

# ISLAM

## SUPPORT MATERIALS - GMGY - BELIEFS & RELIGIONS



**People adhere to religious traditions in different ways. Not all Muslims will adhere to all of the practices mentioned in this material. If there is a child in your class that follows this religious tradition it is important that the child's parents or guardians are the primary source of information about that child's beliefs and practices.**

### WHAT IS ISLAM?

Islam is the second-largest religion in the world, with over 1 billion adherents. It is a monotheistic religion whose origins lie in the preaching of a seventh-century Arabian man called Muhammad. It is one of the fastest growing religions in the world. Islam considers itself to be the final revelation of God (or Allah in Arabic) to humanity. Muslims believe there will be no other revelation or prophet from God until the end of time. Islamic practices centre on the Qur'an (a sacred text believed to be directly revealed to Muhammad by God), the Hadith (the codified attested word and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad (known as his Sunna)) and the Five Pillars of Islam: shahada; salat; zakat; sawm; and hajj. Muslims believe that Islam is a religion that has always existed and that it was gradually revealed to humanity by a number of prophets, but the final and complete revelation of the religion was made through the Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century CE.



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### MUHAMMAD

Muhammad was born in the Hijaz region on the western littoral of the Arabian Peninsula (Muhammad's birthplace is now in the contemporary state of Saudi Arabia) in 570. Muhammad is respected by all Muslims. One way of showing respect for the Prophet Muhammad is to use the phrase 'peace be upon him' (PBUH) after his name. The traditional story of the Qur'an tells how one night in 610 he was meditating in a cave on the mountain when he was visited by the angel Jibreel (Gabriel) who ordered him, "Recite!". Once Jibreel mentioned the name of Allah, Muhammad began to recite words which he came to believe were the words of God. The Prophet Muhammad dedicated the remainder of his life to spreading this message. The message given to him by God over a twenty-two-year period is recorded in the Qur'an, the sacred text of Islam.

In 622 CE, the Prophet fled north to the city of Medina to escape growing persecution. This event is known by Muslims as the hijira (migration) and marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar. Eight years later, Muhammad returned to Mecca with an army and defeated his persecutors. After Muhammad's death, 50 years later, the entire Arabian Peninsula had come under Muslim control. Muhammad was not a divine figure. However, Muslims consider him the perfect man as he modelled surrender to God.

### THE QUR'AN

The sacred text of Islam, the Qur'an, was committed to writing in Arabic within 30 years of Muhammad's death. Muslims believe it contains the literal word of God as gradually revealed to Muhammad by the Angel Jibreel (Gabriel) over the course of 22 years. Also important is the tradition of the sayings and actions (known as his Sunna) of the Prophet and his Companions, collected in a separate collection of literature (much longer than the Qur'an) called the Hadith.

The Qur'an is considered sacred in Islam. It literally means 'the recitation', of Allah. All things take second place to the regard and importance given to the Qur'an because Muslims believe it is the direct word of Allah. Allah spoke through the Angel Jibreel (Gabriel) in Arabic to Muhammad and, while it has been translated into other languages, the translations cannot be substituted for the original Arabic.



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### CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE AND THE QUR'AN

**If you bring in a Qur'an to show it to your class please be aware of the following guidelines:**

1. The Qur'an should be kept in a clean place. It must not enter a restroom or other unclean place.
2. Do not put things on top of a Qur'an.
3. Do not put a Qur'an on the floor; it should remain above waist level.

#### **Listening to the Qur'an**

4. Muslims and non-Muslims may listen to the Qur'an in any state of purity, but be mindful of where it is placed (a clean place).

#### **Touching the Qur'an**

5. It is not permissible to touch the Qur'an unless one is in a state of purity (wudu).
6. Non-Muslims should not be permitted to touch the Qur'an (in its glorious form in Arabic language), however non-Muslims are permitted to touch translations into other languages. Hands should be washed as a mark of respect before touching the Qur'an (even the translated version).

Interactive Version of the Qur'an is available [here](#).

**Note:** Because Arabic is written from right to left, the book is read from the 'back' to the 'front' from a Western perspective.



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### THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

Muslims have a very clear guide for life, known as the Five Pillars of Islam. These are five acts or observances that are considered obligatory for Muslims. They are a sign of commitment to the religion. They are:

1. Shahada: Confession of faith
2. Salat: Prayer
3. Zakat: Almsgiving
4. Sawm: Fasting
5. Hajj: Pilgrimage

#### Shahada

The Shahada is the Muslim confession of faith. It is only one sentence: 'There is only one God and Muhammad is the messenger of God.'

Muslims recite it at least nine times a day, during prayer and as part of the ritual call to prayer. To utter the Shahada, with complete conviction, even if only once in the course of one's lifetime, is sufficient to make a person a Muslim. The utterance of the Shahada, as well as an absolute belief in it, is an obligation on every Muslim.

#### Salat

Muslims are required by Allah to pray roughly five times a day:

- sunrise
- noon
- mid-afternoon
- sunset
- late evening.

Muslim children as young as seven are encouraged to pray. Muslims can pray at these times in their homes or schools or wherever they find themselves. However, they are encouraged to gather together in their local mosque on **Friday** for community prayer and to listen to the Imam preach.

In Muslim-majority countries, the public call to prayer (known in Arabic as the adhan) from the mosques sets the rhythm of the day for the entire population, including non-Muslims. The call to prayer is broadcast from the minaret (a tower in the mosque) about 15 minutes before prayer time five times a day, giving Muslims time to stop what they are doing and prepare for the prayer, wherever they find themselves.

Some Muslims own their own prayer mat which can be used for prayer. It is not seen as a holy object; generally serving the purpose of cleanliness. The prayer ritual, which is over 1400 years old, is repeated five times a day by hundreds of millions of people all round the world.



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Carrying it out is not only spiritual, but connects each Muslim to all others around the world, and to all those who have uttered the same words and made the same movements, facing east towards Mecca.

Before praying Muslims must perform a cleansing ritual known as wudu or ablution. This is a sequence of washing movements of certain parts of the body which are generally exposed to dirt or smog. Mosques have washing facilities for men and women.

### **Zakat**

Zakat is the compulsory giving of an agreed proportion of one's wealth to charity. It is regarded as a type of worship and of self-purification. Zakat is the third Pillar of Islam.

Zakat does not refer to charitable gifts given out of kindness or generosity (which are known as Sadaqat), but to the systematic giving of 2.5% of one's wealth each year to benefit the poor.

### **Sawm**

Sawm is fasting. It is the fourth of the Five Pillars of Islam.

Muslims are required to fast during Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. During the 29/30 days of Ramadan all adult Muslims must fast. Muslims who are unwell may be excused from some of these, as may those who are under twelve years old, the very old, those who are pregnant or breast-feeding.

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### Hajj

Once a year, Muslims gather together in Mecca to stand before the Kaaba and praise Allah. For Muslims, the Hajj is the fifth and final pillar of Islam. It occurs in the month of Dhul Hijjah which is the twelfth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. It is the journey that every capable adult Muslim must undertake at least once in their lives if they can afford it and are physically able.

The Hajjis or pilgrims wear simple white clothes called Ihram. During the Hajj, the pilgrims perform acts of worship and they renew their sense of purpose in the world.

Mecca is a place that is holy to all Muslims. It is so holy that no non-Muslim is allowed to enter.

### THE MOSQUE

The mosque is a place to gather for prayers, to study and to celebrate festivals such as Ramadan. It can also be used to house schools and community centres. The Arabic word for mosque, masjid, means 'place of prostration'. The first mosque was in the Prophet Muhammad's home in Medina.

The simplest mosque would be a prayer room with a wall marked with a *mihrab* – a niche indicating the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca (a direction known as the qibla), which Muslims should face when praying. A typical

mosque also includes a minaret, a dome and a place to wash before prayers. Each feature has its own significance.

Click [here](#) for more information about mosques.

### Etiquette for visiting a mosque

#### Clothing in a mosque

Clothing should be modest for both men and women. This means an ankle-length skirt or trousers, which should not be tight fitting or translucent, together with a long sleeved and high-necked top. A headscarf is usually essential for women. Before entering the prayer hall the custom is to remove your shoes and place them on a rack.

#### Entering a masjid

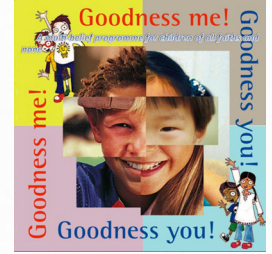
Men and women usually enter the prayer hall by separate entrances. Visitors may be greeted by the Arabic greeting As-salam Alaikum which means 'peace be upon you.' The answer, if the visitor chooses to use it, is Wa 'alaikum-as-salam, which means "peace be upon you too'. Do not offer, or expect, to shake hands with people of the opposite sex. Before entering the prayer hall or prayer room, Muslim men and women perform wudu or cleansing ablutions if they have not already done so earlier or from home. This is not necessary for non-Muslim visitors who do not join in the prayer.





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### The prayer hall

Remove your shoes and enter the prayer hall quietly. Muslims sit and pray on the floor in the prayer hall. Chairs are sometimes available for visitors in the rear of the prayer hall. If you choose to sit on the floor, then avoid pointing your feet in the direction of the mihrab (the wall with the niche or alcove in it, indicating the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca), unless a medical condition makes this the only possible posture. If visiting as a group during a time when prayers are taking place, sit together toward the rear of the hall.

### Worship in the masjid

When salat or namaz (in Persian/Urdu), one of the five daily prayers is in progress, visitors are welcome to observe. The salat generally lasts five to ten minutes and is led by the Imam. He leads the congregation from the front and faces towards the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca, as does the rest of the congregation. The congregation will form straight lines and act in unison during the entire prayer and follow the motions of the Imam.

The Imam recites some portions of the prayer aloud and some portions silently. His recitations are short verses of the Qur'an, but the rest of the congregation follows his actions silently. If a visitor arrives when the prayer is in progress, he or she should find a place near the rear wall and quietly observe the prayer. There are no sacred or holy objects in the masjid, except copies of the Qur'an on bookshelves along the side walls or elsewhere in the prayer hall. Muslims do not make sacred offerings or carry out blessings of food during salat. The only gestures expected of visitors are to remove their shoes, act respectfully in the prayer hall and silently

observe the ritual of prayer.

### Community halls

Community Halls are used for community gatherings and a place where food is served. These areas are for socialising and there are no requirements for removing shoes and the conversation is usually loud. Most visitors are welcomed in the community halls before being escorted to the prayer halls.

## AT A GLANCE...

**Main location:** The largest concentration of Muslims is in South-East Asia and South Asia (Indonesia, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh); Middle East and North Africa are Muslim-majority regions, but South-East and South Asia have many more Muslims.

**Major sects and denominations:** Sunni, Shiite and Sufi

**Sacred text:** Qur'an (Koran)

**Language of revelation and worship:** Arabic

**Religious Leader:** Imam

**Special place of worship:** Mosque

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**God:** God (Allah in Arabic); the same God revealed, according to Islam, partially in the Jewish and Christian Bibles.

**Type of theism:** Monotheism

**Purpose of life:** Submit to the will of Allah and attain paradise after death.



**How to live:** Follow the Qur'an, Hadith and the Five Pillars of Islam and believe in the Five Articles of Faith.

**Afterlife:** Resurrection of body and soul followed by eternal paradise or hell.

**Symbols:** Crescent moon and star (this is a cultural symbol rather than a religious symbol). Imagery of the prophets and angels are not permitted in

Islam. Remember this includes imagery of Jesus, Abraham, Noah, Moses and many other Judeo-Christian prophets as these are all recognised as Islamic prophets also.

Some of the main Islamic celebrations:

Dates for the main festivals can be found [here](#) on the interfaith calendar.

- **Ramadan**

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, when Muslims fast during daylight hours.

There are several reasons why Ramadan is considered important:

- The Qur'an was first revealed during this month.

- The gates of Heaven are open.
- The gates of Hell are closed and the devils are chained up in Hell.

Ramadan is often called 'month of the Qur'an' and Muslims attempt to recite as much of the Qur'an as they can during the month. The night the Qur'an was first revealed is known as Laylat al-Qadr. It is said to be one of the last ten nights of Ramadan. The gates of Heaven are open and the gates of Hell are closed. Muslims believe that their good actions bring a greater reward during this month than at any other time of year, because this month has been blessed by Allah.

Many Muslims try to give up bad habits during Ramadan, and some will try to become better Muslims by praying more or reading the Qur'an. Muslims generally fast for the whole month of Ramadan, provided they are old enough and healthy enough to do so.

- **Eid al-Fitr**

Muslims celebrate the end of Ramadan and thank Allah for the help and strength that he gave them throughout the previous month to help them practise self-control.

The festival begins when the first sight of the new moon is seen in the sky.

The celebratory atmosphere is increased by everyone wearing best or new clothes, and decorating their homes. There are special services out of doors and in mosques, processions through the streets, and of course, a special celebratory meal - eaten during daytime, the first daytime meal Muslims will have had in a month. Eid is also a time of forgiveness, and making amends.



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- **Eid al-Adha**

This is a four-day public holiday in Muslim-majority countries. The festival commemorates the prophet Ibrahim's (Abraham's) willingness to sacrifice his son Isma'il when God ordered him to. This Eid also marks the end of the yearly Hajj (pilgrimage).

God appeared in a dream to Ibrahim and told him to sacrifice his son Isma'il. Ibrahim and Isma'il set off to Mina for the sacrifice. As they went, the devil attempted to persuade Ibrahim to disobey God and not to sacrifice his beloved son. But Ibrahim stayed true to God, and drove the devil away. As Ibrahim prepared to kill his son God stopped him and gave him a sheep to sacrifice instead.

Ibrahim's complete obedience to the will of God is celebrated by Muslims each year. Each Muslim, as they celebrate, reminds themselves of their own submission to God, and their own willingness to sacrifice anything to God's wishes.

As with many celebrations there are prayers, and also present giving.

