Short Projects: Arabic LearnCUID

This collection offers a curated sample of 100 short learning projects drawn from the evolving work of Arabic LearnCUID. Each project is inspired by real source texts—translated poetry, historical archives, visual media, and reflective scholarship—and reimagined as a collaborative, exploratory experience for learners.

These are not assignments in the traditional sense, but open-ended invitations: to read, to reflect, to connect, and to create. Rooted in themes of cultural memory, identity, storytelling, language-in-context, and cross-cultural interpretation, each project is designed for small learning groups working with translated materials across diverse cultural, academic, and generational backgrounds.

This is not an exhaustive list, but a growing archive—a glimpse into the types of topics, methods, and reflections that have emerged across Arabic LearnCUID groups in recent years. Projects vary in form and tone: some are analytical, others visual or creative; some explore historical materials, others confront urgent questions of modern identity and representation. What they share is a commitment to learning with and through culture—not about it from a distance.

We invite you to use these as inspiration, adaptation, or provocation. Like the cultures they explore, these projects are meant to travel, to transform, and to speak differently in each new context.

Latest update: April 2025.

Between Worlds

Example projects explore the early crossroads of Arabic and Anglo-Saxon.

Offa's Dinar: When an English King Wrote in Arabic

Summary:

In the 8th century, King Offa of Mercia minted a gold coin that featured Arabic script — a copy of a dinar from the Abbasid Caliphate. Why would an Anglo-Saxon ruler use Arabic to express authority? This project explores how coins become cultural mirrors. Learners will trace the journey of Arabic aesthetics into European hands and reflect on what "borrowing" symbols means for identity, power, and admiration.

Genesis in Two Tongues: Comparing Creation Stories in Arabic and Old English

Summary:

Some early medieval texts, like *Genesis A & B* in Old English, share surprising parallels with Arabic religious storytelling. This project invites learners to compare selected verses from Arabic and Anglo-Saxon traditions — not to find differences, but to interpret shared themes like exile, obedience, and divine justice. The goal is to reflect on how sacred stories shape cultural worldviews across time and language.

Maps of the Mind: How the Early English Imagined the Arab World

Summary:

Before Google Maps, there were mental maps: stories, coins, and manuscripts that shaped how people imagined the world. This project invites learners to reconstruct an Anglo-Saxon "map" of the Arab world, based on medieval texts like Orosius and biblical commentaries. Learners will reflect on how misunderstanding and admiration coexisted, and how cultural imagination informs real-world attitudes.

East of Eden: Arabic Places in English Religious Geography

Summary:

In Old English religious texts, places like Egypt, Arabia, and Jerusalem are more than geography—they are symbols of morality, exile, or divine testing. Learners will explore how Arabic and Middle Eastern lands appear in Christian storytelling and how those symbols evolved. What happens when real places become metaphors? And what happens when learners from those places re-read those metaphors?

Shared Sacred: The Many Lives of Orosius' Anti-War History

Summary:

Paulus Orosius was a Christian historian whose works were translated into Latin, Arabic, and Old English — with each version offering a different take on history and violence. This project invites learners to compare how Orosius' message was adapted in Arabic and English contexts, reflecting on whether peace, war, and paganism mean the same thing in different cultural frames.

Writing the 'Other': How Early Europe Spoke About Arabs

Summary:
Long before the Crusades, English writers were already describing the Arab world — sometimes as foreign, sometimes as noble. This project explores how early European texts constructed "the other," and encourages learners to reverse the lens: how might Arab learners write about Anglo-Saxon England? Through this mirror exercise, participants will reflect on how stories shape respect or suspicion.

From Rome to Baghdad: A Timeline of Cultural Misconceptions

Summary:
From Roman historians to English chroniclers, the Arab world was often depicted through second-hand accounts. Learners will create an annotated timeline of moments where Arabic culture was either misread or surprisingly respected in early European texts. What changed over time, and why? This timeline is less about facts and more about feelings: how misunderstandings grow, fade, or shift across centuries.

Center or Edge? Rethinking 'Civilization' from Arabic and English Views

Summary:
This project challenges the old idea that Europe was the "center" and the Arab world the "edge" of civilization. Learners will explore what early English writers thought of cultural centers — and what Arabic writers thought of Europe. Through short reflections and quotes, the group will ask: who decides where the center is? And how do maps and metaphors shape that view?

Echoes of Arabic in Old English Thought

Summary:
Even when not acknowledged, Arabic ideas and aesthetics subtly shaped early English thought — through trade, coins, translations, and religious influence. This project tracks small echoes of Arabic presence in early medieval England and invites learners to imagine what those fragments meant. It's a poetic exercise in noticing what's hidden in plain sight.

The Middle Ages We Don't Talk About: Reclaiming Overlooked Encounters

Summary:
Many Western narratives skip the Middle Ages as "dark" or unimportant. This project reclaims the richness of the era by focusing on overlooked connections between Arabs and Anglo-Saxons. Learners will explore why some histories are forgotten and create short stories or zines that spotlight forgotten facts, coins, and conversations that once linked distant lands.

Art Meaning

Example projects explore the Arabic language as living art.

The Breath Behind the Letter: Discovering Arabic Calligraphy as a Spiritual Practice

Summary:

Arabic calligraphy isn't just writing—it's a meditative act. This project invites learners to explore how calligraphers connect breath, rhythm, and devotion through the movement of the pen. Inspired by traditional workshops and personal reflection, students create visual sketches and journal entries that connect the act of writing with states of stillness and contemplation. What happens when we write slowly, with intention?

Dot by Dot: Proportion, Geometry, and the Mystery of the Arabic Letter

Summary:

In Arabic calligraphy, one dot can define a whole system. This project introduces learners to the geometric secrets behind the structure of Arabic letters—how dots, circles, and golden proportions shape beauty and meaning. Through creative exercises and guided drawing, learners uncover how mathematics and mysticism meet in every letter, drawing inspiration from Ibn Muqlah and beyond.

Letters as Friends: Exploring the Social Life of the Arabic Alphabet

Summary:

Some letters are loners. Others are always connecting. This playful, reflective project looks at the Arabic alphabet as a network of relationships—how letters stretch, curve, and change depending on who they're next to. Through collaborative visuals, short stories, and even animations, learners explore how the Arabic script can teach us about sociability, adaptability, and empathy.

The Calligrapher's Toolbox: Ink, Intention, and the Craft of Creation

Summary:

What does it take to write like a master? This project explores the traditional tools of Arabic calligraphy—from reed pens and inkwells to treated papers and cutting plates. Learners try hands-on practices or visual simulations of preparing and using calligraphy tools, discovering how each tool embodies care, patience, and a history of craftsmanship.

The Letter 'Ayn' as Identity: From Form to Feeling

Summary:

'Ayn isn't just a letter—it's a sound, a curve, a visual symbol with deep roots. This project focuses on the letter ''Ayn' as a case study, exploring its visual transformations across calligraphy and typography, and its metaphorical roles in poetry, art, and identity. Learners create their own artistic interpretations of 'Ayn', reflecting on how a single symbol can hold memory, culture, and voice.

Modern Artists, Ancient Letters: When Calligraphy Meets Contemporary Art

Summary:

How do today's Arab artists reinterpret ancient letterforms? In this project, learners explore

artworks by Madiha Umar, Dia Azzawi, and Munir Fatmi—each blending Arabic calligraphy with modern expression. Through group discussion and creative response projects (collage, drawing, digital mashups), learners reflect on how calligraphy becomes political, poetic, or purely personal in the modern world.

Mapping the Life of the Arabic Alphabet: A Visual Timeline Project

Summary:
Where did Arabic letters begin—and where are they going? This timeline project asks learners to trace the evolution of the Arabic script from early Qur'anic calligraphy to digital fonts. Through collaborative research and visual design, groups create a map or interactive timeline showing how technology, culture, and politics have reshaped the way Arabic is written and seen.

The Science of Letters: Ibn Arabi and the Secret Meaning of the Alphabet

Summary:
Ibn Arabi believed that each Arabic letter had a soul, a metaphysical essence. In this project, learners explore selected teachings from *ʿIlm al-Ḥurūf*—the "Science of Letters"—and interpret them through personal reflection and visual storytelling. What does it mean to see letters not just as symbols, but as living entities with meaning beyond language?

Typography in Translation: Writing Arabic for the Digital Age

Summary:
How does Arabic change when it moves from pen to screen? This project explores the transition from calligraphy to typography—from organic curves to digital fonts. Students examine contemporary Arabic typefaces, discuss their strengths and challenges, and prototype their own designs or digital lettering concepts. It's a reflection on how tradition adapts to technology.

The Calligraphic Zine: Telling Our Stories through Letters

Summary:
Combining art, storytelling, and typography, this project invites learners to create a small zine (digital or paper) using Arabic letters as both language and image. Whether personal, poetic, or playful, the zine becomes a space to express identity, cultural memory, or linguistic playfulness, to showcase learners' growth and creativity.

Outlaws of the Word

Example projects explore the poetic rebels who turned exile, hunger, and defiance into art.

Poetry with Mud on Its Shoes: The Modern Ṣuʿlūk in Baghdad

Summary:

This project introduces learners to the figure of the modern ṣuʿlūk—the outcast poet who turns poverty and rebellion into a personal and political identity. Through reading excerpts and creating reflective responses, students explore how poets like Ḥusayn Mardān and Jān Dammū walked the line between resistance and ruin, writing from the cafés, alleys, and margins of modern Iraq.

Naked Verses: Ḥusayn Mardān and the Trial of Transgressive Poetry

Summary:

When Ḥusayn Mardān published Qaṣāʾid ʿāriya (Naked Poems), he was taken to court—not for violence, but for verse. This project invites learners to examine how poetic language challenges not only literary norms but social taboos. What does it mean to be obscene in a political world? Students reflect through discussion, visual poetry, and creative provocations of their own.

Café, Cigarette, Poem: Spaces of Ṣaʿlaka in 1950s Baghdad

Summary:

Where does poetry happen? For Iraq's poetic rebels, the cafés, bars, and nightclubs of Baghdad became their lecture halls. In this project, learners map the social geography of mid-century Baghdad through poems, oral stories, and fictional reconstructions of the poets' hangouts. The aim: to understand how urban life feeds literary expression—and resistance.

Letters in Rags: Jān Dammū and the Politics of Poetry Without a Home

Summary:

Jān Dammū, one of Iraq's most enigmatic modern poets, lived his ṣaʿlaka as both poem and performance. Learners dive into his only collection Asmāl (Rags), tracing how his fragmented, surreal writing style reflected not only personal chaos but a deeper rejection of the Baʿthist regime's cultural control. The project ends with learners crafting their own "letters in exile."

Before the Rhymes: The Ṣuʿlūk in Pre-Islamic and Modern Eyes

Summary:

Who were the ṣuʿlūk before they became metaphors? This comparative project looks at classical outcast-poets like al-Shanfarā and ʿUrwa ibn al-Ward alongside modern figures like Mardān and Dammū. Learners explore recurring themes—poverty, freedom, rebellion—while asking: what makes a poet a threat in different eras?

The Street as a Page: Redefining Literature from Below

Summary:

In this project, learners consider how modern ṣuʿlūk poetry broke the walls between high culture and everyday life. Through group inquiry and sample translations, they reflect on how literature can emerge from "filth, fog, and hunger," not just schools and salons. The challenge: to write a collaborative poetic statement in the voice of the modern street.

Writing Without Permission: From the Qaṣīda to Concentrated Prose

Summary:

Ḥusayn Mardān didn't just defy society—he broke the rules of Arabic poetic form. This project explores how he and others pushed past classical meters and structures into something wild and new, often before the prose poem was accepted. Students compare classical forms with experimental works and reflect on the freedom (and cost) of literary disobedience.

Poetry After Prison: Can a Vagabond Become a Revolutionary?

Summary:

Mardān's prison experience sparked a shift from sensual rebellion to political commitment. This project examines how poetry changes under pressure—from personal pleasure to collective struggle. Learners follow this journey and reflect on their own ideas of resistance, transformation, and whether poetry can "grow up" without losing its fire.

Rags, Ritual, Revolution: Ṣaʿlaka as a Cultural Archetype

Summary:

This big-picture project invites learners to trace how ṣaʿlaka evolved from a socio-economic condition in the Jāhilī era to a powerful metaphor of resistance in modern literature. What makes this archetype so durable—and so dangerous? Students create a digital timeline or visual map linking key figures, poems, and cultural moments from past to present.

The Poem Refuses to Obey: Ṣaʿlaka as Literary Strategy

Summary:

Is rebellion a poetic technique? This project treats ṣaʿlaka not just as a lifestyle, but a literary style. Learners investigate how form, tone, imagery, and self-representation all conspire to create a "refusing" poem—one that resists neatness, closure, or domestication. The project ends with learners co-authoring a zine of rebellious writing in Arabic or bilingual format.

The Feminine Voice

Example projects explore the voice, gender, space, and solidarity in poetic form.

Writing as a Woman: Can a Poet Borrow a Gender?

Summary:

This project invites learners to explore the bold and controversial question posed by Qabbani's *Journal of an Indifferent Woman*: can a male poet authentically speak in a woman's voice? Through selected readings and group debate, learners reflect on the difference between speaking **for**, **with**, or **instead of** others—and the responsibilities of empathy in literature.

Jing'an and Damascus: Places That Shape the Poem

Summary:

Zhai Yongming wrote about a forgotten Chinese village, while Qabbani mourned his exile from a jasmine-scented Damascus. This project examines how physical and emotional spaces—rural, urban, foreign, internal—shape the language of memory and resistance. Students use maps, drawings, or photo essays to imagine how place becomes poetry.

The Poetic Diary: Living One Month at a Time

Summary:

Zhai's *Jing'an Village* is built around the lunar calendar. Qabbani's *Journal* mimics a woman's daily reflections. This project explores how poetry and life writing merge in the form of poetic diaries. Learners create their own month-by-month entries—short, vivid poems that reflect how days shape identity.

Black Night Consciousness: When Women Write the Silence

Summary:

Zhai once wrote that real power comes from confronting one's fate with inner truth. This project dives into how silence, darkness, and the night become metaphors for female experience and self-discovery in modern poetry. Learners reflect on metaphors in their own cultural traditions and create visual or poetic interpretations of "black night" themes.

What Is a Feminine Text? Reading Without the Author's Gender

Summary:

Do you need to be a woman to write a feminine poem? This question leads learners into deep reflection as they analyze poems from both Qabbani and Zhai, noticing voice, form, vulnerability, and rebellion. The project becomes a collaborative effort to define what "feminine" might mean in writing—across languages and borders.

Walls, Windows, and Wombs: Feminine Space in Poetry

Summary:

What kinds of spaces do women inhabit in poetic imagination? In this project, learners explore how female narrators are often placed in confined or fragmented spaces—and how they reimagine those

places through metaphor, storytelling, and bodily imagery. Students design visual collages or poetic scenes where space becomes symbolic.

Poetry as Translation: Making Feminine Meaning Across Cultures

Summary:
Both Qabbani and Zhai act as translators—not of language, but of emotional and cultural experience. Learners take on the role of poetic "translators," adapting or rewriting poems in a way that preserves voice and intent across boundaries. This project emphasizes sensitivity, context, and creative reinterpretation.

She Speaks in Symbols: Metaphor and the Mask of the Feminine

Summary:
From mirrors and moons to cages and jasmine, both poets fill their verses with symbols of womanhood. Learners decode these metaphors and create a "symbol map" that visually traces key themes. What happens when we read metaphor not as decoration, but as code for cultural and emotional truth?

Love, Pain, and Protest: When Romance Becomes Political

Summary:
Qabbani's love poems were often about freedom. Zhai's quiet imagery challenged Chinese nationalism. This project explores how intimate emotions like love or sorrow can also be acts of political protest. Learners reflect on emotional expression in their own cultures and how it can hold public power.

A Poem in Her Shoes: Writing a Feminine Persona

Summary:
After studying how both poets construct fictional "I" voices—often of women—the learners try it themselves. The challenge: write from a perspective you don't usually inhabit, with care and complexity. It's not about pretending—it's about asking, listening, and imagining with humility.

Tales That Travel

Example projects explore when a novel crosses oceans, changes tongues, and takes root in a new cultural world, since translation is not seen as copying—but as creation.

Robinson Crusoe in Beirut: The Desert Island as Cultural Mirror

Summary:

When Buṭrus al-Bustānī translated Robinson Crusoe into Arabic in 1861, he didn't just bring the story—he reshaped it for Arab readers. This project explores how this classic European tale of isolation and survival was retold in a new context, reflecting local values and educational goals. Learners reflect on the symbolic desert island as both a colonial metaphor and a space for reinvention.

What We Keep, What We Cut: Manfalūṭī's Selective Translations

Summary:

Muṣṭafā al-Manfalūṭī didn't translate word-for-word. Instead, he rewrote European sentimental novels to match Arab moral and emotional codes. This project explores what happens when a translator becomes an editor—or even an author. Learners reflect on what choices they would make in adapting a story across cultures, and how omission can be a form of creation.

Reading Between the Lines: Hidden Politics in Translated Fiction

Summary:

Colonial powers like France and Britain saw translation as a civilizing tool. But Arab translators used fiction to resist, critique, or question those very empires. This project invites learners to explore the political tension in early Arabic translations of European novels—especially how power, morality, and identity are reframed in stories meant for "education."

Hybrid Texts, Hybrid Selves: What Is an Arab Novel?

Summary:

Was the Arabic novel born from the European one—or from something older and native, like the maqāma or Alf Layla wa Layla? This project explores the idea of "hybridity" through early Arabic adaptations, inviting learners to analyze examples and reflect: does every novel have to have one origin? Or is it always already mixed?

Names That Travel: From Paul and Virginie to Qabūl and Jannah

Summary:

One French romance became an Arabic tale with rhyming names, poetic titles, and a moral message. This project traces the translation of Paul et Virginie into Qabūl wa Jannah, exploring how translators changed names, styles, and endings to resonate with Arab readers. Students create side-by-side comparisons and propose their own renaming of characters in cross-cultural stories.

The Translator as Author: Who Owns the Story?

Summary:

In the early 20th century, some Arab translators removed the names of European authors from their versions entirely. This project tackles the question of ownership in translation. Can a translator become a co-author? Learners debate ethical and artistic dimensions of rewriting and explore how invisibility in translation can be both erasure and empowerment.

The Print Revolution: How Translation Changed Reading in Arabic

Summary:

The arrival of the printing press in Egypt (with Napoleon!) launched more than a political campaign—it changed what people read, and how. This project looks at the impact of mass-printed translated novels on literacy, education, and imagination in the Arab world. Learners create a "reader's journal" imagining what a young Egyptian reader might have thought of their first foreign novel.

From Adventure to Escape: The Rise of the 'Entertainment Novel'

Summary:

During colonial occupation and post-ʿUrābī defeat, Arabic translations of French and English adventure stories skyrocketed. This project explores how fiction became a form of cultural escape. Students analyze how plots, genres, and characters were adapted to fit local emotional needs and reflect on how reading can offer both distraction and subtle resistance.

Lost in Translation? Or Found?

Summary:

Some early translations were criticized for being "inaccurate" or "free." But this project flips the question: what might those creative shifts actually reveal? Learners explore passages from early translated novels and reinterpret them not as mistakes—but as windows into how Arab writers reimagined foreign stories for local meaning.

Translation as Uprising: A Story for the Future

Summary:

What can translation teach us about rebellion? From Napoleon's proclamations in Arabic to Muhammad Husayn Haykal's reworking of Rousseau, translation has been used to dominate—and to push back. In this project, learners design their own "mini-uprising" through translation: selecting, adapting, and rewriting a short text as a call for cultural or creative resistance.

The Makers of Memory

Example projects explore how Arabic anthologists didn't just copy poetry—they curated a cultural map.

A Pearl from Every Place: Mapping the Literary Cities of the Yatīma

Summary:

Al-Thaʿālibī organized his anthology by city—not by theme or time. This project invites learners to explore what it means to imagine literature geographically. Students create a visual "literary map" of the fourth/tenth-century Islamic world, linking poets to cities, and reflecting on how places shape language and fame.

Anthologist as Artist: Building a Mini-Yatīma

Summary:

Students take on the role of Al-Thaʿālibī himself, curating a mini-anthology of contemporary Arabic poetry (modern or classical), complete with biographies, thematic pairings, and personal commentary. It's a reflective exercise in taste, judgment, and presentation—how do you frame a voice for others?

The Forgotten and the Famous: Whose Voice Gets Saved?

Summary:

Many poets in *Yatīmat al-Dahr* are remembered only because Al-Thaʿālibī included them. This project explores the question of cultural memory: what makes a poet worthy of being included in an anthology? Learners choose one lesser-known figure from the Yatīma and build a digital or visual profile that reimagines them for today's world.

The Biographer's Craft: Writing the Life of a Voice

Summary:

Every entry in the Yatīma includes a short biography—just enough to frame the poet's work. This project challenges learners to practice the same craft: write a poetic biography of a real or fictional contemporary figure in 200 words or less. What details give weight to a life, and which ones are just noise?

From Oral to Ink: How Poetry Travels Through Time

Summary:

Many poems in Al-Thaʿālibī's anthology were preserved orally before being written down. This project follows the journey of a poem from mouth to manuscript, exploring how performance, memory, and trust shaped literary transmission. Learners try oral poetry performance and reflect on what's lost—and gained—when words are written.

The Editor with a Point of View: Bias in Beauty

Summary:

Al-Thaʿālibī didn't just collect—he judged. He often commented on which poets were "eloquent"

or "uneven." This project asks students to explore the ethics of curating: can you love literature and still be critical? Learners write personal reflections or creative critiques of poems they select, inspired by the Yatīma style.

The Anthology as Mirror: What the Yatīma Says About Its Time

Summary:
Through courtly praise, rivalries, and regional pride, Al-Thaʿālibī's anthology reflects the values of his world. This project invites learners to "read between the lines" and extract what the Yatīma says about class, gender, travel, and fame. The group creates an infographic or exhibition that shows the social structure hidden inside the literature.

Lost Pages: Imagining the Voices That Were Left Out

Summary:
Who didn't make it into the Yatīma? This speculative project invites learners to imagine the stories and voices left out of Al-Thaʿālibī's anthology—especially women, minorities, or poets from remote regions. Learners write fictional entries (bio + poem) for these imagined poets, blending history with empathy.

Poetry in Pairs: Dialogue Across Time

Summary:
Al-Thaʿālibī often placed poems from different authors side-by-side to contrast or complement them. This project invites learners to create poetry "pairs" by choosing one classical Arabic poem and one modern work that speak to similar themes—love, exile, longing, praise—and reflect on the echoes across centuries.

Curate Your Generation: A Living Anthology Project

Summary:
Inspired by *Yatīmat al-Dahr*, learners collaborate to build a "living anthology" of voices from their own networks—friends, classmates, digital communities—through interviews, short bios, and favorite quotes or poems. The result is a collective portrait of what poetry, expression, and belonging mean today.

On the Edge of the Tribe

Example projects explore how tribal verse became a tool for survival and cultural definition.

Hudhayl Without Horses: Rethinking Pre-Islamic Poetry's Norms

Summary:

Unlike the Najdī poets with their camel journeys and cavalry glory, Hudhayl's poets wrote about hunger, speed on foot, and stripped-down survival. This project challenges learners to rethink what makes poetry "heroic." Through comparisons and creative rewriting, students explore how hardship, rather than grandeur, can be poetic.

The Elegy Without the Dead: Praising Life by Mourning Animals

Summary:

Hudhayl's poets often wrote elegies not by praising the person who died—but by describing fierce animals who couldn't escape death. This unusual style invites learners to explore how grief can be expressed indirectly, and how metaphors help us speak the unspeakable. The project ends with writing an elegy "by proxy.

Running, Not Riding: The Anti-Aristocratic Poet-Warrior

Summary:

Forget the gallant horsemen of Najd—Hudhayl poets celebrated those who ran on foot, lived simply, and fought with bare weapons. Learners explore how poetry can reflect class difference, regional identity, and alternative heroism. They reflect on today's equivalents: who gets praised in poetry, and why?

A Tribe Through Its Poets: Building a Hudhayl Family Tree

Summary:

Using real poems and lineages from Ashʿār al-Hudhaliyyīn, learners create a poetic "family tree" of Hudhayl—who taught whom, who responded to whom, and how themes passed down generations. This interactive project makes oral transmission and mentorship visible through creative diagrams or digital storytelling.

Riddles, Rhymes, and Reputation: Wordplay in Tribal Verse

Summary:

Hudhayl poetry is full of verbal puzzles, allusions, and tribal nameplay—used to show wit, claim identity, or humiliate enemies. This project invites learners to decode examples and write their own "tribal-style" verses using hidden meanings, regional pride, and clever metaphor.

Hudhayl's Weather Report: Rain, Stars, and Migration in Verse

Summary:

For nomadic poets, poetry was also a calendar and a map. Learners explore how the Hudhalīs used stars (anwāʾ), rain patterns, and seasonal references to document their lives. Through visual timelines and regional weather poems, learners see how environment and expression are deeply linked.

Ayyām al-ʿArab: Turning Battles into Story and Song

Summary:

Tribal poetry often appears alongside battle tales (ayyām)—part report, part boast. Learners examine these narratives and reflect on how poetry records history not as facts, but as feeling and pride. The project ends with students creating their own mini ayyām-style accounts based on real or imagined events.

The Shadow of the Ṣuʿlūk: Margins Within the Tribe

Summary:

The so-called "brigand poets" (ṣuʿlūk) weren't always outsiders—Hudhayl's poetry shows how their ideals of endurance, hunger, and fierce independence were celebrated within tribal norms. This project helps learners rethink the boundary between rejection and respect through creative profiles of these figures.

Poetry as Political Negotiation: Praise Without Kings

Summary:

Unlike other tribes who wrote panegyrics for rulers, Hudhayl poets often praised peers and equals. This project explores how poetry functioned as social negotiation—solidifying alliances, defending honor, or reshaping disputes. Learners experiment with writing "egalitarian praise" in verse or prose.

Who Gets Remembered? Rebuilding a Lost Anthology Page

Summary:

Some Hudhalī poets are preserved in only a line or two—yet their voice shaped the whole. Learners choose one such figure and imagine what their full poetic life could have been, combining historical facts with poetic creativity. A tribute to voices almost lost.

Literary Boundaries in Arabic Life Writing

Example projects explore autobiography not as a solo act—but as a house filled with echoes.

Writing the Family: Can You Tell Your Story Without Them?

Summary:

Many modern Arabic autobiographies center on the family—not just as background, but as core material. This project invites learners to explore how family members shape the narrator's identity, and to create their own short autobiographical scenes where relatives "interrupt" or speak alongside the narrator, Bakhtin-style.

The Voice Isn't Singular: Exploring Heteroglossia Through Life Writing

Summary:

Using Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia—the presence of multiple, layered voices in a single text—students reflect on how autobiography becomes a kind of conversation. Learners examine short excerpts from writers like Fadwa Tuqan and Raja Shehadeh, then experiment with writing their own layered texts: diary + letter, poem + memory, or internal debate.

My Father, My Enemy, My Guide: Patriarchy in Autobiographical Memory

Summary:

Across many Arabic autobiographies, the father appears as a paradox—revered, feared, resisted, mourned. This project explores how figures of patriarchal authority are remembered and reframed. Learners create a poetic or visual interpretation of the "father-figure" as seen through memory and resistance.

Fragments of a Self: Writing with Childhood Objects

Summary:

From Layla 'Usayran's colored ribbons to Hanna Abu Hanna's rain-drenched window, memory in autobiography often starts from a small object. Learners bring a personal item to class and write a short text that reconstructs a memory through its lens—blending storytelling, sensory detail, and reflection.

Return to Childhood: Writing a Journey in Miniature

Summary:

Inspired by the autobiographical trope of returning to one's early self, this project invites learners to script a 3-part poetic scene from their childhood: a place, a conflict, and a voice that interrupts. The result is a mosaic-style story that mimics how memory actually works—in flashes, tones, and contradictions.

Language Inside the House: Code-Switching as Cultural Archive

Summary:

Many autobiographies—especially Palestinian ones—include multiple languages or dialects (Modern Standard Arabic, colloquial Arabic, Hebrew, English). Learners explore how switching tongues reflects generational shifts, exile, and belonging. The project ends with a collaborative "multilingual family dialogue" collage.

The Autobiography That Refuses to Behave

Summary:

These texts don't follow neat literary rules—there are poems, jokes, quotes, dreams, diary entries. This project invites students to collect and analyze the mixed genres within an autobiography and to craft a hybrid text of their own that blends styles in unexpected ways.

The House as Archive: Space and Memory in Autobiographical Writing

Summary:

In many texts, the house is more than architecture—it's memory made solid. Learners sketch or digitally map their childhood home (or an imagined version), annotating each space with moments, voices, and sensory fragments. A creative way to understand how space structures storytelling.

My Name in the Text: The Narrator, the Author, and the Shadow Self

Summary:

Why do some authors write "I," while others use their name—or avoid it entirely? This project explores the blurry line between fiction and self in Arabic autobiography. Learners examine texts where the narrator's identity is split or hidden, and experiment with writing in the third person about themselves.

Writing the Missing Voices: Mothers, Sisters, Grandmothers

Summary:

While some autobiographies center fathers, others give quiet strength to maternal or female figures. This project asks learners to find the background women in autobiographical texts and bring them to the front—through invented monologues, letter-style writing, or poetic responses. A tribute to those who are heard in silence.

Culture, Digitally Speaking

Example projects explore new ways of learning, reflecting, and experiencing Arabic culture through digital tools, in translation, and across screens.

The Interface of Culture: How Technology Shapes What We Notice

Summary:

This project invites learners to reflect on how the format of cultural learning—text, video, audio, interactive quizzes—affects what we absorb and how we interpret it. They will compare two experiences of the same topic (e.g., Arab hospitality, family roles, or traditions) in different media and reflect on how meaning shifts.

Designing a Cultural Micro-Lesson: 10 Minutes in an Arab World

Summary:

Learners take on the role of digital cultural curators: choosing a cultural theme (e.g., clothing, cuisine, festivals, body language) and building a short 10-minute lesson using a mix of media and narration. The focus is not on information quantity but on depth, context, and curiosity.

Culture is Not an Extra Tab: Rethinking What We Prioritize in Digital Spaces

Summary:

Inspired by the finding that culture often gets 20% (or less) of the focus in structured curricula, learners critically analyze a real or imagined online Arabic learning platform and redesign it with culture as the core, not the sidebar. What would change if cultural understanding came first?

Arab Culture Online: What's Real, What's Represented?

Summary:

From YouTube vlogs in Amman to Cairo food Instagrams, learners curate and critique 5 digital examples of Arab cultural content. Through a mini blog post or video reflection, they ask: Who is the audience? What is performed? What's left out? How does translation affect the story?

The Blended Classroom as Cultural Commons

Summary:

Drawing from Tamimi's case study of a blended Levantine Arabic course, this project looks at how online and face-to-face spaces change how we engage with cultural material. Learners build a visual model of the "ideal blended cultural classroom," incorporating community input, storytelling, and asynchronous tools.

The Hidden Curriculum: What Learners Wish Was Taught About Arab Culture

Summary:

Based on survey-style reflection and dialogue, learners identify key gaps in how Arab culture is taught or presented (e.g., regional variety, religion and secularism, gender dynamics). They present findings through creative outputs—collages, voice notes, or a "wishlist syllabus."

Culture by Hyperlink: What Happens When We Learn in Fragments?

Summary:
Inspired by the hypermedia concept, this project examines how nonlinear learning (jumping from video to glossary to image) creates a unique cultural experience. Learners use a digital annotation tool to track their journey through an Arab cultural theme, reflecting on insight, confusion, and emotional reactions.

Mood Boards of Memory: Designing Digital Scenes of Arab Daily Life

Summary:
Instead of summarizing Arab cultural facts, learners design visual storyboards or "digital dioramas" that capture intimate, lived moments (e.g., a Ramadan breakfast in Gaza, a grandmother's home in Tunis, a street vendor in Khartoum). Translation and visual storytelling become tools for emotional accuracy, not encyclopedic scope.

Culture Without Borders: What Arab Learners Teach Us About Ourselves

Summary:
This reflective project flips the lens: how do Arab learners, teachers, or artists perceive and present their culture to outsiders? Learners review testimonials, art, or interviews and explore moments of pride, frustration, or redefinition. They then write a letter "to a future learner" about cultural humility.

Design Your Dream Cultural Tool: Tech That Listens First

Summary:
Learners imagine a cultural learning tool—not a product, but a philosophy in form. What does tech look like when it's built to listen across difference? Their personal project can be a pitch, sketch, prototype, or manifesto.

Crossed Tongues, Shared Stories

Example projects explore how language carries culture, conflict, and care.

Who Speaks for the Culture? Heritage Learners as Cultural Archives

Summary:

Heritage speakers of Arabic bring lived cultural experiences to the classroom. This project invites learners to explore how these students become living archives of regional customs, idioms, and traditions, and asks: how do we respectfully listen to voices that come not from books, but from homes?

The Classroom as Micro-Arab World: Tracing Cultural Diversity Through Student Backgrounds

Summary:

Not all Arabic learners come from the same "Arab" background. This project asks learners to map cultural and regional diversity in the classroom (Levantine, North African, Gulf, etc.), then reflect on how these variations influence values, humor, religion, and everyday practices.

The Dialect Debate: What Happens to Culture When Colloquial Meets Classical?

Summary:

Arabic classrooms often mix Modern Standard Arabic with spoken dialects—Levantine, Egyptian, Iraqi, and more. This project uses recorded conversations and interviews to reflect on how culture sounds different depending on how you say it, and what's lost or gained in translation.

Cultural Comfort Zones: Inclusion, Exclusion, and Authority in the Arab Classroom

Summary:

Foreign language learners sometimes feel culturally less 'authentic' than heritage learners—and vice versa. This project explores how these tensions play out in classroom dynamics, and invites students to design learning environments where every kind of Arab cultural experience has value.

Can You Teach Culture Without Bias? The Teacher as Cultural Mediator

Summary:

Based on the dissertation's interviews with instructors, this project asks learners to reflect on how teachers select and present Arab culture—and how that influences what is seen as "correct" or "real." Learners then curate their own balanced "cultural snapshot" for future Arabic classrooms.

Learning From Tension: Conflict as a Cultural Learning Tool

Summary:

Rather than avoiding discomfort, this project encourages learners to analyze moments of misunderstanding, silence, or contradiction in classroom discussions as moments rich with cultural meaning. They then reflect on personal experiences where culture clashed—and what it taught them.

When Grammar Meets Grandmother: Reconstructing Arab Home Culture from the Classroom

Summary:

Learners explore the cultural dissonance between textbook Arabic and lived Arab domestic culture—including food, greetings, emotional expressions, and intergenerational expectations. This leads to a short digital storytelling project: "Things My Textbook Didn't Say About My Culture."

Learning Through Each Other: Peer Exchange as Cultural Bridgework

Summary:

Inspired by the study's findings on group interaction, this project reimagines peer-to-peer discussion not just as practice, but as cultural translation. Students are assigned to learn about a cultural custom from a peer's experience, then present it in their own voice—with reflection on missteps and insights.

Voices in the Circle: Building Community Across Cultural Identities

Summary:

Using methods from circle dialogue and story-sharing, this project centers the Arabic classroom as a community of practice rather than a space of competition. Students co-design inclusive rituals (greetings, storytelling, celebration) and reflect on how community formation is a cultural act.

Pedagogy as Politics: Whose Culture Gets Taught?

Summary:

Learners review real Arabic class syllabi and reflect on whose voices are included or excluded—what countries, religions, genders, and class perspectives appear? The project culminates in a proposed syllabus that makes Arab cultural plurality visible and vibrant.