The Transfer of Classical Knowledge Before the Renaissance

Essential Learning
Students will learn the chronology and events related to the preservation and transfer of Greek and Roman learning after the classical period to the Byzantine, Sassanid Persian and Muslim civilizations, including its translation into Arabic and the further development of scientific and philosophical knowledge in Muslim civilization. They will understand the process by which it was transferred to European scholars from the 12th century on, and how this development relates to the rise of intellectuals and universities in Europe and what role this knowledge transfer played in the Renaissance of the 15th and 16th centuries.

Assessment
• Evaluation of completed map and skill activities as described
• Graded notes on reading, contribution to discussion
• This lesson lends itself well to an essay question requiring students to trace the path of classical learning from the Byzantine Empire to the Muslim lands to Europe, and to describe the process of transfer among cultures and its significance in each.

Remedial: Evaluate the results of the exercise of producing a graphic organizer of the main ideas in the suggested text. Both activities, the chart and the primary source quotes, are also accessible for this level.
Extended: See extension activity.
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Instructional Strategies
Featured “habits of mind” of world historian: Common Phenomena, i.e. preservation and transfer of knowledge through translation, patronizing scientific and literary work by rulers, private individuals.

1. Give the students copies of the reading “What Happened to Classical and Ancient Learning after Rome?” Have them skim the reading, then take notes on their reading in order to prepare a written chronology that answers the question: “What did happen to classical and ancient learning after Rome?” For each event or change recorded in the chronology, students should look for causation (why did this happen?) and describe why this body of learning was valued in the culture to which it was transferred. Share answers at the end of the reading and writing period. The format of the written assignment may be a sheet of paper folded lengthwise into two columns, the left for the chronology, and the right side for the explanation.

2. Give the students copies of the reading “Medieval Learning, Arabic Knowledge and the ‘Medieval Renaissance in Europe’”. Students should first skim the reading briefly as before, then begin reading in order to take notes. This time, students should write in the left hand column the changes described in European society and intellectual life in the reading, and in the right hand column they should write a brief note about the cause for this change, or its significance.

3. Map Skills: Have each student or pairs of students do the map/chart activity “Illuminating Europe’s Dark Ages” according to directions. They can then compare the results of their chronology notes with the chart.

4. Primary Source Readings: Have the students read the brief primary source quotes in “Echo from the Past: Who Were the European Translators of Arabic Works?” Each student will role-play one of the scholars, explaining to the class why he has gone to Spain and why he took up the work of translation. Evaluation is based on the students perceptiveness in bringing out the personal or other reasons why the scholars undertook the work of translation. Discuss as a class the difficulties and the advantages of traveling to another land, across cultural boundaries, in pursuit of knowledge. What other motives are described in the quotations?

Remedial: Read middle school/mixed ability text “The Wisdom of Many Cultures: from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance”, pp. 116-124. Have students make a graphic organizer.

Extended: Chart Activity: Read “Muslim Scientists on Europe’s Bookshelves, 15th Century and Beyond”, pp. 233-234 and chart between pages 234-235. Answer questions using chart, as described on page 234. (the chart on pg. 3 of the PDF is best printed on 11×17” paper)
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Materials and Adaptations
The PDF below contains excerpts from Segment II: Education and Scholarship of CIE’s The Emergence of Renaissance: Cultural Interactions between Europeans and Muslims (1999).
Renaissance unit – Story of Knowledge Transfer

Correlation of Lesson To State Standards and Curricula
CALIFORNIA History/Social Science, Grade 7 World History and Geography
7.2 Islam...
• draw from literary sources to explain the intellectual exchanges among Muslim scholars of Eurasia and Africa and identify the contributions Muslim scholars made to later civilizations in the areas of science, geography, mathematics, medicine, art, and literature.
7.8 Students understand the origins, accomplishments and geographic diffusion of the Renaissance. As a basis for understanding this concept, students:
• describe the way in which the revival of classical learning and the arts effected a new interest in “humanism”
• describe the role of Muslim scholarship (i.e., the intellectual, scientific and technological transfers from the Muslim world)

MASSACHUSETTS History and Social Science Standards
b. The origins and principles of Islam. ..Muhammad and the teachings of Islam (Islamic medicine, Arabic numerals-from India; Scheherazade. the Alhambra palace)...  
• Students describe European learning and enlightenment through learning from Islamic science, geographical exploration and cultural mathematics, and medicine, and interactions.
• Students recognize the transmission of Islamic preservation of ancient Greek works. They map the diffusion of ideas across regions of the globe.

NORTH CAROLINA
3.2 Trace the rise of Islam and cite the achievements of Islamic civilization.
• Analyze the extent to which the contact between European Christians and Muslims in Spain had an influence on the rest of Europe.

VIRGINIA
Standards of Learning for History/Social Science World History and Geography I and II
WHGI.8 1k student will relate knowledge of Islamic civilization from about 600 to 1000 A.D. by
a) describing the origin, beliefs, traditions, customs, and spread of Islam;  
d) citing cultural and scientific contributions and achievements of Islamic civilization.
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WHGI.I2 The student will demonstrate knowledge of social, economic, and political changes and cultural achievements in the late medieval period by...

d) explaining the preservation and transfer to Western Europe of Greek, Roman, and Arabic philosophy, medicine, and science.

Fairfax County Program of Studies (POS) Connection

Benchmark 6.3: The student understands the political, intellectual and artistic developments in Renaissance Europe

1. Assess the importance of the Islamic states and the Byzantine Empire in transmitting scientific and philosophical knowledge to Europe.

2. Explain connections between the Italian Renaissance and the development of humanist ideas in northern Europe.

Backward links to World History I in the POS:

Benchmark 4.1: The student understands the emergence and spread of Islam

1. Evaluate Muslim contributions in mathematics, science, medicine, literature and the preservation of Greco-Roman learning.

Benchmark 5.1

1. Analyze cultural achievements in Europe including the rise of art, architecture and literature and the establishment of universities.

Virginia SOL connection

9.1b the location and culture of the Byzantine and Muslim empires

9.2d the preservation of Greek and Roman philosophy, medicine and science

9.3a economic foundations of the Renaissance, including European interaction with Muslims.