

Intro to Islam Unit for Students

Standard 7.2.2: Trace the origins of Islam and the life and teachings of Muhammad, including Islamic teachings on the **connection with Judaism and Christianity**.

Before beginning a unit, many teachers do a pre-test, KWL, or have students discuss what they already know. Because Islam is in the news a lot and often misrepresented, students often have misguided views on it and this can lead to comments being made that could be offensive (often without realizing). Because of this, we have provided 2 handouts to beginning your unit on Islam:

Islam Pre Test and Answer Key

TIME Article on Islam

The pretest is designed to get students thinking about what they already may know about Islam, and compare and contrast it to religions learned in sixth grade. This can be done individually, in pairs, or small groups, and then reviewed together as a class.

The TIME article on Islam was written after 9/11, and shows the peaceful nature of Islam, as many people had negative views of the religion in the aftermath of the attacks. This article could be used when implementing Common Core Standards by doing a “close reading” (annotating) of the text.

Islam: What Do You Already Know?

Using what you already know about Islam (or take an educated guess), circle true or false to the following questions, or fill in the blank when required:

**Remember: people who follow Islam are called Muslims.*

1. "Allah" is the word for "God" used by Arabic speaking Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

True False

2. Muslims bow toward the East when they pray. True False

3. The largest Muslim population of any country in the world is:

A. Saudi Arabia

B. Indonesia

C. Egypt

D. India

4. Giving to charity is a requirement of Islam. True False

5. Muslims worship on Sundays. True False

6. Islam has more followers than any other religion except Christianity. True False

What Do You Already Know About Islam and Its Connections to Christianity and Judaism?

Use your personal knowledge of these religions, and/or what you learned about Christianity and Judaism in sixth grade, to check either Judaism, Christianity, and/or Islam next to each statement.

	Islam	Judaism	Christianity
1. Abraham is an important figure	_____	_____	_____
2. Jesus is an important figure	_____	_____	_____
3. Muhammad is an important figure	_____	_____	_____
4. Discourages pictures or statues of their religious leaders	_____	_____	_____
5. Wine is an important part of ritual	_____	_____	_____
6. A monotheistic religion that was originated in the Middle East	_____	_____	_____
7. Prohibits eating pork	_____	_____	_____
8. Followers read a holy book	_____	_____	_____
9. Accepts the story of Adam and Eve as part of their tradition	_____	_____	_____
10. Regards Jerusalem as a holy city	_____	_____	_____
11. Has a creation story about God creating the universe out of nothing	_____	_____	_____

Answer Key For “Islam: What Do You Already Know?”

1. “Allah” is the word for “God” used by Arabic speaking Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

True

Allah is the Arabic word for God; therefore, “Allah” is the word used by Arabic-speaking Muslims, Christians, and Jews as the word for God. We can hear its counterpart in the other two semitic languages – Aramic (Jesus called God “Allaha”) and Hebrew (“Ellohim”). It makes no sense to say “Muslims worship a god called Allah” than to say “The Spanish worship a god called Dios.”

2. Muslims bow toward the East when they pray. **False**

Muslims pray towards Mecca in Saudi Arabia, which could be north, south, east or west, depending on where you are while praying. For example, if a Muslim in California was praying, he or she would be facing east, but if a Muslim in China was praying, he or she would face the west.)

3. The largest Muslim population of any country in the world is:

A. Saudi Arabia

B. Indonesia (currently 204,847,000 Muslims)

C. Egypt

D. India

4. Giving to charity is a requirement of Islam. **True** False

5. Muslims worship on Sundays. True **False (They worship on Fridays)**

6. Islam has more followers than any other religion except for Christianity. **True** False **(Largest number of followers is Christianity, followed by Islam, and then Judaism)**

Answer Key For “What Do You Already Know About Islam and Its Connections to Christianity and Judaism?”

	Islam	Judaism	Christianity
1. Abraham is an important figure	<u> x </u>	<u> x </u>	<u> x </u>
2. Jesus is an important figure	<u> x </u>	_____	<u> x </u>
3. Muhammad is an important figure	<u> x </u>	_____	_____
4. Discourages pictures or statues of their religious leaders	<u> x </u>	<u> x </u>	_____
5. Wine is an important part of ritual	_____	_____	<u> x </u>
6. A monotheistic Middle Eastern religion	<u> x </u>	<u> x </u>	<u> x </u>
7. Prohibits eating pork	<u> x </u>	<u> x </u>	_____
8. Followers read a holy book	<u> x </u>	<u> x </u>	<u> x </u>
9. Accepts the story of Adam and Eve as part of their tradition	<u> x </u>	<u> x </u>	<u> x </u>
10. Regards Jerusalem as a holy city	<u> x </u>	<u> x </u>	<u> x </u>
11. Has a creation story about God creating the universe out of nothing	<u> x </u>	<u> x </u>	<u> x </u>

*Note: There are many more statements that can show the similarities and differences between the three religions; these are only a few.



Facts about Islam

- **Islam** is an Arabic word meaning submission to God. As a religion, Islam calls for complete acceptance of and submission to the teachings and guidance of God. The word has connotations of peace and wholeness. It has the same root as “salam” - peace (for more information, you may reference [True, Peaceful Face of Islam](#) found on the ADC website).
- A **Muslim** is one who believes in God and that Muhammad was the supreme messenger of God, and seeks to live his or her life in accordance with God’s word as told by Muhammad.
- **Allah** is the Arabic word for God. Allah is also used by Arabic-speaking Christians and Jews in prayer or speech about God. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are the three great monotheistic world religions.
- Muslims believe that the **Qur’an** (or Koran) is God’s word as revealed to the prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel. The Qur’an is the basis for Muslim beliefs regarding God, worship, morality, knowledge, wisdom, the human relationship to God, and relationships among human beings. Just as Christians believe that Jesus was the manifestation of God, Muslims believe that the Qur’an encapsulates the Word and manifestation of God. The original text of the Quran is in Arabic, and translations are available in libraries and bookstores around the world.
- **Muhammad** is respected as a prophet of Islam. He is not regarded as the “founder” of Islam, but one of many prophets including: Adam, Abraham, Moses, Solomon, and Jesus. Therefore, Islam did not begin or follow Muhammad, who insisted that his followers “call me the servant of God and His messenger.” He is regarded as a human being and in no way divine, but rather the final prophet who completed the revelation began by the earlier prophets.
- The **Hadith** — the teachings, sayings and actions of Muhammad — were reported and collected by his devoted companions. They explain and elaborate on Qur’anic verses, which provide a model of conduct for Muslims.

Five Pillars of Islam

Every action done with the awareness that it fulfills the will of God is considered an act of worship, but the specific acts termed the **Five Pillars of Islam** provide the framework of Muslim spiritual life. They are:



- 1) The **Declaration of Faith**: “I bear witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is his messenger.”
- 2) **Prayer** is prescribed five times a day as a duty towards God. Prayer strengthens and enlivens belief in God and inspires one to a higher morality.
- 3) **Fasting** is called for during the month of Ramadan. This involves abstention from food, beverages, and sexual activity from sunrise to sunset, as a means to curb evil intentions and desires. Allowances are made for health, age and circumstances. After sunset, families and communities come together for a large meal, meant to celebrate the end of the day’s fast.
- 4) **Zakat** is a proportionately fixed contribution from surplus earnings of individual Muslims. It is spent on the poor and needy, meant to benefit the welfare of society as a whole.
- 5) The **Hajj** is the pilgrimage to the Ka’bah in Makkah (Mecca), at least once in a lifetime, provided one has the means to undertake the journey.

The Three Abrahamic Religions

There are three Abrahamic religions that were founded in the Middle East: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. **Muslims, Christians and Jews all worship the same God.** The Qur’an has many stories about Biblical characters which are very similar to those in the Old and New Testaments. Jesus is very highly honored as a prophet, although Muslims believe that Christians erred in regarding him as divine. Muslims greatly respect Mary as the mother of Jesus. They believe in the virginal birth of Jesus through the power of the Spirit of God. However, they believe that errors have crept into the Jewish and Christian traditions and into the text of the Bible. The mission of Muhammad was to correct those errors.

Nonetheless, the Qur’an teaches that Jews, Christians and Muslims are all “People of the Book.” As believers, Jews and Christians have rights under Islamic law to live as “protected peoples.” Historically, Islam has been a relatively tolerant religion, and teaches that “there is to be no compulsion in matters of religion.” In the 7th century, Muslim armies conquered vast territories, but conversion to Islam was voluntary and was not imposed “by the sword”, contrary to what western myths suggest.

Some Misconceptions about Islam

- **Islam, Muslims, and Arabs are not interchangeable terms.** Islam refers to the religion itself, and Muslims are the followers of Islam. Arabs are a linguistic and cultural community with a common history in the founding and following of Islam, but not all Arabs are Muslims. Only 15% of the world’s 1.5 billion Muslims are of Arab descent, with the largest concentration found in Indonesia. There are 12 million Arab Christians and thousands of Arab Jews.



- **“Mohammadanism”** is a misnomer for Islam and offends its very spirit, since Muhammad was a merely a messenger of God.
- The accurate translation of the Arabic word **jihad** should be “exertion of effort or struggle” in accord with the will of God. It is any strenuous effort — physical, intellectual, spiritual — for the good. The “higher jihad” is the personal struggle to become a better Muslim. Jihad can mean standing up to speak the word of truth to tyrants and to call for justice. It can also be a religiously guided military struggle, but it does not mean “holy war.” The Arabic word for war is "harb," which does not appear in the Qur’an.
- **“Islamic fundamentalism”**: There are widespread and diverse movements of spiritual and cultural revivalism in the Arab and Muslim worlds. Many of them are critical of Western influence and seek a return to the authentic roots of their own traditions. A small number of these movements use violent means to achieve political goals. These social and political groups are called fundamentalist, and many of them practice “political Islam.” Some Muslims consider such movements as deviations from authentic Islam.
- **“Shariah”** is often negatively defined as a law code that is violent and teeming with religious bigotry. However, this is not necessarily the case. Shariah is the moral and legal code that guides the Muslim way of life. It addresses religious practices; personal and family life; as well as social, economic, and political life. Based on the Qur’an and the teachings and practices of Muhammad, the several schools of Islamic jurisprudence were codified in the early centuries of Islam. Shari’ah is interpreted and flexibly adapted to local and changing conditions by Islamic judges and courts by the consensus of religious scholars. Muslim countries vary widely in the extent to which Shariah is integrated into public life, and most Arab or predominantly Muslim countries do not abide by any sort of Shariah law.

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The True, Peaceful Face Of Islam

By Karen Armstrong

There are 1.2 billion Muslims in the world, and Islam is the world's fastest-growing religion. If the evil carnage we witnessed on Sept. 11 were typical of the faith, and Islam truly inspired and justified such violence, its growth and the increasing presence of Muslims in both Europe and the U.S. would be a terrifying prospect. Fortunately, this is not the case.

The very word Islam, which means "surrender," is related to the Arabic salam, or peace. When the Prophet Muhammad brought the inspired scripture known as the Koran to the Arabs in the early 7th century A.D., a major part of his mission was devoted precisely to bringing an end to the kind of mass slaughter we witnessed in New York City and Washington. Pre-Islamic Arabia was caught up in a vicious cycle of warfare, in which tribe fought tribe in a pattern of vendetta and countervendetta. Muhammad himself survived several assassination attempts, and the early Muslim community narrowly escaped extermination by the powerful city of Mecca. The Prophet had to fight a deadly war in order to survive, but as soon as he felt his people were probably safe, he devoted his attention to building up a peaceful coalition of tribes and achieved victory by an ingenious and inspiring campaign of nonviolence. When he died in 632, he had almost single-handedly brought peace to war-torn Arabia.

Because the Koran was revealed in the context of an all-out war, several passages deal with the conduct of armed struggle. Warfare was a desperate business on the Arabian Peninsula. A chieftain was not expected to spare survivors after a battle, and some of the Koranic injunctions seem to share this spirit. Muslims are ordered by God to "slay [enemies] wherever you find them!" (4: 89). Extremists such as Osama bin Laden like to quote such verses but do so selectively. They do not include the exhortations to peace, which in almost every case follow these more ferocious passages: "Thus, if they let you be, and do not make war on you, and offer you peace, God does not allow you to harm them" (4: 90).

In the Koran, therefore, the only permissible war is one of self-defense. Muslims may not begin hostilities (2: 190). Warfare is always evil, but sometimes you have to fight in order to avoid the kind of persecution

that Mecca inflicted on the Muslims (2: 191; 2: 217) or to preserve decent values (4: 75; 22: 40). The Koran quotes the Torah, the Jewish scriptures, which permits people to retaliate eye for eye, tooth for tooth, but like the Gospels, the Koran suggests that it is meritorious to forgo revenge in a spirit of charity (5: 45). Hostilities must be brought to an end as quickly as possible and must cease the minute the enemy sues for peace (2: 192-3).

Islam is not addicted to war, and jihad is not one of its "pillars," or essential practices. The primary meaning of the word jihad is not "holy war" but "struggle." It refers to the difficult effort that is needed to put God's will into practice at every level--personal and social as well as political. A very important and much quoted tradition has Muhammad telling his companions as they go home after a battle, "We are returning from the lesser jihad [the battle] to the greater jihad," the far more urgent and momentous task of extirpating wrongdoing from one's own society and one's own heart.

Islam did not impose itself by the sword. In a statement in which the Arabic is extremely emphatic, the Koran insists, "There must be no coercion in matters of faith!" (2: 256). Constantly Muslims are enjoined to respect Jews and Christians, the "People of the Book," who worship the same God (29: 46). In words quoted by Muhammad in one of his last public sermons, God tells all human beings, "O people! We have formed you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another" (49: 13)--not to conquer, convert, subjugate, revile or slaughter but to reach out toward others with intelligence and understanding.

So why the suicide bombing, the hijacking and the massacre of innocent civilians? Far from being endorsed by the Koran, this killing violates some of its most sacred precepts. But during the 20th century, the militant form of piety often known as fundamentalism erupted in every major religion as a rebellion against modernity. Every fundamentalist movement I have studied in Judaism, Christianity and Islam is convinced that liberal, secular society is determined to wipe out religion. Fighting, as they imagine, a battle for survival, fundamentalists often feel justified in ignoring the more compassionate principles of their faith. But in amplifying the more aggressive passages that exist in all our scriptures, they distort the tradition.

It would be as grave a mistake to see Osama bin Laden as an authentic representative of Islam as to consider James Kopp, the alleged killer of an abortion provider in Buffalo, N.Y., a typical Christian or Baruch Goldstein, who shot 29 worshipers in the Hebron mosque in 1994 and died in the attack, a true martyr of Israel. The vast majority of Muslims, who are horrified by the atrocity of Sept. 11, must reclaim their faith from those who have so violently hijacked it.

Karen Armstrong has written many books on religion, including *Islam: A Short History*, published last year by Modern Library

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