

# BIG PROBLEMS, CO

**WHY ARE MIDDLE EASTERN POLITICS SO CONFUSING? WHAT GOES INTO SUCCESSFUL DIPLOMATIC NEGOTIATIONS? HOW CAN COUNTRIES WORK TOGETHER FOR THE GREATER GOOD? IN SUMMER PROGRAMS AROUND THE COUNTRY, STUDENTS EXPLORE SUCH COMPLEX ISSUES AND LEARN THAT EDUCATION IS THE FIRST STEP TOWARD FINDING SOLUTIONS.**

## **POLITICS IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

**by Allison O'Malley Graham**

While browsing through the CTY course catalog last year, I read about Politics in the Middle East at Princeton University. Having taken Introduction to International Politics at CTY, I thought the Princeton course seemed like a good next step. I also had a personal connection to the Middle East: As a child, I spent three years in Oman. Half a lifetime later, I was still confused about the politics of the region I still thought of as home.

On the first day of class, we were asked to name the countries in the Middle East. Initially, it was easy: Oman, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq rolled off our tongues. We quickly learned, however, that defining the Middle East wasn't that simple. The class broke out in disagreement over whether to include Pakistan, Libya, and Algeria. What is the Middle East? Is it a geographic grouping, or do culture and religion define it too? What does the term "Middle East" even mean?

The class motto soon became "It's complicated." If a task as straightforward as defining the Middle East proved complicated, then understanding the region's complex political issues was even more difficult. Every day we walked into class thinking we would somehow untangle it all, yet we walked out far more confused and frustrated than before. But our confusion and frustration were only signs of how much we were learning.

In the mornings, we learned the great narratives of the region: the origins of the Sunni-Shia divide; the histories of Iran, Iraq, and Algeria; and details of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Afternoons focused on specific issues such as gender and religion. As the course progressed, our focus narrowed: Instead of discussing the region as a whole, we studied specific topics such as the Algerian War of Independence.

For a final project, we each researched a topic related to Middle Eastern politics. I explored Armenian identity politics in Turkey. At the core of my research was the question of what being Armenian meant. Does religion or ethnicity dictate whether an individual is Armenian, or is it a mixture of the two? I was surprised by how connected identity was to the region's politics as a whole.

This course broadened my understanding of the Middle East and taught me not to be daunted by the complexity of the issues it faces. It showed me that working to understand these issues and examining them from different perspectives can help us find solutions.



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# COMPLEX SOLUTIONS

## THE POLITICS OF POWER

by Ian Morgan

I had always been interested in politics and government, so in 10th grade, I registered for The Politics of Power at Duke University TIP. Held at Rice University in Houston, Texas, the three-week course focused on political power and its effects on society.

The first day, the class engaged in a role-playing activity. Representing a particular country's government, each of the 15 students had to devise a plan to address world hunger while maintaining their country's economy. My role was Director of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC). After researching their country's goals and budget limitations, the students presented their plans.

Unfortunately, we found that solutions to one country's problem often had negative consequences for that country as well as others. For example, my plan to expand refugee camps in Bangladesh required other countries to help fund the expansion. Many were too poor to contribute, and wealthier countries would contribute only if they got something in return. For example, they might want a percentage of the company that engineered the expansion, or want to impose their rules on the project or even the government. Such outcomes would contribute to an imbalance of power. A heated debate ensued, with no one country able to negotiate to get what they wanted. To strengthen their positions, some countries began to form alliances. This activity demonstrated the complex chal-

lenges countries face in solving big problems, as well as the value of alliances and the need for patience in devising solutions.

We discussed the importance of having a thorough knowledge of a country's culture, religion, and history in order to successfully negotiate with them, since understanding others' beliefs, motivations, and priorities allows you to better negotiate on their terms. To explore how even small groups can negotiate to solve problems within their communities, we held mock trials where we represented organizations such as BRAC and the World Food Programme at a world poverty conference.

We also identified leaders who had gained power and created positive change without violence and without losing their integrity, including Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. We learned that a good leader is one who listens, sees both sides of an issue, and makes decisions that may not make everyone happy, but do the most good.

Assuming the roles of various leaders and seeking solutions to such issues as hunger and poverty helped us see how one country's decisions can have a big impact on other countries and how an imbalance of power can make it hard to effect change.



**Ian Morgan** is a sophomore at Barbers Hill High School in Mont Belvieu, TX, where he plays the trombone in the band and is a member of the debate team. This past summer, he again attended Duke TIP, where he took the course Cold War: From Allies to Adversaries.

## HUMAN RIGHTS AND FOREIGN POLICY

by Megan Brennan

I have to admit that I didn't know much about human rights and foreign policy when I signed up for a class on the topic at Northwestern University CTD. Although I had attended CTD summer programs for five years, I had focused on courses such as Order in the Court that allowed me to explore a passion for law. Now it was time to learn something new.

Over three weeks, as we researched world leaders, learned about conflicts overseas, and discussed topics such as the unfolding Greek debt crisis, my eyes were opened to various foreign policy issues and human rights violations. For example, I learned for the first time about the 1990 Rwandan genocide, in which thousands of innocent people were killed while many countries stood idly by. I realized I needed to be more informed about current issues and to get involved when injustices are occurring.

Writing a 10-page research paper on Guantanamo Bay helped me learn about human rights violations right here in the U.S. and the need for humane ways to deal with suspected terrorists. To overcome the stigma of torture associated with Guantanamo Bay, I proposed shutting down Guantanamo, building a new prison for terrorism suspects on Jarvis Island (an uninhabited U.S. territory in the Pacific Ocean), and implementing a new, comprehensive policy against torture.

By studying events and issues pertaining to places thousands of miles away, I learned a lot about foreign affairs—as well as the importance and value of exploring the world beyond one's own interests. ■



**Megan Brennan** is a sophomore at Lake Forest High School in Lake Forest, IL, where she is a member of the student council and the volleyball and gymnastics teams. Megan is also a peer juror on Lake County's Teen Court.