

The Interview: Mohamad Hafiz



New Internationalist Easier English

Ready Intermediate Lesson

This lesson



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What do you think?

Which is Syria and which Saudi Arabia?

(a)



(b)





What do you think?



1) The population of Syria is

(a) 21 billion

(b) 9 billion

2) The capital of Syria is

(a) Damascus

(b) Aleppo











3) Most people in Syria are

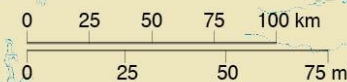
(a) Buddhist (b) Muslim (c) Christian



SYRIA


SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

-  National capital
 Provincial capital
 Town, village
 Airport
 International boundary
 Expressway
 Main road
 Secondary road
 Railroad
 Oil pipeline




Match:

- 1) architect
- 2) homesick
- 3) childhood
- 4) architecture
- 5) siesta
- 6) explore
- 7) jasmine
- 8) activism
- 9) migrant
- 10) refugee
- 11) wellbeing
- 12) design

- a) time between 1 and 12 years old
- b) feeling of missing a place where you lived before
- c) look around to see what you can find
- d) A small illustration of a branch with several white jasmine flowers and green leaves.
- e) someone who plans buildings
- f) planning of buildings
- g) a short sleep in the afternoon
- h) person who tries to move to another country
- i) person who escapes to another country
- j) political protests, demonstrations, etc
- k) make plans and drawings
- l) health and happiness

Match:

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| 1) architect | a) time between 1 and 12 years old |
| 2) homesick | b) feeling of missing a place where you lived before |
| 3) childhood | c) look around to see what you can find |
| 4) architecture | d)  |
| 5) siesta | e) someone who plans buildings |
| 6) explore | f) planning of buildings |
| 7) jasmine | g) a short sleep in the afternoon |
| 8) activism | h) person who tries to move to another country |
| 9) migrant | i) person who escapes to another country |
| 10) refugee | j) political protests, demonstrations, etc |
| 11) wellbeing | k) make plans and drawings |
| 12) design | l) health and happiness |

Before you read make questions to ask Muhamad Hafiz? Then guess the answers!

- 1) Where/born?
- 2) Where/spend/childhood?
- 3) happy childhood?
- 4) How old/move back/Syria?
- 5) What/like most about/childhood?
- 6) Why/move/US?



Now read and check the answers. Are your guesses right?

The interview: Mohamad Hafez

Mohamad Hafez is a Syrian-American architect and artist. He talks to Louisa Waugh about how he is homesick for Syria and how his art is about that.

You were born in Damascus, then you spent much of your childhood in Saudi Arabia before moving back to Syria as a teenager. Tell us about growing up in such different places?

It's strange, but growing up in Saudi Arabia was the best childhood! I used to go to school by bus and I looked forward to it every day because we would drive 200 kilometres across the desert. I think that's where I began to love being alone, especially because I was one of those strange children who didn't like sports. I was 14 when my family moved back to Damascus for a few years, and back home in Syria the streets were full of life. So when my parents took their siestas I would explore the streets of the old city. I still remember some of the smells, like the jasmine flowers over house walls. We call it Damascene jasmine, and I loved it. But, after only a few years as a Damascus teenager, I moved again to the US, to study architecture.

Before you read, what do you think?



- 1) Muhamad began making models of Damascus streets in the US. True/false?
- 2) He tried to copy the streets exactly. True/false?
- 3) He is happy he worked for oil companies in the US. True/false?
- 4) Now making models is more important than architecture. True/false?
- 5) The civil war in Syria began in 2011. True/false?
- 6) He went back to Syria in 2012. True/false?
- 7) His art is political. True/false?

Now read and check the answers.



I started making models when I was at architecture school in the US. The Damascus models are not real streets. They are romantic ideas and from my homesickness for Syria. After I finished architecture studies, I stayed in the US. I spent many years working as an architect for multi-national companies, including oil companies! I am sorry to say that now! But slowly my art was more important. I wanted to think about what home means, especially if like me you lost your home. My pain is not like the pain of people still inside Syria, but the last time I could go back home was in 2011. That was just a very short trip to Damascus to see my family. Then the war started and I knew I couldn't go back for a long time. So my memories of Syria are from before the war. I fell in love with the idea of Damascus, and my memories of it. So my work is about my love of street art and activism.

Before you read, what do you think?



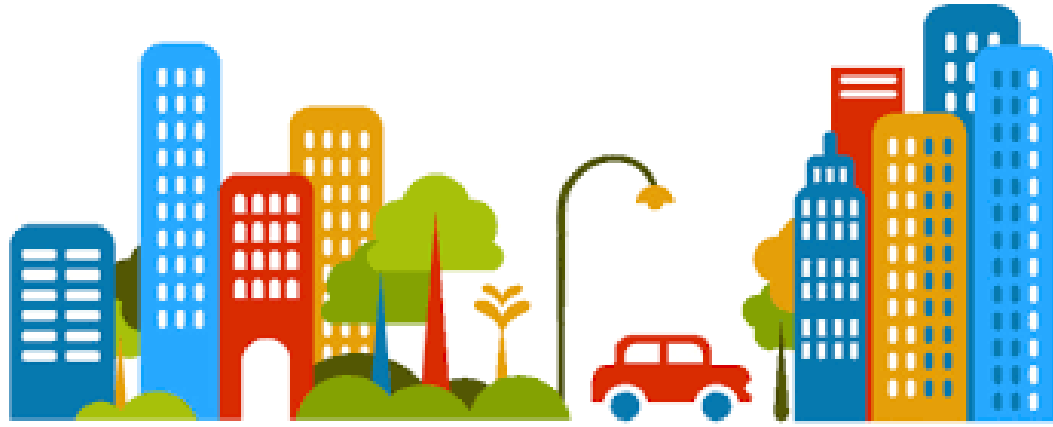
Do you think Mohamad is 100% happy about living in the US? Why? Why not?

Now read and check how he feels.



You have deep homesickness for Syria. But does the US feel like home?

I live in Connecticut, and America does feel like home now. Damascus is also home, but in a very different way. Because, you know, home isn't just a physical place. I have two different ideas in my head: one is about my strong thoughts on the Middle East, especially Syria – and the other is about the West. The two ideas live together happily. I'm happy to be American. But I don't like the way the US government treats migrants and problems with migration. Migrants built the US. The US needs to remember that and its principles. I made art about migration, and migrants and refugees forced to leave their homes We need better policies on both problems.



Think about life in cities. What are examples of the way the architecture is good and bad for people's wellbeing.

**Read and find how many
examples Muhammad gives of
ways Syrian architecture is
good for wellbeing.**



Through Syria's history, we understood the connection between architecture, beauty, and wellbeing. In homes in Damascus, for example, the windows face east and west, for the sunlight. And the design of the homes gives safety, privacy, and rooms to welcome guests. In the streets there are lines of trees to give shade from the sun, and to make walking a pleasure even in the heat. Another tradition was to build religious buildings from different faiths close to each other, like churches and mosques. This made peaceful existence possible. People sat together in public parks and gardens. Now I don't know who could bring together different interests and religious groups inside Syria. But my models of Damascus streets have secret messages, especially for people in Syria, They are messages of hope and to wake up.



- 1) Make a list of things you did and places where you lived or worked when you were younger but that you don't do or live or work in anymore.
- 2) Now tell your partner about them...



Grammar: *used to* and *would*

Muhamad:

It's strange, but growing up in Saudi Arabia was the best childhood! **I used to go to school** by bus and I looked forward to it every day because **we would drive 200 kilometres** across the desert.

- 1) Does he go to school now?
- 2) Did he go to school in the past?
- 3) Did he go to school often or only once?
- 4) Was it a habit?
- 5) Do they drive across the desert now?
- 6) Did they drive across the desert in the past?
- 7) Did they drive across the desert often or only once?
- 8) Was it a habit?

Grammar: *used to* and *would*



Muhamad:

It's strange, but growing up in Saudi Arabia was the best childhood! **I used to go to school** by bus and I looked forward to it every day because **we would drive 200 kilometres** across the desert.

(1) Which grammar is correct: (a) subject + *used to* + base form or

(b) subject + *used* + base form?

(2) Which grammar is correct: (a) subject + *would* + *to* + base form or

(b) subject + *would* + base form ?

Grammar: *used to* and *would*



Which are correct?

- (a) I didn't used to go to school by bus.
- (b) I didn't use to go to school by bus.
- (c) Did you use to go to school by bus?
- (d) Did you used to go to school by bus?



- 1) Go back to the list of things you made and make sentences with *used to* and *would*
- 2) Now tell your partner about your past habits

Homework: Read the original

<https://newint.org/features/2022/10/25/interview-mohamad-hafez>

