

- ◇ There are hundreds of stories featuring Goha in the Arab world. This exercise will familiarise the students with some of these stories.
- ◇ Not only are the stories a key part of Arab culture, but they are also funny and engaging and students will see this aspect of Arab culture.
- ◇ Students will consider how the message is conveyed in the stories.
- ◇ Students will think about what happens when oral stories are written down.

Goha has been a key fixture of Middle Eastern stories for centuries. He is known by lots of different names, Goha or Joha, Hodja, Mollah, or Nasreddin, and is loved by grown-ups and children alike. Whatever people call him, he appears as an innocent or even stupid fool, but time and time again the fool turns out to be wise and to outwit those who call him a fool.

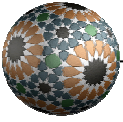
Some people believe he is an imaginary character, while others say he was a real man. There are so many Goha stories, that one can be found to fit almost any occasion.

Usually Goha is pictured as an older man, very poor, with a wife, a son and a donkey. If he ever finds some money, he is expected to lose it. But, he remains content, grateful that nothing worse has happened to him.

Lesson Plan

- ◆ Read the stories on the following pages with your class.
- ◆ In each case, ask them if the story is simply funny or if it also teaches something, and what the lesson might be.
- ◆ You could ask students to make up their own Goha stories.
- ◆ The Goha stories were traditionally part of an oral tradition. To get your students to consider how the differences between oral and written traditions, you could ask them to discuss how they would tell the same story to different people or in different circumstances. This should give them a sense of the dynamism which often characterises oral story telling.





Goha goes to the bank

Goha went into a bank with a cheque to cash. 'Can you identify yourself?' asked the clerk. Goha took out a mirror and peered into it. 'Yes, that's me all right,' he said.

Goha and the lamp

One day Goha was in his favourite cafe boasting that he could see in the dark. Someone on a nearby table heard and was unconvinced, so he said to Goha, "If you can really see in the dark, how come you always have a lamp with you at night?" Goha did not need to stop to think, and replied, without missing a beat, "Oh that. That is so that people can see me and won't bump into me."



The two sides of a river

Goha sat on a river bank when someone shouted to him from the opposite side "Hey! How do I get across?" "You are across!" Goha shouted back

Goha and his son ride the donkey

Goha and his son were on their way to a nearby village. The son rode the donkey whilst Goha walked alongside and his son rode.

On the way they passed some people who pointed at Goha and his son. "Look at that boy, they said." He is riding the donkey and his poor old father is walking."

When he heard this, Goha said, "You get off the donkey and I'll ride."

"Look at that man. He is riding the donkey and his poor young son is walking," some other passers-by said, pointing at the two of them.

Goha thought about this. "Get on the donkey, we'll both ride it," he said. Again Goha and his son passed by some people who pointed at them. "Look at those people riding that poor donkey. How cruel," they said.

Goha thought about this as well. "Let's both get off the donkey," he said to his son, and so they both walked alongside it. The people they passed by looked at pointed. This time they said, "Look at those fools, walking along when they have a donkey they could ride!"

After some thought, Goha said, "I have a good idea. We'll carry it!"

As they walked on another group of people looked at them staggering along under the weight of the donkey.

They pointed. "Look at those fools," they said. "They are carrying a donkey instead of riding it!"

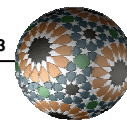
Goha turned to his son and said, "See, my son, how hard it is to please everyone?"



A conversation between Goha and his wife

Goha's wife asked him, 'Who is greater, the Sultan or the farmer?' Goha only need to think for half a second before replying, 'The farmer, of course, because if the farmer does not produce food, where would the Sultan be? He would die of starvation!'





Goha gives thanks to God

Once, when Goha lost his donkey, and he was searching for it everywhere he could think of, he kept on repeating to himself, "Thanks be to God. Thanks be to God." People who heard him were a little surprising to hear him giving thanks to God when he had just lost his donkey. They said to him, "Losing your donkey is not something to thank God for!" And he replied, quite patiently, "I am thanking God that I was not riding the donkey – because if I was, I would be lost as well!"

The pot that died

Goha's neighbour thought that Goha was a bit of a fool, and used to borrow things from Goha and then make excuses for not giving them back. One day Goha borrowed a large pot from a neighbour to cook his dinner.



The following day, Goha returned the pot with another small pot inside. The surprised neighbour asked how the small pot got there. "Your pot gave birth to a young one during the night," said Goha, and he then insisted that the young pot and old pot both be returned to the neighbour as they belonged together and it would be cruel to separate them. The delighted neighbour, laughing at Goha's stupidity, took both the pots.

A few weeks later Goha asked to borrow the pot again. When days had gone by, and Goha still had not returned the pot, the neighbour came by to ask for it. "May God have mercy on its soul," replied Goha. "Your pot has passed away. On the evening I borrowed it, it fell ill and died." The neighbour yelled: "Died! Since when do kettles die?"

"Ever since they've been able to have children," answered Goha.

Goha and the poor man

One day a poor man who was often hungry – on account of his being poor – walked past a cafe where meat was being grilled. He ate his bread, which was all he could afford, outside the cafe so that he could smell the delicious smell of the meat while he ate. But the owner of the cafe came outside and was angry. He demanded that the poor man pay him for smelling the meat! When it became clear that the poor man could not pay, the cafe owner took him to Goha who had become a judge. After hearing the story, Goha paused and thought. He asked the man how much he wanted to charge for the smell of the meat. "5 piastres," he replied. So Goha took a 5 piastre coin out of his pocket and span it on the table. When it fell, he asked the cafe owner, "Did you hear the sound the coin made?" When the cafe owner said he had, Goha said, "Take the sound of the coin as payment for the smell of your meat."

