

Islam

Please note: Muhammad is highly respected by Muslims and it is usual for Muslims to say the blessing 'peace be upon him' after his name. In text this is often shortened to 'pbuh'. This expression of respect is also used after the name of other prophets. This sign of respect should be inferred throughout this syllabus.

The word Islam means submission or peace. Muhammad was born in the city of Makkah in 570 CE. Muhammad is not seen as the founder of Islam but rather as the final Prophet, the first of whom was Adam. There are many other prophets mentioned in the Qur'an including Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses) and Isa (Jesus). Prophet Muhammad is known as 'the seal of the prophets'. He is the Last Prophet.

Muhammad was a trader happily married to his wife, Khadija. At the age of 40 he began experiencing a series of revelations from God. These revelations were delivered by the Angel Jibril or Gabriel over a 23 year period and form the sacred text of the Qur'an. The Quranic text was written down, during the life of the Prophet, although it was compiled as one volume only after his death. The words are regarded as a direct transmission from God Himself. Allah is the Arabic name for God.

Prophet Muhammad and his followers were persecuted in Makkah and eventually migrated to Madinah in 622 CE. This was known as the Hijrah, and became 'Year One' of Islamic calendars. By the time of the Prophet's death in 632 CE, Islam was an established religion in the Arabian peninsula.

The Qur'an and Hadith

The Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad over a 23-year period. Muslims seek to show their love and obedience to God by being obedient to the words in the Qur'an and living as closely as possible to the way the Prophet lived. The Qur'an gives guidance on a range of topics about everyday life, ethical, spiritual, social and moral issues. It is treated with reverence, being handled carefully, and ideally read on a daily basis. Children will often learn to read Arabic and recite the Qur'an at an early age. Recitation is important to Muslims: the words of the Quran have a power when spoken that doesn't go with them being read.

The Hadith are a collection of the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad. The word Sunnah means 'Way (of the Prophet)', and is the life example of the Prophet as reported in the Hadith. Whereas the Qur'an is seen as the word of God, the Hadith are classified according to various levels of authenticity.

Tawhid

Islam is a monotheistic religion. The concept of Tawhid is the oneness of God. God is more important than everything. God cannot be represented pictorially: any picture would be an inadequate distortion, so Islamic art often uses calligraphy and geometric design to express beauty. The different attributes of God are shown in his 99 beautiful names such as Al-Rahim the most merciful and Al-Hafeez the protector of the weak.

The belief in one God is at the centre of the declaration of faith – the Shahadah.

The Five Pillars of Islam: Shahadah, Salah, Sawm, Zakah, Hajj

These provide a structure and a focus for Muslim daily life and worship. Muslims express and uphold their faith by practising these pillars. The Pillars focus belonging, community and worship in relation to time: from daily, to annually, to once in a lifetime, there is a ritual to strengthen the community.

The Shahadah (The declaration of faith)

'There is no god but the One God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.'

Belief in the oneness of God is the foundation of Islam. The words of the Shahadah form part of the words of the Adhan, which are the first words whispered into the ear of a newborn baby and are also the last words a Muslim will hope to hear before s/he dies.

Salah (Prayer)

The ritual prayers (salah – also referred to as namaz), are offered five times a day. All Muslims are required to pray from the age of about 12. Prayer enables one to develop a closer relationship with God. Prayers are said at specific times of day, (once early in the morning, once in the night and the others dispersed through the day), the times will alter slightly depending on the time of year. At the

mosque, Muslims pray in rows behind the Imam, the leader of congregational prayers. Prayer can be carried out anywhere that is clean. Often a prayer mat is used to pray on, but as long as a space is clean it is not essential to use one. Muslims will have to have made Wudhu (ablution), before they pray, so access to water is often useful. Muslims face Makkah (towards South East in the UK) when they pray.

Sawm (Fasting)

Many Muslims fast at various times of the year, but the month of Ramadan (the 9th month in the Islamic calendar) has special religious significance. In this month many adult Muslims fast from dawn until sunset. Fasting involves refraining from eating, drinking, smoking (and other bad habits) and sexual relations. Ramadan is an opportunity to increase one's God consciousness 'taqwa', it is regarded as a time of spiritual discipline that contributes to spiritual growth. There is also a sense of identifying with the poor, and encouraging Muslims to give to the weak and needy. There are exemptions to fasting, for example, for pregnant women, the sick and the elderly, but they must try and make up the time at a later date.

Zakah (Almsgiving)

Muslims are required to give, annually, 2.5 per cent of their savings. This is distributed among the poor and needy. This simple starting point is more complex in practice, where different kinds of wealth attract different levels of Zakah. One impact of the practice of Zakah is that a British charity such as Islamic Relief has an income from donations of over £120 million in a year, used for development work across the world.

Hajj (Pilgrimage to Makkah)

Pilgrimage to Makkah is an obligatory act of worship for those who can afford it and are physically able. Muslims should try to complete the Hajj once in their lifetime. The pilgrimage takes place in the last month of the Islamic calendar Dhul-Hijjah. During the Pilgrimage, Muslims are required to dress simply, focus on worshipping God and be careful not to argue or lose their temper. This is called being in 'Ihram'. As everyone, rich and poor, black and white, are required to dress in the same way and perform the same rituals, Hajj symbolises simplicity, equality, the cosmopolitan nature of the world in one place, and the unity of humanity.

Festivals

Two very important festivals are Id-ul-Fitr and Id-ul-Adha. **Id-ul-Fitr** celebrates the end of the fast of Ramadan. This is a time to ask for forgiveness, thank God for everything He has blessed the believer with and share in congregational prayers. Special food is prepared and shared with family and friends. Presents are given and new clothes are often bought. This is also a time when Muslims will visit the cemetery and remember dead family and friends. **Id-ul-Adha** celebrates the devotion shown to God by his Prophet Abraham to sacrifice his son Isma'il. God ordered that a lamb was sacrificed instead of Isma'il and so this festival is about devotion to God. In keeping with this practice of Abraham, animals are sacrificed and distributed to family, neighbours, and the poor, or money is given to charities who will ensure a sacrifice is made and given to the poor on your behalf.

In the UK:

The Muslim communities of the UK have grown rapidly in recent decades, and now number well over 2½ million people (Census 2011: 2 700 000, England and Wales). That's about 4.8% of the UK population, roughly one in twenty. Most of these people are British born Muslims. Over 2200 mosques (many of them just converted houses or other premises) provide for Muslim worship and community association in the UK.

Islam: Some 'Dos and Don'ts'

'Dos'

- Do teach pupils about the origin and spread of Islam as a world religion: the second largest on the planet, a religion that means 'peace'.
- Douse original Islamic materials such as stories of the Prophet and sayings from the Qur'an and Sunnah wherever possible.
- Do use an English translation of the Qur'an rather than an Arabic one (if the school chooses to hold a copy). Most Muslims believe that before you touch an Arabic Quran you need to be in a state of ablution (have carried out ritual washing), regardless of whether you are a Muslim or not.
- Do use digital resources such as smartboards if you wish to show pupils the Arabic text of the Quran and be careful to scroll through the pages using menu buttons rather than by touching the Arabic text directly.
- Do be cautious about asking Muslim children to do certain forms of artwork. Patterns, buildings natural forms and landscapes are usually acceptable but representing animals or humans may not be. Never ask them to 'draw God'. No image of Allah is allowed in Islam – it would be too far from the truth.
- Do stress the important cultural and intellectual contributions Muslims have made in fields such as science, mathematics, language, medicine, astronomy etc.
- Do prepare pupils before exposing them to recordings of the Call to Prayer or reciting from the Qur'an. They may be beautiful, but strange to untrained Western ears.
- Do be careful about references to pigs or pork with Muslim pupils, who may be taught that pigs are unclean animals, to be avoided in all forms.
- Do be careful of photos of Shi'ite Muslims commemorating the martyrdom of Hussein. Participants sometimes cut themselves, which appears gruesome and detracts from the reasons behind it.
- Do prepare pupils before visiting a mosque, modest dress rules apply to all: check with the mosque for local requirements about such things as head covering, modest dress, removing shoes, sitting with feet pointing towards the Mihrab, in other words towards Makkah, and brief your pupils about the requirements of respectful visitors.
- Do choose pictures of Muslims praying carefully; show a variety of different positions, not simply 'rear views'.
- Do engage thoughtfully with the negative and Islamophobic portrayal of Muslims and Islam in the UK's media, perhaps relying on academic work and accurate statistics to challenge and confront assumptions and prejudices which can be misleading or even a form of racism.

'Don'ts'

- Don't describe Muhammad as 'the founder of Islam'. Muslims believe he is the last and final Prophet of Islam but that their faith preceded him and goes back through a long chain of Prophets to Adam and the beginnings of human kind, created by Allah.
- Don't refer to Allah as 'the Muslim God'. Muslims believe Abraham, Moses and Jesus worshipped the same God. 'Allah' is the Arabic word for 'God'. There are '99 Beautiful Names' for God in Islam – but Allah is not one of them.
- Don't imply that Muslims are 'all the same'. Major communities of Sunni or Shi'a Muslims and smaller groups which are in some ways 'on the edge' of institutional Islam are all represented in the UK - and possibly in your classrooms. In unity, there is diversity.
- Don't use the archaic terms 'Muhammadanism' or 'Muhammadan'; these suggest devotion to Muhammad rather than submission to God. It's outdated – challenge this term if you hear it. Use 'Islam' and 'Muslims' instead.
- Don't touch a Qur'an (or Arabic extract) with dirty hands, place it on a floor or dirty surface, put things on top of it or leave it open on a stand as an exhibit.
- Don't dispose of an unwanted version of the Qur'an by throwing it away, even if it is in a tatty condition. Give it to a Muslim member of staff if you have one or donate it to a mosque.
- Don't portray Muhammad or one of his Companions, in drama or role play or use illustrations which claim to show Muhammad or his Companions either in outline or with faces blanked out as in some forms of Persian art.
- Don't liken Wudu to Christian Baptism. It is a practical and ritual preparation for prayer, not a ritual marking initiation as in Christianity.
- Don't say Muhammad 'fled' from Makkah to Madinah as it suggests cowardice. He left as part of an organised 'emigration'. In general Muslims avoid attributing negative emotions to the Prophet.
- Don't dwell on historical differences or conflicts which resulted in bloodshed e.g. the crusades. To what extent some of these were religiously motivated is debatable.
- Don't allow pupils to think that killing a sheep or goat at Id-ul-Adha is a sacrifice to a bloodthirsty God. It is a reminder of the story of Abraham and Isma'il. The killing of an animal results in a sacrifice of generosity which feeds many.
- Don't ever equate Islam with terrorism and violence. Try to help pupils understand the Islamic meaning of 'Jihad'. The greater Jihad refers to striving along a spiritual path. The lesser Jihad refers to using agreed force to defend Islam against attack. It must be a last resort

