacher said that religion sometimes is a conflict in the classroom especially when discussing it. This happens because of the misconceptions parents teach their kids and because of the lack of exposure to the true concepts and beliefs in religion.

_The Teacher’s Role_

Some teachers view their role as facilitators as well as mediators which is consistent with Bennett (2003) and Nieto (2002) study results. They also stated that, as teachers, they influence the student’s behavior, attitude and thinking since they are role models to them.

Some teachers confirmed that their role is as essential as the parent’s role since they spend a long time with students. For this reason, teachers have a strong influence on the student’s development of thinking skills as well as on the student’s behavior and on the way they approach certain situations in life.
While most teachers discussed how they are mediators between parents and what happens in school with their students, some other teachers assured that being a role model is what matters to them. Through modeling, teachers are able to send the required message to their students and help them behave properly.

The Characteristics of the Language Instructor

The teachers’ answers mostly focused on three main points. The teacher should be culturally knowledgeable (see Rosen 2000, Heberman 1998), open to all cultures, neutral in his/her opinion (see also, Paris and Lung, 2008) and respectful and understanding towards all student’s opinions (Rosen 2000).

All teachers agreed that it is essential for language instructors to have a strong background on the Lebanese culture. Such knowledge assists students to learn critically about their culture and understand the values of the Lebanese culture. They also reported that language instructors should respect the student’s opinion without revealing any bias.

The results of the interviews are consistent with the literature. Literacy, be it, cultural or critical, should be integrated in the curriculum so that students become more aware of its importance and learn to behave accordingly.

This section mainly reported and discussed the interview results conducted with the teachers. The next chapter introduces the cultural awareness kit for grade 6 classroom in Lebanon.
The Cultural Awareness Kit is a collection of activities that introduces grade 6 students to the Lebanese Culture. The kit teaches the students about Lebanon in general and about the Lebanese traditions, food, politicians, villages, art and special occasions.

The activities are divided into three parts: classroom activities, field trip activities and yearly activities. The Kit also includes two evaluation forms that the teacher can use to evaluate the student’s involvement and understanding in the classroom activities and in the field trip activities. A set of questions related to the yearly activities is also created for grade 6 students to answer as a wrap up for such activities. In addition to that, pictures and illustrations are included as references or samples by which the students can use to learn about the Lebanese Culture. All the activities found in the kit are based on the English Language. In other words, grade 6 students will be learning about the Lebanese Culture through the English Language. Grade 6 students will learn a variety of English words that are related to the Lebanese Culture.

A) Classroom Activities

Such activities are explained by the teacher in the classroom. The teacher has to discuss the purpose of each activity and explain how it is done. She/He can ask the students to present their work to their classmates at the end of each activity.

To start with, the teacher asks students to find the meaning of the words ‘culture’ and ‘cultural awareness’ and discuss them in class. It is crucial for students to understand what they will be learning and why they are learning about their culture. After the discussion, the teacher explains to the students that they will learn about the Lebanese Culture through a lot of activities.
1- Warm up Activity

After discussing the words ‘culture’ and ‘cultural awareness’ with the students, the teacher shows the students some pictures to help the students understand what they will be learning throughout the year. Such pictures include touristic sites, Lebanese customs, the Lebanese Flag and other symbols that represent Lebanon (see Appendix A). In this activity, students will also learn vocabulary words that are directly related to the Lebanese Culture.

2- Research Activity

This activity is based on research. In this activity, the teacher can divide the students into five groups. Each group has to work on certain topics and in the end; students should present a written paper and a power point presentation about their work.

Group 1

- The Lebanese geographical location
- The Lebanese flag
- The Lebanese National Anthem
- The Lebanese weather

Guided Questions

What are the countries surrounding Lebanon?
What is the geographical location of Lebanon?
Who drew the Lebanese flag?
Why were the red and the green colors chosen?
What do these colors represent?
Who wrote the Lebanese National Anthem?
Describe the weather in Lebanon.

Group 2

- The Famous Lebanese actors/actresses
- The Famous Lebanese customs
- The Main Languages used in Lebanon
- The Famous Lebanese Writers

Guided Questions

Name some famous actors and actresses.
Talk briefly about their lives and their work.
Describe the Lebanese customs.
What are the three main languages used in Lebanon?
Name the most famous writers and discuss some of their famous work.

Group 3

- The main religions in Lebanon
- The main National Holidays in Lebanon
- The Famous Lebanese singers

Guided Questions

What are the main religions in Lebanon?
Discuss briefly each one of them.
Name some famous Lebanese singers
Discuss briefly some of their famous work.
Group 4

- The Famous Lebanese Poets
- The Famous cultures that shaped Lebanon through history

Guided Questions

Who are the most famous Lebanese Poets?
Discuss their lives briefly and talk about their work.
One of the cultures that shaped the Lebanese history is the Roman Culture. What are some other cultures?
Discuss each culture and some of the most famous features about each one.

Group 5

- The Famous Lebanese musicians
- The Famous Lebanese musical instruments
- The Famous Lebanese dances

Guided Questions

Who are the famous Lebanese musicians?
Discuss their famous work.
What kind of musical instruments are mostly used?
What is the most well-known Lebanese dance?

3- The Food Activity

In this activity, the teacher can also divide the students into groups. Each group has to come up with a booklet that contains the most well-known Lebanese main dishes, appetizers and desserts. Each group should include 3 main dishes, 5 appetizers and 5
kinds of dessert. The teacher should check out the students work and coordinate with each group so they won’t present the same content.

The teacher can ask each group to present some kind of food and share it with their classmates.

4- **The Lebanese Model Activity**

In this activity, each student has to design a Lebanese Model. The concrete body can be a cedar tree, the Jeita Cave, the Baalback Columns, the Raouchi Rock or any famous symbol that represents Lebanon.

Students have to present the model to their classmates, tell them why they chose this symbol specifically, its history and what this model represents.

5- **The Lebanese Documentary Film Activity**

In this activity, students should work by pairs. They have to make a 15 minute documentary film about different places in Lebanon that are visited by tourists. Such places can also be famous villages, towns or any touristic place and ruins. Each pair has to discuss the location of the place, its history, and its significance.

6- **The Family Tree Activity**

In this activity, each student has to draw his/her family tree, provide all the family members, provide their pictures (if possible) and discuss the family history. Students can also present their family tree as a concrete model. Each student should then talk about his family to his/her classmates.
7- **The Guest Speaker Activity**

In this activity, each pair has to ask any person he/she knows who has lived for a period of time outside Lebanon, to share his/her experience with the students. The guest should talk about the traditions of the country he/she lived in and then the pair should compare between those traditions and the Lebanese tradition.

8- **The Magazine Activity**

In this activity, the teacher should give the students a magazine article or newspaper article about the Lebanese culture. The teacher asks the students to read the article, summarize it, discuss it and come up with a conclusion or a certain value that should be related to the Lebanese Culture. Then, the teacher should ask the students to collect three articles from magazines and newspapers about the Lebanese articles, to read them, summarize them and then reflect on them. Debates about different topics can be implemented in the classroom. Students can express themselves and exchange their ideas. (see Appendix A)

9- **The Debate Activity**

In this activity, the teacher should divide the students into two groups. One group should discuss the pros of a certain topic and the second group should discuss the cons of the same topic. In this way, the two groups exchange ideas, learn from each other and at the same time they practice their English Language.

*Topic one- The Lebanese city life versus The Lebanese country life*

*Topic two- Beirut in the 1960’s and 1970’s versus Modern Beirut*
B) Field Trip Activities

Such activities are executed outside the classroom. However, the teacher should also explain the purpose of each activity and give the students all the needed information so they can carry on their task. These activities are divided into interviews and visits. After each activity, the students should present their work in the classroom through a power point presentation.

1- Interview One

In this activity, students have to work in pairs. Each pair should interview one Lebanese politician and ask him/her about his/her experience in politics and some accomplishments he/she did for Lebanon. Students can also briefly discuss some important phases of the politician’s life and reflect on them.

The teacher should check the students’ questions and correct them if necessary.

2- Interview Two

In this activity, students should also work in pairs. Each pair should interview a famous Lebanese woman who worked on an educational project or social project or any project or program for the Lebanese society. The interview should include questions about the woman’s life, about the programs she worked on, the reasons why she chose such a program and what are some future plans.

3- Visit One- The Lebanese National Museum

Grade 6 students visit the Lebanese National Museum with their teacher. Such a visit teaches them about the different ages throughout history and the material used during each age. Students should present a report about what they have learned and observed.
4- Visit Two- The Lebanese Army

In this activity, students have to work in groups of three. The groups should visit the Lebanese Army and learn more about it. Students learn about its job and accomplishment. After the visit, Students should submit a report about what they have observed and learned.

5- Visit Three- The Lebanese Parliament

A visit to the Lebanese Parliament would be the second step after interviewing the Lebanese Politicians. This visit will help each pair understand more the politician’s work and where he/she spends his/her time. A report should be submitted after the visit.

6- Visit Four- The Lebanese Factories

A visit to some factories such as Nestle, Shtoura, Taanayel, Fattal, Proctor & Gamble and many other factories would introduce grade 6 students to the different products that we use in our daily life. A report should also be submitted after the visit. In this activity, students work in groups.

7- Visit Five – A Helping Hand Visit

In this activity, students visit small villages and towns that are considered poor or deprived from some essential daily needs or that need a helping hand from the Lebanese Government. After the visit, a detailed report should be written that includes ideas to help the concerned town. Each group should divide the ideas into two parts.
One part should be done by the Lebanese government and the second part includes the ideas that can be implemented by grade 6 students.

C) Yearly Activities

The yearly activities are mostly done at the end of the year since they need preparations and practice. The teacher should follow up with the student’s work and help them throughout the year.

1- The Lebanese Campaign

In this activity, the teacher should divide the work among all the students. Students have to plan a campaign to enhance tourism. Grade 6 students can design shirts, sell Lebanese models or write brushes and posters. Students can be creative in designing the campaign and implementing it.

2- The Rahbani Play (Arabic language)

In this activity, grade 6 students have to choose a play for Assi and Mansour Al-Rahbani, practice it and present it at the end of the year. The play can be chosen at the beginning or in the middle of the year, so the students have the time to practice their roles.

3- The Lebanese Play

In this activity, students should write a play that includes as many Lebanese traditions as possible and present it at the end of the year. With the teacher’s help, the students can write a story about a Lebanese family and show the different moral values that they have learned throughout the year about the Lebanese culture.
4- **The Lebanese Festival**

In this activity, the teacher should also divide the work among all the students. Grade 6 students have to design a festival that includes everything that they learned about the Lebanese Culture. The festival must include a folk dance, wedding ceremonies, funerals, Mother’s day and Christmas Day. During the festival and after the coordination with the teacher, some grade 6 students can present their power point presentations about Lebanon to the audience and discuss what they have learned from their experience.

5- **The Helping Project**

The Helping Project is the name of the project that students should work on by groups. After visiting the towns and writing the reports about what can and should be done to help such villages, students should apply the second part they have worked on.

6- **The Lebanese Culture Newsletter**

In this activity and with the teacher’s assistance, grade 6 students collect their work and some interesting reports, power point presentations and interviews that were done to design a newsletter. This newsletter should also contain games, riddles, jokes and pictures about Lebanon.
Cultural Awareness Kit
Evaluation Form for the Classroom Activities

Group’s Name: ________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>W</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The students recognized 5 out of 7 pictures in the warm-up activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Each group came up with a booklet for the Lebanese Food. The booklet contains the correct ingredients for the main dishes, appetizers and desserts</td>
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<tr>
<td>In the Lebanese Model Activity, each group designed a model that represents Lebanon, presented the reasons why this model was chosen and what it symbolizes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Each pair prepared a 15 minute documentary film about different touristic places in Lebanon. Each pair discussed the location of the place, its history and its significance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>In the guest speaker activity, each pair, compared the Lebanese traditions to the traditions that the guest discussed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>In the debate activity, group one presented 5 cons of the Lebanese city life with supportive details. Group two presented 5 pros of the Lebanese country life with supportive details.</td>
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</tbody>
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E= Excellent    G= Good    F= Fair    W= Weak
Cultural Awareness Kit
Evaluation Form for the Field Trip Activities

Pair’s Names: ______________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>E</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Each pair discussed the politician’s experience in politics as well as the</td>
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<tr>
<td>accomplishments he/she finished in Lebanon. Each pair illustrated</td>
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<tr>
<td>important phases in the politician’s life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Each pair included questions about the woman’s life, discussed the</td>
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<tr>
<td>educational projects she worked on and her future plans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Each pair reported what was observed at the Lebanese Museum and discussed</td>
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<tr>
<td>the main points that represent each age in history.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Each group learned about the Lebanese Army, and about its most important</td>
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<td>accomplishments it fulfilled.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Each group discussed the history of the factory, its objectives, its</td>
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<td>mission and described its different products.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Each group discussed the essential needs of the village visited, explained</td>
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<tr>
<td>the reasons of each need and presented novel and logical ideas to provide</td>
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<td>help for the village.</td>
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E= Excellent  G= Good  F= Fair  W= Weak
Cultural Awareness Kit
A Set of Questions for the Yearly Activities

A) Questions on the Lebanese Campaign Activity & the Lebanese Festival

1- Provide a full description of your two projects, including the date, the location and the people involved (audience).

2- How do these two activities support the Lebanese Community generally and the Lebanese culture specifically?

3- If your activities were successful, what outcomes and benefits will it achieve? What kind of changes you would have created in your Lebanese Society?

4- After carrying out these two activities, what kind of relationship you built between your school and your Lebanese Community?

B) Questions on the Rahbani Play & the Lebanese Play

1- Why do you think the teacher has chosen plays for Asi & Mansour Al-Rahbani and not for any other Lebanese artists?

2- What moral lessons you learn from these two plays?

3- In the play that you created and developed, what are the Lebanese traditions and the Lebanese values you included and why?

4- In the play that you created and developed, whom are you addressing and what messages are you trying to send?

C) Questions on the Helping Project

1- What is the difference between your suggestions and the government’s suggestions?

2- What difficulties or obstacles did you face while providing help for the village?

3- What were the people’s reactions when you went through the helping process?

4- Do you have future suggestions or plans for the concerned village or any other village?

5- Describe your feelings towards the project as a whole.
Chapter Five

*Implications*

I have examined the meaning of literacy, cultural literacy and cultural awareness throughout history in order to create a kit for the Lebanese grade 6 students to learn about the Lebanese culture. Several interviews were conducted with teachers to know whether or not cultural literacy is applied at school and if it is, how it is applied and what kind of activities are implemented in classrooms.

This study will be an asset in several ways. First, it will motivate teachers to learn about their culture whether they are Lebanese or not Lebanese. Teachers will be aware of their culture through educating themselves continuously before teaching their students. Second of all, students will learn about country and what is around them. They will understand the significance of the traditions, the moral values and the beliefs of any country, not only Lebanon. This is why the Cultural Awareness Kit proves to be an asset for both grade 6 students and teachers to learn about the Lebanese Culture.
References


Appendix A

Questions for interviewing grade 6 teachers

1- “Language and Culture” are interrelated. Do you agree or disagree? Why? Why not?

2- How do you relate “culture” to your classroom?

3- Why do you think it is important for grade 6 students to learn about their culture?

4- What kind of cultural conflicts do you encounter in your classroom? How do you solve such conflicts?

5- How do you view your role as a mediator between the school and the student’s home?

6- In your opinion, what kind of characteristics should the language instructor have in order to teach the students about their culture?

7- How would you enhance cultural awareness in your classroom?

8- What kind of activities, games, and exercises do you implement in your classroom?
Once Upon A Time, the City Island of **Tyre**

In 332 B.C., Alexander the Great marched with his soldiers down the Phoenician coast without facing any resistance from Aradus, Byblos, and Sidon. His goal was to capture the city island of Tyre since its position was strategic. When he reached the city, a delegation of noblemen went out to meet him. Presents and provisions were offered to the young conqueror. But Alexander’s answer was to enter Tyre and make a sacrifice in the most ancient temple to Melkart, a highly honored god by the Tyrians.

But his real intention was to occupy the fortified island. On the mainland was an ancient city, called Palaetyrus by the Greeks. They offered him to make his sacrifice there. But Alexander didn’t accept such an answer and furiously promised the Tyrians living on the island to show them that they are on the mainland.

Soldiers, slaves and laborers started building a causeway from the mainland to the island. The island was protected all around with very high walls, and the inhabitants were convinced that the Carthaginians would help them in the defense.

The Greeks used stones and wood from the destroyed Palaetyrus on the mainland. The water was deep near the island, and the causeway construction was difficult. The Tyrians’ volleys and fire-darts from the island walls reached the Greek workers. They were confident that their city was impregnable. But, as the siege went on, they decided to send the elderly, women and children to Carthage.

It’s said that a Carthaginian delegation arrived to the Tyrian Island for the annual feast of honoring their ancestors and god Melkart. They promised them help. Meanwhile, the Greeks were preparing their engagement. The island’s northern and southern ports were blocked and siege engines were heading towards the city island walls. Nevertheless, the Tyrians showed a fearless resistance in the sea as well as in the island’s streets.

After seven months, Alexander captured the city island and sacrificed to Melkart. By building the causeway, the Greek conqueror changed forever the shape of Tyre to a peninsula!

- R.S.
The Conquerors at Dog River

It's a historical site located at half an hour's drive north of Beirut near Dbayeh where a tunnel perforates the promontory known as the Cape Dog. According to legend, a statue of a dog, placed on that promontory top, barked when conquerors reached the area. It is said that his barking was so loud that it was heard in Cyprus. It's also said that the Ottomans threw it in the sea.

Historians believe that in ancient times that promontory wasn't easy to surpass and that its sides were steep, which made the advance of armies almost impossible. But conquerors found it a good strategic point to announce their achievements. Thus, inscriptions were left by Egyptians, Assyrians, Greeks, Romans and Mamluks in commemoration of their victories in the region.

Much later, French and British troops in World War I and II continued the tradition and left inscriptions too. In 1946, the Lebanese government as well commemorated the evacuation of the French troops three years after the country's independence. This was later followed by the liberation of South Lebanon inscription in the year 2000. Most of the inscriptions are on the right bank side, a few meters away from the Dog River mouth, just off the narrow road. According to a Latin inscription of Emperor Caracalla, that road was built by the third Roman legion. It's important to know that other inscriptions can be found at the promontory top.

At almost one kilometer from the tunnel is the famous Arab bridge. On the opposite side, a long Arab kufi inscription seems struggling to survive since it's located at the road pavement level. It was left in the 14th century when the Mamluks built the bridge, which was reconstructed in the 19th century by Prince Beshir Shehab II. Later, the Ottomans would build the bridge that traverses the River just near the highway.

Since then, most of the Dog River Valley has changed. But in places, remains of an aqueduct and bridges can be seen.  

- R.S.
Beirut Souks and Their Reinvention

Souks are traditionally located inside the ancient city walls or in a public place outside where caravans could display their goods. It's an Arabic word for market and usually the city would have specialized souks for fruits and vegetables, spices and perfumes, and textiles. When the Central District of Beirut was reconstructed, the souks' area was preserved. The aim was to maintain, as much as possible, the historical features of the capital’s ancient center.

Souks are also one of the essential elements in a city. After they had been destroyed by the 1975 war, their rebuilding was necessary; they attract Lebanese and tourists as well. With modern construction techniques, the Souks of Beirut were “reinvented” in such a way as to cope with both modern and authentic aspects of the capital’s city center. Undoubtedly, there's no need to choose between Beirut Souks and the ones of Saida, Tripoli and Sour – each is beautiful in its own way.

The 15th century Islamic domed monument at Beirut Souks’ entrance is a reminder of the capital’s great history. According to excavations, seven different civilizations were found in Beirut Central District.

Once there, one can notice how the souks form a unity that nicely integrates in its surroundings. Traditionally, the shops in ancient cities seem almost squeezed alongside the alleys. At Beirut souks, that feel is well-conserved. The alleys, which are supposed to maintain or link the souks together, often cross to form small squares. A sense of being inside a labyrinth is normal...one should let himself be swept away by the crowd and the pleasure of discovering the shops...the way out is just around the corner!

The history of Beirut Souks is also survives through their names: Souk Ayass, Souk el Tawileh, Souk el Janil, Souk el Sayaghine...most are from the 19th century. Soon, a new "ritual" will rapidly settle as many shoppers make it a habit to meet their friends and to enjoy Beirut's authentic atmosphere.

- R.S.

Photos courtesy of Solidere.
The treasures of Amsheet
Elegant houses, palm trees, and savory traditional cuisine!

To enjoy the fascinating treasures of this town, the northern coastal main road is the fastest and easiest. In almost one hour drive from Beirut, you reach Amsheet. But for the romantic travelers, there's always the old remarkable maritime road. Take it from Keffil; it runs along the sea and traverses the beautiful Joumeh and its ancient waterfront houses as it follows the curve of the city's bay. Keep following that road until you reach Byblos; this historical city rests on a promontory as the sea washes its feet. Then, only 3km away, is Amsheet.

A series of wooden-door shops passes by as you drive to the old town where the walk is rewarding. It's a living outdoor museum of refined houses, their main doors were often built with ancient ornate stones and their alleys covered with a mosaic of pebbles.

The old houses bear European and Ottoman influence and are surrounded with gardens planted with Mediterranean trees. In many places you see the cactuses growing at the terraces' edge as if conceived by an artist's imagination. As for the palm trees, they were brought by the rich Amsheet merchants who traded with Iraq in the 18th and 19th centuries. Today, artisans plait the dry leaves creating Amsheet's most famous basketries. But the merchants also exported silk to Europe. Scattered old “silk houses” are found close to the merchants' great residences.

There's another reason why this town is famous. In 1860, Ernest Renan - a French writer and philosopher - came on an archaeological mission to Lebanon and Syria. He was accompanied by his sister Henriette. Most of his stay was at Zaitah's house. Unfortunately, his sister died, and her tomb was placed under the oak tree where she loved to sit.

But the town has beautiful pebble beaches and cliffs where few restaurants are settled. The list of Amsheet treasures continues with mawwara. Baked only at furn as-sabaya (bakery of the young ladies) mawwara is a dough filled with almonds, walnuts, sugar, rosewater and orange blossom water. Perfumed and crispy, it transforms your day into a memorable treat!

-R.S.

Information courtesy of Antoine L. Lahoud, Vice-President of Amsheet Municipality.
Armenian cuisine
A remarkable experience in Lebanon!

Culinary art in Lebanon is an expression of the country’s soil, climate and culture. Armenian cuisine brings a rich flavor to the food industry in Lebanon. What’s on the menu?

It’s the culinary art of the Armenian Diaspora in Lebanon, particularly in Anjar in the Bekaa, Bourj Hammoud (the capital’s northern suburb), and in Beirut itself. As a tour guide, I had the opportunity to taste the Armenian bread Tonir that is only made in Anjar. But the shanklish Manousheh is among my favorites. The shanklish - a dried cheese - is crumbled and mixed with red pepper paste, rosemary or thyme and cut onions. So delicious!

Armenian cuisine is about family gatherings. It reflects their warmth and love for life. Their meals in Lebanon are accompanied with beer, wine or Arak which is a distilled alcoholic drink with anise seeds flavor. On an Armenian table, there should be an abundance of dishes that perfume the air with a variety of spices such as pepper, cumin, garlic, and coriander...

The meal often starts with an array of appetizers called the meze that includes Etch which is an Armenian tabbouleh and boeregs pies. It seems that there are a variety of boeregs, which is a phyllo pastry filled with cheese, spinach, and meat...The meat products such as basturma – an air dried beef meat seasoned with cumin and garlic – and sujuk which are sausages prepared also with spices are probably the top favorite street food for the Lebanese. As for the grilled meat or kebab, it’s served as a main course. The most exquisite one is fished kebab prepared with sherry jam! The dried apricots soaked in sugar syrup and filled with cream are the sweet way to end a delightful meal!

**Recipe**

**Etch**
(Armenian Tabbouleh)

In a pan, fry fine cut onions in olive oil. Then add 4 to 5 chopped red tomatoes and salt. Add tomato and red chili pastes and 300 grams of fine burghul (cracked wheat). After it absorbs the sauce, add the juice of 2 lemons. Turn off the heat and mix with a handful of fresh cut parsley.
In the Arab world, *kaak* refers to bread and pastries. But in Lebanon, when one says *kaak*, it means the sesame bread in a handbag or basket shape. Many *kaak* vendors cross different areas on their bicycles honking a horn to announce their presence, hollering: *Kaak! Kaak!* It’s sold in the streets and bakeries either plain or filled with *zaatar* – dry thyme – or *Picon* which is the favorite family French spread cheese in Lebanon!

You see them at any time of the day, on vendors’ bicycles protected by a plastic cover, brown or should I say toasted, with sesame seeds; the *kaaks*’ scent is irresistible. As early as 6 o’clock in the morning, vendors target the busiest places to satisfy workers’ hunger.

But since 2003 a new *kaak* bakery made a revolution in the Lebanese affordable street food market. It’s the warm Abou Arab *kaak*. Hajj Zouhair Abou Arab’s *Kaak* is sold in ten branches across the country: warm and with a greater variety of fillings!

What’s the secret behind this simple bread? It must be the delicious toasted sesame seeds that cover the *kaak* or the spices that are added to the dough. Hajj Abou Arab says that it’s thanks to the finest quality of the ingredients. Similar *kaak* are made in Turkey and the Middle Eastern countries, but in Lebanon, its shape and taste are different.

Many bakers call it the Beirut *kaak* as its recipe was brought to Beirut in the forties from Tripoli, north Lebanon, to give it its actual basket shape. There, the *kaak* is round and sold with the same filling of *zaatar*. At Abou Arab bakeries, the *kaak* adopted modern taste by varying the fillings.

On the wall behind the counter, you find a selection of sweet and salty fillings that can easily compete with any fast food restaurant menu. It seems that the “king of *kaak*” is not ready to be dethroned.

Whatever the secret is behind the success of the *kaak* industry in Lebanon, it will remain behind the scene of the baker for a long time.

*Kaak! Kaak!*
Palmyra Hotel

Baalbek’s second impressive historical site!

As the majestic Roman temples at Baalbek have always attracted travelers, the Palmyra Hotel had offered them warm hospitality. The hotel has its own personality; antique furniture and Persian carpets, pictures of some of the most distinguished guests, terrace garden with scattered archeological artifacts and a wonderful location overlooking the Roman ruins. Today, more than one hundred years after its foundation, the Palmyra Hotel stands in its colonial style as a reminder of an epoch.

It was Perikli Mimikaki who decided on one fine day of the year 1874 to leave Istanbul and come to Baalbek to found the Palmyra Hotel which “is beyond doubt, the oldest of all existing hotels in Lebanon”.

At that time, travelers were distinguished personalities who had the professional reason to visit the temples. Among them, European Royalties such as the Prussian Prince Friedrich Karl in 1883 enjoyed the hotel’s friendly services as much as the English writer George Bernard Shaw and the French General de Gaulle. During World War I, the hotel was used by the German army. Later in World War II, it became a British headquarters. The small bar itself is a gem of the forties, an image of a romantic epoch in the Middle East.

Once you enter the hotel’s hall, a scent from the past, of a forgotten glamorous era, fills the air. On the walls were left black and white photographs of Baalbek temples as well as of royalties and distinguished Lebanese and foreign artists who participated in the Baalbek Festival. Not to forget Jean Cocteau drawings! Art Deco oriental lovers will find in the blend of objects and furniture the nostalgia of an era.

The 1975 war stopped time at the Palmyra Hotel and faded its glamorous days. But the enchantment still fills its air as much as the dances of the bacchantes in their light dresses, still engraved at the Bacchus temple. And travelers as ever always stop at the Palmyra Hotel – or its annex - to experience its glorious past.

When excavations of the Central District started in the early nineties, much of Beirut's ancient history was revealed. Potteries, ceramics, mosaics, and statues were able to uncover the artisanal and commercial activities of such a great city. Some of these sites can be seen, such as the Roman baths on Banks Street (or Riad el Solh Street). If those sites were left in the open air, two others - so far - are kept under the ground of Al Omari Mosque on Maanad-Weygand Street, and Saint George Cathedral on Star Square (Place de l'Étoile).

In the fifties, while renovation works of Al Omari Mosque were taking place, an ancient crypt was revealed under the mosque courtyard. It's about an underground chamber where fragments of granite columns without capitals, probably from the Roman period, support two arches. In 1113 – 1115 A.D. a Crusader church to Saint John the Baptist was built by reusing Roman marble capitals and pillars. It had been built on the site of an ancient mosque dating back to the early time of Islam. In 1291, the church was transformed into the great mosque of Beirut.

To the northeast of Star Square is Saint George Cathedral of the Greek Orthodox community. Built in the 17th Century, it's one of the oldest churches in Beirut. Two older superimposed churches were found underground when renovation works started. The oldest is from the Byzantine area. Today, a big glass window covers the floor in front of the iconostasis. The light in the ancient Byzantine church shows what will become an underground museum. There, a beautiful mosaic inspired the renovators to design the floor of the Cathedral. Most of the frescos - of the actual cathedral - were renovated but you can still admire the old ones as well as the original icons.

A visit to Al Omari Mosque as well as Saint George Cathedral of the Greek Orthodox and their ancient ruins allows you to contemplate and reflect as you find yourself standing in presence of the past.
the glass collection at the National Museum of Beirut
An artistic craft!

On the upper floor of the National Museum of Beirut, exhibits are jealously displayed inside windows by chronological order. The glass collection is found in the Roman-Byzantine section along with a bloc of glass, formed by the glass flow found in one of glass factories in Tyre where many are still on-site.

The little thin transparent or opaque glass recipients, ornate with multicolored driblels of glass, look so fragile and yet so real. The Phoenician cities practiced glass production towards the 7th century B.C. There were different techniques such as using a mold, but according to ancient historians the blown glass technique is a Phoenician invention in Tyre and Sidon around the first century B.C. That technique transformed the glass industry; the artisans became able to produce more and save time. It also allowed them to create a bigger variety. The cities of Beirut, Sidon and Tyre were the most important glass manufacturers.

Looking closer, you see a variety of vases. Some were for pharmaceutical use, and others were used for perfumes or even, according to the legend, to collect the tears of the family of the deceased. They are known as lachrymatories and were often found inside the sarcophagi with the dead. The different vases were closed with perishable tops.

The glass is also present in the shape of pearls or beads, bracelets, and scarabs... The production technique demanded highly talented artisans. As for the pendants in human face, specialists wonder whether they could be considered as "jewels". There are also the double flasks which were used for the kohl and were often found with small sticks of ivory, bronze or glass to draw the eye line. The glass was made either in its natural color blue or greenish blue. The other colors such as the yellow and the orange are obtained by adding minerals and metallic oxide.

With these precious exhibits hanging as they are inside the windows, it's hard to imagine people holding such delicate vessels! They are the subtle touch that adds real color to the Museum's already fabulous collections!


A chapel to Saint Paul and Peter
In Saida!

Mathew 15:21 ... "Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon" when public attention became extreme. Both cities were famous for their strong pagan cult. Around the year 64 A.D. while Saint Paul was taken to Rome, the ship anchored at Saida's port. He was allowed to visit his Christian friends (Acts 27:3).

Saint Paul spent three days among his friends where the Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan stands today. The Archdiocesan Church, built in 1690, is dedicated to Saint Nicolas, the patron saint of navigators and merchants. Saida's seamen have been renowned for their bravery and skills since Phoenician times.

It's inside the ancient city of Saida between the busy souks - markets - of gold and carvers that the church is located in a very narrow alley. If the door is closed, ring the bell. Visitors and pilgrims are always welcome.

As you walk into the little courtyard, a small chapel to Saint Paul and Peter is just there at the entrance. Icons of the two Saints were put on the altar as a reminder of their visit to Saida. According to tradition, Saint Peter the apostle, with his disciples, entered the cities of Tyre, Saida, Beirut, Byblos and Tripoli where he stayed for three months.

Once in the small open-air courtyard, raise your eyes to the sky. An old simple bell tower stands out. You will be overwhelmed by the tranquility of the place. When you enter the church, the mystic scent of incense and the melodies of orthodox hymns fill the air. The old icons of the Virgin Mary, Jesus and Saint Nicolas were "written" by orthodox monks. Behind the altar, a small Islamic ornate niche was laid in the wall.

Sitting in the faint light of the church, you cannot help but contemplate the holy icons. Their eyes penetrate your soul as echoes of early Christian prayers resonate.

Reference: ChurchesForJesus.org
There are 11 youth hostels in great locations across Lebanon just waiting to welcome you. Run by The Lebanese Youth Hostels Federation (LYHF), they offer a comfortable bed, warm shower, great kitchens, and a laid back, fun environment. Most of the hostels are located in places which offer a wide range of recreational and outdoor activities as well as cultural and environmental activities. There are TV rooms and suitable rooms to hold meetings and workshops. An LYHF hostel is a lively meeting place for individual and group travelers who seek new experiences with a special flavor.

LYHF is an NGO founded in 1965, and among whom its earliest presidents was Wafic Ajouz. It is a member of Hostelling International (a worldwide chain of hostels with over 4000 hostels in over 70 countries) and of the Arab Youth Hostels Union. The youth hostel movement, born in Germany in 1909, began with German schoolteacher Richard Schirnmann, who arranged, for students of limited means, visits to the countryside and cities of the world. The idea soon spread across Europe with youth hostel associations in various countries. In 1932, the international youth hostel federation was founded.

LYHF’s mission is to expand the horizons of youth from all countries, particularly those of limited means, and to welcome people without exception or discrimination. Its aims are to encourage the young generation to tour Lebanon; to preserve the same high standards across all hostels; and to build close ties with sister Arab unions and international associations.

Says LYHF co-founder and President Anis Abdul Malak: “The idea is to give youth of limited means the opportunity to travel, discover cultures, and exchange ideas. Youth hostels accommodate people of all ages, individuals and families alike. Hostel seekers can book accommodation online by visiting the global federation website at ihostel.com and clicking the Lebanon link”. Annual membership, at only $20, entitles members to discounts on hostels, travel services, cultural activities and retail purchases, to accessing the world’s largest network of safe clean hotels, and to becoming part of a global community of like-minded travelers.

The need for low-budget accommodation worldwide is high. Says Abdul Malak: “In 2009, there were 53 million overnights in hostels in 64 countries. This represents 35% of world tourism.

We encourage internal tourism in rural towns and villages. In Beirut, we have agreements with hotels that meet our conditions to offer members discounted accommodation. The hostels built and furnished by LYHF yield economic benefits to Lebanon and provide work for the large number of people needed to run them. The young tourist today is tomorrow’s investor, and the federation would benefit from sponsorship by economic corporations or governments”.

For 2010, the federation has a rich heritage and tourism activities calendar designed to promote youth tourism to Lebanon. For its youth tourism activities, the federation often cooperates with the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Sports and Youth. LYHF also organizes custom tours to suit you and your group, giving you the chance to experience ultimate adventure and culture in Lebanon, meet other friends from around the world, and make lifelong friendships.

Photos: Some of the LYHF hostels.

For more information, visit www.lyhf.org, email lyhf@lyhf.org, or call 961-1-750 676.
Hajj Toufic el Masry, known as Abou Imad, has been perpetuating his father's and grandfather's craft since...as long as I remember, he said. At the age of 65, Abou Imad is still sewing, with a needle and a thread, expensive abayas for his privileged clientele.

He’s at the Khan el Khayateen or Tailors’ caravanserai in Tripoli, Lebanon’s second greatest city. You’ll find him either working in his shop or conversing with the next-door tailor. Situated in the ancient city, the Khan el Khayateen regained its old magnificence after renovation. Ten elegant arches traverse gracefully its passageway; they have long been impressing travelers, evoking imageries of scenes from the past.

Abou Imad is proud to be the only tailor in Lebanon who sews the Abaya without using a sewing machine. When asked about the Abaya, he affirmed that it’s also called Mashla and it’s a long flowing wrap, made with animal wool and embroidered. The Mashla’s or Abaya’s sleeves are long, and it is worn over men’s or women’s garments. Historically, Tripoli has been renowned for making abayas in different forms and materials such as wool and camel hair. “The Tripolitan abaya is unique and doesn’t resemble any abaya made in the Arab world,” he insisted.

As Abou Imad was explaining, he was pulling from the shelves different materials in plain colors. The camel hair is imported from Iran and is considered to be the most expensive. Among his clients are still prominent Lebanese and Arab figures. As for women’s abayas, there are some differences in the material, the design, and the color of course.

In the past, people wore abayas on important occasions or even for evenings in their diwan or reception hall. Today, in a society that is attached to ancestral traditions, the abaya is still worn by dignitaries on special occasions or in the privacy of their homes.

After I left Abou Imad’s shop, his war telling me how hard this handcraft is kept coming back to me, as well as the image of him showing me his fingers worn by needle pricks.
The Convent of Our Lady of Balamand

"...its name is crusader, its history is byzantine...it's at Balamand that we rediscover, a scent of Antioch and of sycamore, of imperial crow and Chrysostome [early church father]... the convent winters in its litanies. When the mountains around vanish away, the People of God act as a compass."

- Nadia Tuéni, 20 poèmes pour un amour

The Balamand Convent is located on the edge of a plateau south-east of Tripoli at 200 meters altitude. It was built in 1157 by the Cistercians monks at a time when Tripoli was a crusader earldom. Archaeologists believe that the site was originally dedicated to a pagan temple which later became a byzantine church.

Today, one main entrance leads the visitors to a central square courtyard or the cloister. It features wonderful stone architecture and allows the monks to collect their thoughts before entering the Church. It is a haven where one can easily imagine the monks praying under the arcades. The outside walls are austere: a well, a beautiful old tree, and few remaining Cistercian decorative stone pieces reused probably by the Orthodox monks.

Towards the end of the 13th century when Tripoli was captured by the Mamluks, many Orthodox historians think that the convent was abandoned for three centuries till the arrival of Orthodox monks in 1602. They restored the crusader convent and developed it by adding the first floor.

Everywhere in the convent, an atmosphere of pious tranquility prevails. Inside the Our Lady of Balamand and St. George Churches, the icons' silence whispers litanies in your ears, and the eyes of the Saints seem to overwhelm you. It seems that St. George Church was the chapter house, or a hall where the monks used to sit around the abbot and listen to his instructions and advice.

The refectory was also built by the Cistercian monks. Today, the Orthodox priests have transformed it into a hall for music concerts. The church tower is unique with its gothic style. It overlooks Tripoli and the sea like a watch-tower or a lighthouse.

- R.S.
Orange Blossom Essence

*Busfeir,* known as the Seville orange, is one of the most essential citrus fruits in Lebanon. In spite of its bitter taste, the juice is used to perfume our food and its blossom essence (or *Mazahr*) is used to flavor our drinks and sweets. According to historians, it was during the Umayyad period, with the invention of the alembic apparatus or locally known *karakeh,* that *Mazahr* use spread along the eastern Mediterranean coast. The *karakeh* distills the blossoms and collects the vapor.

It’s said that the Arabs introduced the *naranj* or orange to North Africa and Spain - where it’s called *naranja,* after they discovered it in China. In Lebanon, citrus groves are found along the coast but mainly in the South around Majdaliyeh town. There, many families produce *mazahr* while Saida’s sweet shops add it to the sugar syrup (*qatr*) to flavor the variety of Lebanese pastries.

From Saida to Naqoura, the old maritime road traverses orchards of bananas and citrus. The sight of the intense green coastal plain is breathtaking. The oranges and lemons are like dots on a surface of green bushes. The French orientalist Gerard de Nerval visited Sidon in the 19th century and wrote: “later we went to see the ruins which we reach through delicious gardens, the most beautiful along the Syrian coast”.

During March and April, the *Busfeir* blossoms release their fragrance. At this time of year, Saida region thrives not only on the orange blossoms, whose volatile scent fills air, but also on preparing *Mazahr* too. A jam made of the blossoms’ petals as well is sold at sweet shops in small transparent jars that reveal its vivid red color. The jam garnishes pastries and enhances their taste.

Before sunrise, farmers collect the blossoms to preserve the oils’ concentration during distillation. When it’s bottled, a film of yellow oil covers the water’s intense ivory color. Then its color turns to white when prepared with hot water and served in white coffee cups. It’s the *café blanc* - a real treat after a copious meal!

- R.S.
Plastic is strong, durable, versatile, lightweight, safe, inexpensive, and made from a by-product of oil refining which would otherwise be wasted... but did you know that plastics can take up to 400 years to break down and that almost all the plastics ever made can still be found somewhere? The problem, noted by governments and NGOs alike, is that plastic lasts too long if it gets into the environment and particularly in the oceans. Yet there is a solution, and it is available worldwide and in Lebanon.

This solution has been found by Symphony Environmental Ltd., a British public company. Its d2w® additive put into the plastic at the extrusion stage makes the finished product "oxo-biodegradable" (so that it will degrade and disappear in a short timescale, leaving no fragments, no methane and no harmful residues). Degradability is not a disposal option - you can still re-use and recycle - it is low cost insurance against the accumulation of plastic waste in the environment; d2w® environmentally responsible plastic products are made with the same machinery and workforce as ordinary plastic.

For all practical purposes the degradable alternative is indistinguishable from non-degradable. Strength, clarity, sealability, printing properties, gas and moisture permeability, for instance, are all the same as their non-degradable alternatives during the useful life of the product. It is virtually impossible to distinguish newly made degradable plastics from their non-degradable alternatives - in many cases the use of the d2w® droplet logo on the finished product is authorized in order to distinguish those which are degradable and have been made using the additive.

In most cases any additional cost involved is small and outweighed by the significant Marketing, PR and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) benefits of adopting degradability. In terms of applications, almost all flexible and semi-rigid polyethylene and polypropylene films are capable of being made degradable using d2w® technology.

As for product life, the useful life of d2w® totally degradable products is 'programmed' at the time of manufacture and typically includes some margin for flexibility. A number of factors can accelerate degradation: sunlight, heat, and stretching and tearing. While the degradation process cannot be stopped, it will be considerably delayed by chilling or freezing. Needed are appropriate - but not special - storage conditions and stock rotation.

Symphony Environmental Ltd. has appointed Ghaneem Development & Trading (a Lebanon-based company dealing in plastic raw material) as exclusive distributors in Lebanon for its range of d2w® oxo-biodegradable plastic additives. The revolutionary d2w® additive renders ordinary plastic oxo-biodegradable and as a result makes it disappear in a short time period instead of remaining scattered all over Lebanon for decades.

Lebanese palaces & historic houses
An Architectural Splendor

Text by Raghida Samaha: Photos by Elsie Haddad

They are the palaces and houses of Lebanon from the 17th to the early 20th century. Built under Ottoman and French influence, they hold elements of Islamic Art as well. But when Prince Fakhrreddine II returned from Italy after a five-year exile, his mind was imprinted with images of Tuscan palaces and gardens! Italian and French architects came to design noble houses. Many of the historic houses of Lebanon embrace enchanting Mediterranean nature and the “secret iridescence” of sunrays. Much of their inhabitants’ time was spent outdoors on a balcony or terrace. Living rooms are spacious to host extended family members, neighbors and friends. Their gardens are planted to suit their owners’ taste and traditions. Almost every maintained historic Lebanese house has at least one aromatic plant kept at the entrance to greet guests with its light fragrance. The following six Lebanese palaces and historic houses, among many others, are open to the public. They stand witness to our rich history and to the “originality of our culture”, reflecting the warm art de vivre of a stately society.

References
- Musée Historique de Saïda, (brochure), Debbane Foundation.
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Sheikh Khalil Geha House

Overlooking the city of Zahleh, Sheikh Khalil Geha House is located in the oldest neighborhood between Mar Michael and Mar Jirjis churches. The house is an oasis of tranquility. Since the 17th century, the family has participated in different historical events of Zahleh and its foundation.

As the copper door opened, we stepped into a haven of simple and refined architecture. Geraniums, basil, gardenia blossoms and cedars grow amidst the serenity of the house.

The fountain and the stables’ wood doors are the elements that make up the ground level. An agreeable stone staircase with a wrought-iron banister takes you to the upper level where a gallery of twenty-one arcades provides a shaded circulation area for the surrounding rooms. It forms a semi-enclosed outdoor terrace embracing the panoramic view of Zahleh, its Berdawni River and the mountains. Here too is a fountain that was cut in a monolith stone. It’s believed that the number of arcades and fountains tell the social rank of the house’s owners. A heavenly atmosphere prevails; an old bitter orange tree infuses the terrace with the scent of its blossoms.

The main hall is a museum. Sticks hang on the walls. One was offered by Jamal Pasha in 1916 to Dr. Michel Geha, who was an important physician. Ancient damascene and Lebanese handmade furniture, old Persian carpets, ancient icons from Greece, Jerusalem, and the Vatican can be found. The silverware and amazing embroidered curtains seem to hold time itself. The family had a role in Zahleh’s history. The democratic movement by the city’s people led to an independent Zahleh in 1857 under Ottoman occupation and was considered the first democratic movement in the Middle East. The design of the city’s bicolored flag (in red and green topped by a cross), also happened in that main hall.

In another room, a unique carpet was offered to the family by the Persian prince of Kom. He ordered that the carpet must show all the animals and all the flower colors of Persia! The family’s antique collection is wide and unique and will soon be collected for exhibit in the house’s private museum.
Beiteddine
A Princely Palace

At the age of 15, Prince Beshir Shehah II moved to Deir el Qamar in the Shouf Mountain. A few kilometers away was Beiteddine village, where he built, in 1788, a palace on a hilltop protected by the surrounding steep valleys. From a distance, the Palace appears almost hidden by robust cypress trees, and the mountains seem furrowed with stone terraces planted with olive trees.

At the palace entrance, the visitor is charmed by the scent of jasmine and the sound of a rippling fountain. The open courtyards with stone benches overlooking the valley, coupled with the fragile thin pillars supporting the gallery arches, transform the palace into an enchanting place. It's the Dar el Barranieh or the outside house.

This is where hospitality was offered to travelers. It overlooks a 60-meter courtyard or a midan where the Prince held his feasts and gathered his soldiers.

The beauty of the Palace unravels as if by magic; as the visitor traverses the magnificent arched entrance with two staircases located down that midan, the intricate façade of the Harem and its courtyard progressively appear. It’s the element of surprise in Arab architecture. An imposing fountain with its flowing music in the midan agreeably surprises the visitor. The halls are ornate inside with painted wooden panels, arabesques, marble mosaics and fountains to capture the colors of the day.

The Harem façade is the most elaborate, decorated with stone and marble mosaics. The gemoled (twin arcade) windows with their flower compartment and intricate wooden kiosk (similar to a balcony) are the characteristic elements of such architecture; they bring in the valley's view and that subtle, sweet-scented air. It’s believed that incense was burned in the palace niches, as perfume was poured into visitors’ hands.

Inside the baths, polychromatic rooms in marble and ochre stones enhance their luxurious beauty. A sense of warm moisture still holds the perfume of olive oil soap. The past is vividly present and tells the story of an art of living.
Robert Mouawad Private Museum
A Continuous Passion for Art

Situated in Zokak el Blat behind Beirut Serail, what is today Robert Mouawad Private Museum was originally built by Henri Pharaon’s father Philippe Pharaon in 1901 during the “belle époque” in neo-gothic Italian style. It's believed that false marble panels decorated the Interior, disappearing during the First World War. Henri Pharaon’s passion for Arabian horses led him to Syria where he discovered the painted woodwork of Syrian houses during the Ottoman Empire. Impressed by decorative Arab art, he decided to have an Oriental reception hall in his residence.

But along the way, he eventually accumulated different wall and ceiling woodworks, fountains, chimneys, and marble floors. The wood was sculpted and painted in mulberry and pistachio trees. His passion for history led him to collect different archeological artifacts that one can find today in the garden, amidst trees and gigantic cactus!

With the help of an architect, who was highly artistic in assembling different elements, the residence became a legacy of Oriental Arab Art. From the reception halls on the ground floor to the rooms above, one is impressed by Henri Pharaon’s lifetime collection of Byzantine icons and books – encompassing a 9th century copy of the holy Koran, Chinese porcelain, blown glassware, weapons as well as carafes and mantles made in Bohemia especially for Ottoman Empire countries.

Henri Pharaon was also a politician. He had a role in founding an independent Lebanon. Today, in the dining room, it’s said that around the table that he designed, meetings were held with many politicians. The first Lebanese flag was sketched and signed by different leaders also on that table. In 1952, it’s believed that Eleanor Roosevelt met him during an official visit to Lebanon and said about him: “…he quite evidently is a man of political and financial power but also a man of great artistic taste.”

Henri Pharaon’s legacy is preserved. Robert Mouawad, world-renowned jeweler, purchased the residence. His rare collection of important jewelry designs, such as a 16th century Spanish emerald brooch, turns the residence into an enchanting one-thousand-and-one-nights palace!
Bustros House
Preserving A Heritage

Located in Ashrafieh's Rue Trabaud, a street named after First World War French commander Albert Trabaud, the elegant Bustros House generously opens its doors for private ceremonies and opens its garden to the public, enabling them to enjoy the Italian cuisine of La Posta restaurant. Within the complex, in 2004, the Metropolitan Club opened its doors.

In Ashrafieh, some streets have been distinguished from others by featuring a street sign describing them as “street with a traditional character”. A sense of harmony overpowers you as the old buildings are of almost the same height, with small balconies and European architectural ornamentation elements.

The neighbourhood evokes an image of its history as well. The street in front of Bustros House was given the name of the commander Trabaud when the French troops entered Lebanon in 1920! According to Gaby Bustros, the officer wanted to requisition the house, but a young lady didn’t allow it.

The ground level of the house was built in 1875, and then in 1910, the owners added a floor and covered the roof with red tiles, probably from Marseilles. The style was of an Italian-Lebanese inspiration: beautiful sandstone for the outside walls and a garden planted with a variety of citrus trees. The two date trees in front of Bustros House are as old as the house itself. They were planted away during the rehabilitation works. It was a custom in many Lebanese houses to plant a date tree in the garden. This can still be noticed today in many coastal towns.

The halls and the rooms inside the house are beautiful in their simplicity. Their high ceilings are often ornate with stucco, and their marble floors as well as the three arcades are an expression of the family's social rank. The elegant arcades open the house out to the garden and street.

Outside, the decoration is found in the original ironwork of the portal and balustrades. Jasmine and gardenia have been planted - according to tradition - at the house porch to infuse the air with their fragrance. An elegant late 19th century atmosphere prevails and inhabits visitors' imagination.
The Palaces of Deir el Qamar
A Charming Princely Capital

At Deir el Qamar, you have the opportunity to visit more than one palace just by walking around the town square. Their stones absorb the daylight as the constructions integrate harmoniously in the surrounding nature. Located on the Shouf Mountain, this town was a charming princely capital, when in 1590 Emir Fakhrreddine Maan moved in from Baaqlin after being nominated Prince of Lebanon. Beautiful ornate gardens, barracks, mosque and marketplaces were built around the town square where a central fountain still stands. Many Maanid palaces were burnt down by their rivals during Prince Fakhreddine's exile in Italy in 1614.

But when he returned, he rebuilt Deir el Qamar with bright yellow stones that he transported from Akkar after destroying his rivals' palaces. Those stones are seen on the main constructions' façades and entrances, in stripes alternating with the local limestone. The palaces and houses are oriented to the valley. Their courtyards, windows and stone benches are there to build a dialogue between men and nature and among men themselves. Similar structures can also be found in Venice, Florence, Turkey and Syria.

Deir el Qamar was Emir Fakhrreddine's favorite town. There, he enjoyed summer air whispering at 800 meters above sea level. Today, his charming palace houses Marie Baz Wax Museum. Founded by Samir Baz, the museum presents some historical Lebanese personalities. But the jewel of this palace is the Liwan with its fountain. On a warm day, the Prince would sit in that covered living space overlooking the central courtyard and enjoy the splendor of the sun.

On the opposite side of the square is an 18th century Shehab palace occupied by the Municipality of Deir el Qamar. A beautiful entrance with two lions, emblem of the Shehabs, invites you in. Once there, admire the domed room with its wood paneling. It's believed that in the serenity of this adornment lived Prince Beshir Shehab II prior to moving to Bieteddine in 1810. That same serenity continues to inspire many visitors when they contemplate these humble but majestic palaces.
Charming fountains
...a vital culture

Fountain, sabil or ain are names that designate the architectural element for drinkable water. In Lebanon, the ain is always related to moments of romantic feelings. "The youngest went down to the fountains with the girls of the village - like Rebecca of the Bible"... It was at the ain also where young men would secretly choose their bride to be.

Essential element of survival, water is an architectural element in Arab culture as well. In every ancient city, there is a sabil to quench the passer-by's thirst. The labyrinth of alleys in such cities leads to public squares where a basin refreshes the atmosphere as well as citizens. The square is a meeting place where people drink together a freshly squeezed juice.

Travellers and citizens enjoy the leisure time they spend in a hammam. Traditionally, it's located near a mosque where the fountain is found in its courtyard. It allows the worshippers to perform their ablutions prior to praying. In the hammam, the fountain is found in the first room. After the bath, people are wrapped from head to toe with towels and left to relax to the sound of the water rippling in the fountain like lyre notes.

Another building where water is essential is the caravanserai or rest house. Built along trade routes and in cities, the caravanserai was for travellers. The basin is in the middle of the courtyard shaded by trees, creating a small enchanting world.

At palaces, sabils and fountains are found in halls, terraces, courtyards and at every turn. That is so obvious at Beiteddine and Debbaneh palaces. Rich families could afford building a canal system from the spring to their homes.

But the fountain is often found as well at a church courtyard or - such as in Islam - is sometimes dedicated to the rest of a deceased soul. Normally, a verse is left above. Once again, remnants of 18th -19th century's fountains and sabils bring back the enchantment of water rituals of days past.
Yes, Lebanon of the 18th–19th centuries still has more to offer. At that time, the cafes where found around the country, and public baths or hammams became part of the urban cities while canals on the mountains carried water to villages and often to dignitaries' houses. Warm nights were spent outdoors, with family, friends and neighbours gathered around a great feast at the rhythm of dabke music - group folklore.

If you are in Beirut and feel like having a good coffee, go to Gemmayzeh cafe, one of the very few remaining Lebanese glass cafes. The coffee is strong, giving you the right energy to start your day. In Saida and Tripoli, coffee is appreciated in small and old kahwehs - coffee places - with a vaulted ceiling. Men play backgammon or cards and smoke the nargileh - water pipe. Admire the small coffee trays and the copper rakweh - coffee pot. In some modern coffee shops, a small cup of coffee is served the same way. It's a tradition that brings back all the rituals of coffee drinking.

If you're really looking for a change of scenery, Sour, Sidon and Tripoli are the places to be. In Tripoli visit hammam el Abed. It's located in the gold souk and offers a steam bath and a massage. Using a loufa and a local soap made with olive oil, you're vigorously bathed.

At night, when you step into a Lebanese restaurant, you might come across a group of people celebrating. As the DJ plays the music loud, men and women together rejoice at the dabke cadence.

One of Lebanon's most beautiful mountains is the Shouf. That is where the Emirs built their palaces and gardens. Inside the halls you're surprised to see such a small amount of furniture. But the marble mosaics covering the floors, the elegant fountains, and ornate wood panels on walls and ceilings are magnificent!

Never leave without letting yourself get taken by the charming sceneries. The stone benches on the terraces of Beiteddine Palace overlook the valley. Like the Emir, let your mind wander over the graceful trees in the valley below!
Silk in Lebanon
...a fabulous industry!

For hundreds of years, China had kept the monopoly on producing silk. But it was during the reign of Byzantine Emperor Justinian that the secret was unveiled. Two monks who embarked on a secret journey to China brought back cocoons; they had clandestinely hidden them in a hollowed bamboo stick!

That is how in the 6th century, the silkworm production was proliferated in the Byzantine Empire and mostly in Lebanon. The climate and the soil were adequate to plant the white mulberry trees for silk worm breeding. It was Prince Fakhr al-Din II (1572-1635) who encouraged its production in Mount Lebanon.

But the silk industry was important in Beirut as well. Archéological excavations revealed an Ottoman silk workshop in Beirut Central District with seven basins, a well, and a reservoir. A traveler talked about orchards of mulberry trees around Beirut.

Many families built their wealth on exporting the silk and the cocoons to France and Italy. In 1832, French writer Lamartine mentioned weavers “working under the mulberry trees – on those beautiful multicolored silk fabrics. The threads were hanged from one tree to another”. In the 19th century, the silk quality was improved which helped bring social and economic prosperity to Lebanon.

Men, women and often children would come on their mules, horses and donkeys from different parts of Mount Lebanon, bringing the cocoons and selling them to the factories. Busy and long is the season from May to October. Families thrive on breeding silkworms and drying the white and gold cocoons. "If the cocoons were to be shipped, they were steamed in hot water before sending them to Europe".

It’s said that in 1910, 60% of the country’s income was from silk. But later, that industry couldn’t fight against synthetic fibers. Today, many silk breeding and drying houses and factories are left to ruin. But there’s a Silk Museum at Bous, in Lebanon, that opens only during the silk season from May to October, bringing back that fabulous industry!