

TEACHER'S GUIDE TO



ISLAM AND MUSLIMS



**TEACHER'S
GUIDE TO
ISLAM AND MUSLIMS**

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Did you know that most bullying takes place in a school setting?

Approximately 50% of Muslims aged 11-18 reported being called mean names because of their religion.¹ Additionally, in 25% of the cases involving Muslim students, a teacher or administrator at school perpetrated the bullying.² This booklet provides educators with the information and resources that relate to Muslim students. By creating a safe space for students to be different without being marginalized, educators can play an important role in the formation of healthy and diverse school environments.

This booklet is intended to assist educators to learn about Islam and their Muslim students by providing accurate information on Islam. Our primary objective in publishing this booklet is to provide educators with resources that can help them become better teachers and to promote inclusive and diverse learning environments.

1. Council on American-Islamic Relations, Growing in Faith: California Muslim Youth Experiences with Bullying, Harassment & Religious Accommodation in Schools (Santa Clara, CA), accessed May 30, 2018, from <https://ca.cair.com/sfba/wpcontent/uploads/sites/10/2018/04/GrowingInFaith.pdf?x93160>.

2. Dalia Mogahed and Youssef Chouhoud, American Muslim Poll 2017: Muslims at the Crossroads (Dearborn, MI: Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, 2017), retrieved from <https://www.ispu.org/american-muslim-poll-2017/>.

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Islam

Islam means submission. It is derived from the same root word as peace. Muslims believe that to achieve this peace, one must submit to the will of God.

Muslims

Followers of Islam are called Muslims.

Allah

Allah is the Arabic word for God used by both Arab Muslims and Arab Christians. The Bible in Arabic also uses the name Allah to refer to God.

Muslims around the world

There are approximately 1.8 billion Muslims in the world. That means that about one in every four people on earth is a Muslim. While many might associate Islam with the Arab world, Arabs only make up 20% of the Muslim population. The country with the single largest Muslim population is Indonesia. About two-thirds (62%) of Muslims live in the Asia-Pacific region.



Indonesian Muslims



American Muslims

There are about 3.3 million Muslims living in America. This means that Muslims make up about 1% of the total U.S. population.³ American Muslims are racially diverse, but African Americans make up the oldest and largest percentage of American Muslims. The vast majority of Muslims living in the U.S. are American citizens (82%).⁴



3. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/01/06/a-new-estimate-of-the-u-s-muslim-population/>

4. <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/07/26/demographic-portrait-of-muslim-americans/>

WHAT DO MUSLIMS BELIEVE?

One God

The most important and core message of Islam is the oneness of God. God is only one, He has no partner, child, or spouse.

Angels

Unlike humans, angels do not have free will and must obey all the commands of God.

All Prophets and Messengers

Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Joseph, Jesus, and Muhammad peace be upon all of them were all Prophets of God. The Prophet Muhammad is the last and final messenger sent by God.

All previous scripture

Moses was given the Torah, Abraham the scrolls, David the Psalms, and Jesus the Gospel. With the exception of the Quran, no previous scripture is completely preserved in its original form. The Quran serves as God's final message to mankind.

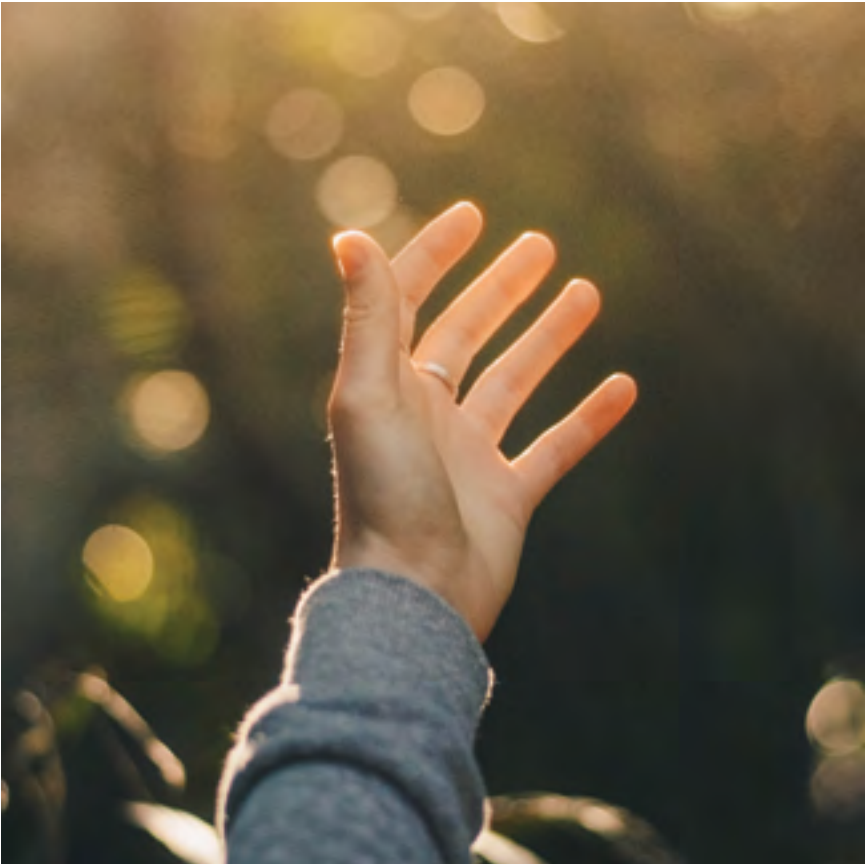
Afterlife

There will be a day of judgment where God will hold people accountable for their actions in this world. Those who did good will enter paradise and those who did evil will either be forgiven or punished in hell. Everyone will be accountable for their actions in this world.



Jesus in Islam

Muslims believe that Jesus was one of the greatest Messengers of God, but not the son of God. His birth was miraculous, and he was blessed with great miracles from God. In essence, God chose Jesus to deliver the same unified message that past prophets had brought to humanity: to worship the One God and to lead a morally upright life to attain salvation in the eternal life after death.



WHAT ARE THE PILLARS OF ISLAM?

Islam is a way of life. Every action if done with the correct intention can be an act of worship. This comprehensive definition of worship encompasses many things such as helping a neighbor, eating healthy, and being kind. However, there are specific actions, called the five pillars of Islam, that provide the basis of Muslim spirituality.

1

The Declaration of Faith:

The declaration of faith is that one testifies that there is no God except Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.

2

Prayer:

Islam prescribes a ritual prayer five times a day. Muslims perform ablution before prayer. One may pray alone or in a group. This prayer typically takes a few minutes and can be performed in a mosque, home, school, or at work.

3

Fasting the Month of Ramadan:

During the month of Ramadan, Muslims abstain from food, drink, and sexual relations from dawn to sunset. They must also refrain from negative behaviors, intentions, and words.



4

Charity:

This is a charity that is paid annually and is 2.5% of one's net savings on which a year has passed.

5

Pilgrimage to Mecca:

Muslims who have the financial means and health to undertake the pilgrimage must do so once in their life. The pilgrimage takes place in Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

It is important to note that Muslims are not required to perform the above acts until they reach the age of puberty. Although they are not required to do so, some younger children may begin practicing them earlier.



ACCOMMODATING MUSLIM STUDENTS' RELIGIOUS NEEDS

The First Amendment protects the free exercise of religion. Additionally, the Equal Access Act of 1984 (upheld by the Supreme Court in 1990) affirmed the right of student initiated religious activities in public schools. Some Muslim students, those who choose to practice the faith, might request accommodations to fulfill their religious obligations. Below are some items that will help educators better understand what some of these accommodations might entail.

Prayer:

Some of the five daily prayers might fall within regular school hours. The prayer usually takes about ten minutes. During the prayer, the Muslim student will stand, bow, and prostrate several times. This can be performed in any clean space and does not require complete privacy. During the prayer, the student is not allowed to engage in conversation with others and hence may not respond unless it is an emergency.

Friday Prayer:

On Fridays, Muslims attend a special congregational prayer in the afternoon called Jumu'ah. Those who are conscious about attending this prayer might request to be released from school early. In cases where schools or universities have a large Muslim student body, the prayer can be performed on campus.



Fasting:

During the month of Ramadan, Muslim students might request to go to the library instead of the lunchroom. They may also request to be excused from any kind of physical activity during physical education.

Dietary Restrictions:

Muslims are not a homogenous group and one will find different practices among them. Some individuals and cultures will adhere more closely to the teachings of Islam than others. Islam prohibits the consumption of alcohol, pork, and any pork-by-products or derivatives. Some objectionable food items include:

Pepperoni, sausage, and bacon

Hot dogs containing pork

Gelatin, usually found in Jell-O, marshmallows, and gummy snacks

Lard

Some Muslims will also only eat meat or poultry that was slaughtered according to halal standards

BULLYING OF MUSLIM YOUTH

DR. MADIHA TAHSEEN

Muslim youth are increasingly experiencing religious-based bullying similar to the story described above. A bullying survey of Muslim adolescents in California conducted by The Council of American Islamic Relations (CAIR) found that 53% of Muslim students have experienced religiously-based bullying in school—nearly twice the national average of bullying reported in 2017.⁵ Many studies show that Muslim youth are reporting rising rates of depression, anxiety, problem behaviors (e.g., smoking, drinking), and decreasing rates of academic engagement as a result of bullying.⁶ At the same time, these studies show that many Muslim youth respond to bullying with increased community engagement and civic participation.⁷ As an educator, you are in a unique position to significantly influence the trajectory of Muslim youth's outcome in the face of bullying.

6. CAIR. (2017). Unshakable: The bullying of Muslim students and the unwavering movement to eradicate it: CAIR-CA School Bullying Report 2017. Retrieved from <https://ca.cair.com/sfba/publications/2017-bullying-report/>

6. Aroian, K.J. (2012). Discrimination against Muslim American adolescents. *The Journal of School Nursing, 28*(30), 206-213. doi: 10.1177/1059840511432316. Ahmed, S.R., Kia-Keating, M., & Tsai, K.H. (2011). A structural model of racial discrimination, acculturative stress, and cultural resources among Arab-American adolescents. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 48*, 181-192. doi: 10.1007/s10464-011-9424-3. Sirin, S.R. & Fine, M. (2008). *Muslim-American Youth: Understanding hyphenated identities through multiple methods*. New York: New York University Press

7. Ahmed, S., Patel, S., & Hashem, H. (2015). *State of American Muslim youth: Research & recommendations*. Canton, MI: Institute for Social Policy and Understanding and The Family & Youth Institute.



How can you promote resilience among Muslim youth?

It is crucial to realize that Muslim youth are a diverse group and vary in their racial, cultural, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds. For example, a young Black Muslim male may experience different challenges than a young white Muslim youth, a refugee, or a third-generation immigrant female who wears a hijab (head covering)—despite all sharing the same faith. These differences are all important to keep in mind as you interact with all kinds of Muslim students in the school setting.

”
The online world is
equally unsafe for
Muslim children,
who are increasingly
experiencing
cyberbullying...

What does bullying look like among Muslim youth?

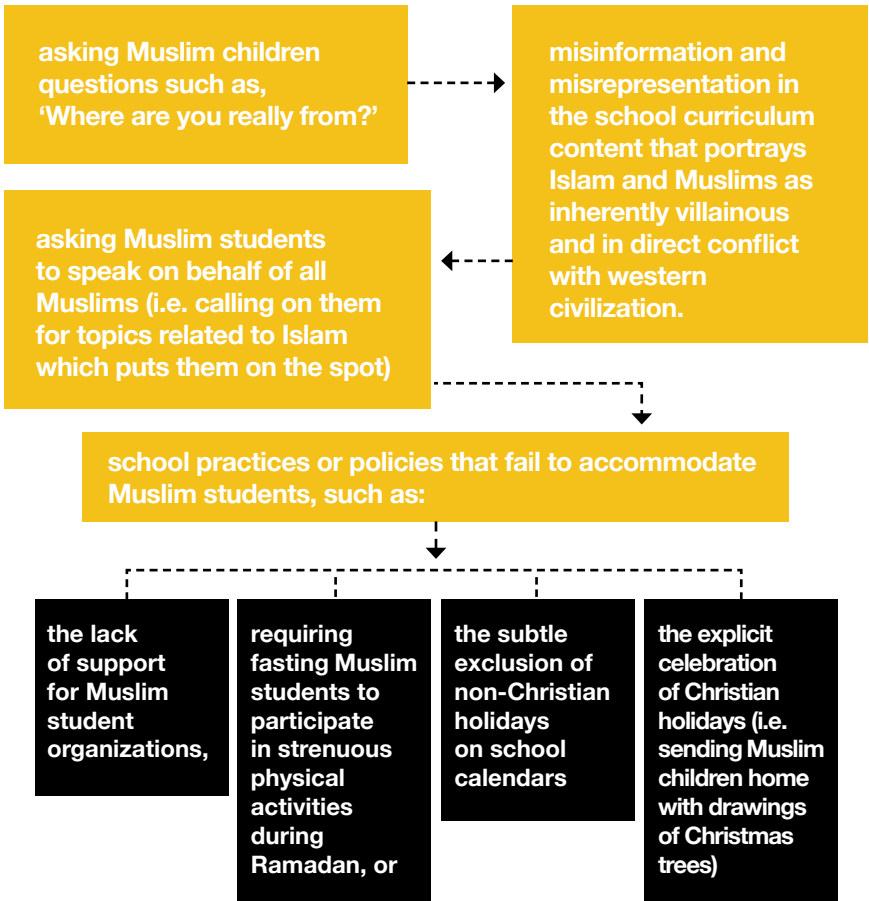
Just like youth of other religious backgrounds, Muslim youth experience **verbal bullying** as the common form of bullying, which usually includes derogatory comments about their religious practices and beliefs, and statements which perpetuate negative stereotypes about Islam. Unfortunately, **physical bullying** is also on the rise—increasing from 9% to 19% over three years (CAIR, 2017). Bullying also takes on an indirect and hidden form, which may miss our radars but is equally detrimental to youth's mental health. **Microaggressions** are brief and everyday slights or insults that communicate negative messages towards individuals of color and may or may not be intentional (Sue, 2010). Among Muslim youth, these look like:

”

PHYSICAL BULLYING

increased from
9% to 19%
over three years

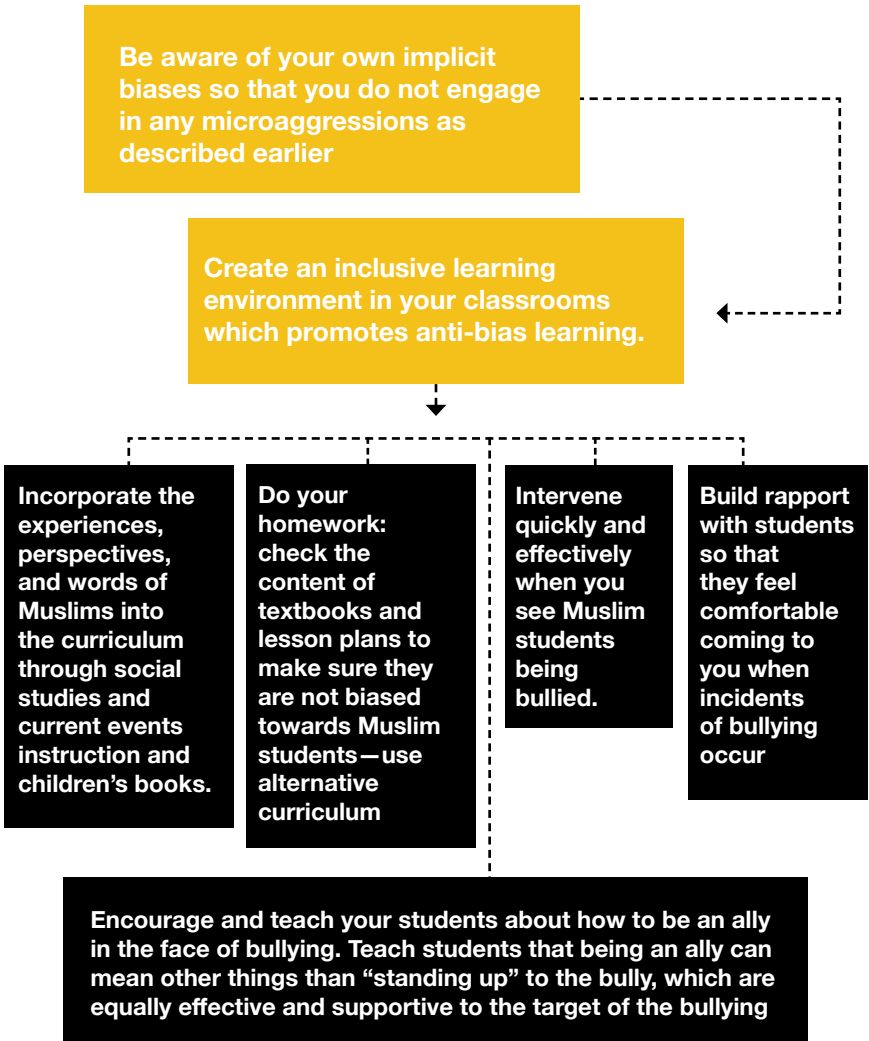




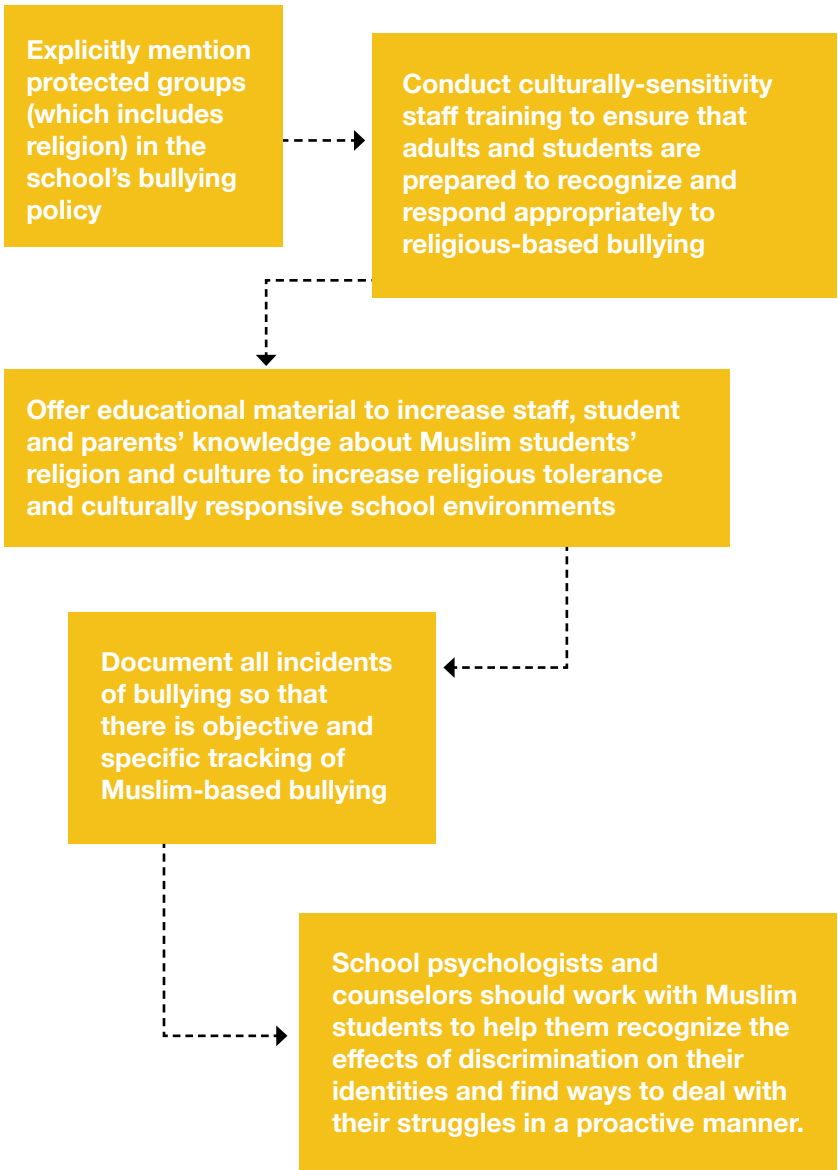
Bullying among Muslim youth does not occur simply in classrooms or amongst peers—it occurs while under adult supervision, such as in classrooms, in the cafeteria, and afterschool programs. It also occurs in unsupervised settings such as in the hallways, on the bus, and in the bathrooms. The online world is equally unsafe for Muslim children, who are increasingly experiencing **cyberbullying** in the form of anti-Muslim rhetoric on all social media platforms. Ultimately, research illustrates the pervasiveness of anti-Muslim bullying that Muslim youth experience as they move in and out of various social settings during their daily lives.

What can educators and schools do to support Muslim students in their classrooms and schools?

As an educator, you can engage in the following strategies to support your students:



Schools can engage in the following prevention and intervention efforts to support Muslim students:



A RAMADAN GUIDE FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS

BY DR. SUSAN DOUGLAS

What is the Islamic observance of Ramadan?

During the month of Ramadan, the ninth month in the Islamic lunar calendar, Muslims abstain from all food and drink from dawn to sunset. This religious duty of fasting is known as sawm in Arabic. It is one of the “Five Pillars,” or basic acts of worship in Islam.

Who is required to fast in Ramadan?

Muslims who have reached puberty, are of sound mind and healthy enough to carry it out, are required to fast during the month. Exceptions are made for Muslims when they travel, those who are acutely or chronically ill, as well as menstruating women and nursing or pregnant mothers. Those who must take medications may be unable to fast or adjust their medication schedule.



When does Ramadan begin?

The appearance of the month of Ramadan each year is based on the lunar calendar, based on the sighting of the new moon's crescent, or calculation of when the moon is sightable in various regions of the globe. The lunar calendar is shorter than the solar, or Gregorian, calendar, which means that Ramadan moves through the months and seasons of the solar year, arriving about 11 days earlier each year. The beginning and end of Ramadan may vary by a day, based on methods of observing the appearance of the crescent of the new moon, or its calculation. Local observation was the norm before instantaneous global communication, and the new moon cannot be sighted all around the world on the same day, so Ramadan does not begin everywhere on the same day.

Which school-age students are likely to be fasting in Ramadan?

Fasting is required for adults, but children and youth practice fasting during part of the month, or part of the day. Many older Muslim students fast for the whole month, and some younger children want to fast during part of the month, if they are willing and able and if their parents allow them to do so. Children love to participate in the practice as a way of feeling included in this festive month, even if they fast only a few days or part of a day.

How can school officials and teachers accommodate fasting students?

School administrators can show sensitivity to fasting students by providing alternate locations during lunchtime so that they can be away from the cafeteria. During Ramadan, Muslims may decline to participate in parties or other events that feature food and beverages. During Ramadan, teachers may notice that fasting students may be subdued in their behavior, especially by the afternoon. It is worth noting that fasting becomes much easier for most after the first few days, and the body adjusts. Being aware of and addressing possible bullying and ridicule of fasting students is a good way to support this challenging experience.



What school activities may require accommodation during Ramadan?

Some Muslim students or their parents may ask that they be exempted from rigorous activity in their Physical Education classes during Ramadan. Physical Education teachers are encouraged to allow fasting Muslim students to participate in alternative activities during Ramadan to avoid the possibility of dehydration or hypoglycemia resulting from strenuous exercise, especially when the weather is hot and it could lead to heat exhaustion. Grading practices in P.E. should not penalize students who strive to fulfill this religious obligation.

Sleep schedules are affected during Ramadan

Ramadan fasting is also a time of spiritual observances, especially additional prayers and reading scripture in the mosques. While parents try to minimize the changes to their children's sleeping schedules, some alteration is inevitable during Ramadan. The daily fast is preceded by a pre-dawn meal as early as 3:30 am in the summer, and it is broken at sunset. Near the end of Ramadan, Muslims commemorate a special event called Laylat al-Qadr ("The Night of Determination"). The Quran states that on this night in Ramadan, 610 CE, Muhammad (peace be upon him) first received revelation from God. In honor of this event, the Muslim community observes additional prayers for several nights toward the end of the month, especially on the 27th night. Parents may request an excused absence for their children on the following day if the 27th of Ramadan falls on a weeknight and students have been up very late.

When does Ramadan end?

What celebrations take place?

Ramadan ends as it began, with the sighting of the new moon. Eid al-Fitr (“Feast of Breaking the Fast”) celebrates the end of Ramadan and the first day of the month called Shawwal. On the morning of the Eid, Muslim families gather for worship services at a local masjid or other community locations. They visit with relatives and friends, share special foods and entertainment. As with the start of Ramadan, there may be some discrepancy about the date of Eid celebrations among members of the Muslim community, due to differing methods of determining the first day of a new lunar month. If Eid falls on a school day, Muslim parents will request an excused absence from school, which conforms to most school accommodation policies. This also includes the ability to make up any exams, or not scheduling school-determined exams on that release day.

Susan Douglass has a doctorate in history from George Mason University, and an M.A. in Arab Studies from Georgetown. She serves as K-14 Education Outreach Coordinator at Georgetown’s Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, and conducts education outreach for Georgetown’s Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding nationwide. Dr. Douglass is an author and curriculum writer whose work appears in books, in school curriculum and reports, and online teaching resources.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT MUSLIM WOMEN AND THE VEIL

DR. KATHERINE BULLOCK

What is hijab?

■ Hijab is an Arabic word from the root hajaba, meaning to cover, conceal, or hide. It is a complex notion encompassing action and apparel. It includes lowering the gaze with the opposite sex, and applies to men as well, who must lower their gaze and cover from navel to knee. Let's call it "modest dress and behavior."

The word itself appears in the Qur'an in several contexts, though, interestingly, not in the two verses that address Muslim women's dress directly [24:31] and [33:59]. These two verses enjoin the believing women to draw their "khimar" over their bosoms and to "draw their outer garments" around them when they are outside, respectively. Traditionally, a "khimar" is defined as a headcover, referred to by those who believe that hijab includes covering the head. Hence the interpretation: "draw your headcover over your neck and bosom." From this point of view, hijab as modest dress includes covering the head with a scarf.

■ Modest behavior includes not touching the opposite gender, nor being alone in a room together.



■ The word hijab is also used as the word to describe the headcover itself, as in “I am wearing a pink hijab to match my skirt today.”

Are Muslim women the only women who wear headscarves?

■ Many different faith and ethnic groups have head coverings for both men and women. Sikh and Hindu women wear loose veils over their heads. Amish women wear headscarves. Catholic nuns still wear head coverings, and Mary the Mother of Jesus, peace be upon her, is always depicted in a head covering. Orthodox Jewish women are also required to cover their hair. Many avoid the modern conundrum of appearing strange by using a wig instead of cloth to accomplish this.

When do Muslim women start wearing a headscarf?

■ Once a young woman reaches puberty, the headscarf becomes an obligation. Some young girls like to wear it to practice, or dress up and pretend to be grown up, but it's not required of them.

Where does a Muslim woman wear hijab?

■ She will wear it in front of unrelated men, and men in the extended family whom she would be eligible to marry. This includes inside her home and outside it. If none of those men are present, she doesn't have to wear it, even if she is outside.

What does the word “veil” refer to?

■ When used to describe Muslim women's modest dress, the word “veil” is totally inadequate. Region, history, class position and politics all contribute to an incredible variety of modest dress.

■ A face veil, the proper correspondence with the English word “veil”, is known as a “niqab.”

■ The Afghan burqa is a full body covering with mesh grille for seeing.

■ The Iranian chador is a large single piece of cloth cut as a semi-circle covering the head and body leaving the face uncovered.

■ The Indonesian jilbab, often in traditional batik, is a long loose tunic worn over pants or long flowing skirts, with a headscarf.

■ In the West, Muslim women usually adapt mainstream fashion, pairing a long-sleeved shirt with a long skirt and a color coordinated headscarf often held elaborately with jewelry-enhanced pins. YouTube videos and Muslim women's fashion magazines contain tutorials and suggestions on how to wear different styles of hijab.



Niqab



Afghan Burqa



Indonesian Jilbab



Iranian Chador



**Western
Muslim
Woman**

Do Muslim men wear hijab?

■ Muslim men are required to dress modestly. It is not called hijab. The Qur'an addresses men as well, telling them to lower their gaze and guard their private parts [24:30]. Their clothing must be loose, not transparent, and cover from the navel to the knee, even in front of other men. Open shower rooms make this difficult to fulfill.

What are some things public school educators should know about female Muslim students who wear hijab?

■ Most importantly is not to assume she is being forced by her parents. Many young Muslim women proudly adopt hijab to demonstrate their identity to the world at large. Often their families are opposed to this;

■ Hijab is a piece of cloth, not an intellectual cover, she should be able to strive and achieve academically;

■ The hijab is not a barrier to full participation at school, with certain accommodations.

What kind of accommodations would a Muslim student in hijab need at school in order to be fully engaged?

■ If there is a school or sports uniform, an adaptation to long pants/skirt and long sleeves;

■ A gym uniform that is long sleeved and loose, with a headscarf, it can be in the school colors if that is required;

- Female only swimming classes with windows covered and female lifeguards;
- Private shower stalls and cubicles for changing.
- Female partners for sport related activities that would include physical contact, like karate.

Katherine Bullock, PhD, teaches Islam and politics in the Department of Political Science, University of Toronto Mississauga. She is the author of “Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical and Modern Stereotypes.”



MUSLIM HOLIDAYS

BY FARHANA N. SHAH

Celebrations are part of all cultures and religions. Many Muslim-majority countries have diverse cultural holidays; however, there are only two major holidays that all Muslims celebrate, each is celebrated at the end of an Islamic ritual.

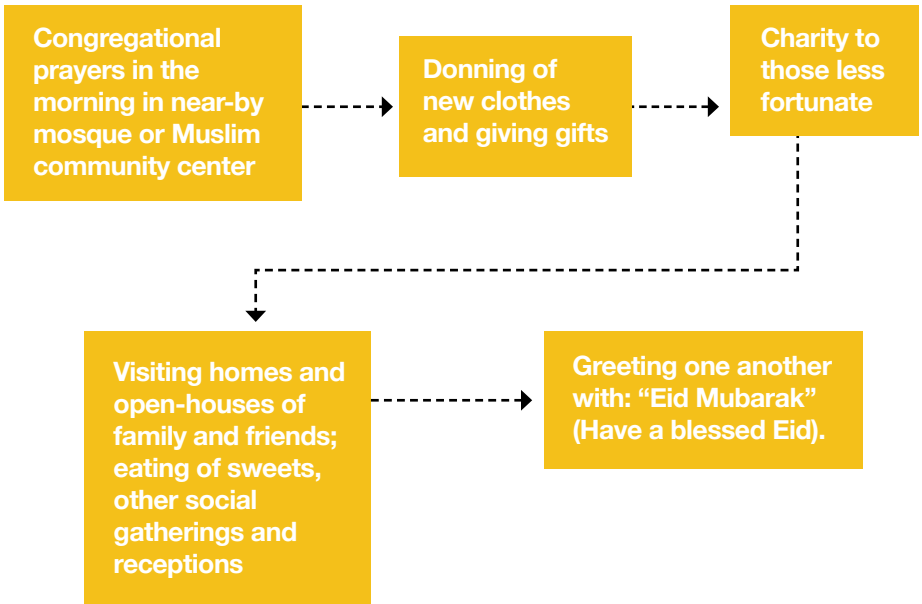
The first of these holidays comes after the completion of Ramadan and is called Eid-ul Fitr which means the “festival of fast-breaking.” It is a celebration of thankfulness for being able to fast the whole month and for the self-control and positive habits formed in the 30 days.

The second major holiday Muslims celebrate is called Eid-ul Adha means “festival of sacrifice.” This holiday takes place after the Hajj (Pilgrimage) in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. This holiday is celebrated in honor of the sacrifice that Prophet Abraham and his son Ismael were willing to make to show their dedication and commitment to God.

”
It is not the
responsibility
of schools
to celebrate,
but rather
recognize.



Both holidays include celebrations with family, friends, and communities. They usually involve the following practices:



More public school systems are beginning to recognize these two as holidays, this is important because it allows Muslim students to feel that their faith is important in the U.S.; their country of birth (as majority of the students are U.S. born or natives).

What are some ways teachers can recognize Eid-ul Fitr or Eid-ul Adha to build relationships with their Muslim students?

They can learn how to pronounce and greet them when the two Muslim holidays (Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha) fall during school year.

Depending on the age of the student, either have the parent or student share information about the holiday and its significance.

Across content-areas (may vary by elementary or secondary school levels): festive music and artwork; learn about holidays in the Muslim-majority countries, etc.

Furthermore it is important to understand that Muslims students do not celebrate Christian holidays such as Christmas, Easter, or Valentine's day (because they are Christian holidays). Questions often arise, especially in the elementary settings about Muslim students feeling left out or compelled to participate even though they may not understand the event or have differing beliefs. Teachers can make their Muslim students feel part of the class during this time by ensuring activities are inclusive. For instance, instead of singing Christmas carols or coloring Christmas trees, teachers can focus on the theme of winter with trees, warm drinks, and gingerbread cookies.

Some Muslim students do not celebrate Halloween because they consider it to have pagan origins. However, others might choose to participate because they do not consider it to be a religious holiday.

Religious diversity fosters a culture of respect because everyone is recognized; however, it can be daunting if schools must take time out for every holiday. It is not the responsibility of schools to celebrate, but rather recognize. There are many ways to be inclusive of all students without taking time out of academics. For instance, instead of lumping all holidays in December because of Christmas, plan it so each holiday is recognized throughout the year. A good way to find out which holidays are celebrated is by having students complete a survey about themselves or emailing parents. This is something schools can add to their school calendar and share with PTA and community, so all faiths and ethnicities are recognized.

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INCLUSION OF MUSLIM EDUCATORS

BY NAGLA BEDIR

When administrators and teachers think of how Islamophobia shows up in schools, they might think about how Muslim students are bullied by their peers and discriminated against by their teachers. Yet, Islamophobia is the individual and systemic irrational fear and prejudice of Muslims, regardless of their age. What is often missing from this narrative is the experience of Muslim educators in our schools. How do Muslim teachers, guidance counselors, paraprofessionals, etc. feel about their interactions with their colleagues and their administrators? Does the school promote an environment of inclusiveness and cultural competence? Administrators and teachers alike need to be mindful of their interactions with Muslim educators for several reasons. Muslim educators bring a multitude of strengths to the classroom that are essential for learners in our globalized world. They are often understanding of multicultural backgrounds and highly socially conscious. They can provide new perspectives and connect with the Muslim students and students of color in schools.

While some schools are doing a fantastic job of making Muslim educators feel welcome, many Muslim educators report feeling censored, isolated, and misunderstood. The following recommendations stem from the discussions with Muslim educators on how schools have supported them.



1. Ask before assuming anything

Most people think that Muslims all come from Saudi Arabia and speak Arabic. However, that is not true. In fact, there are 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide and Muslims in the United States are so diverse and come from so many different countries and backgrounds that others often have a hard time classifying them. There is not a single race or ethnicity that dominates the rest. About 41% of American Muslims consider themselves white, a category that includes those who describe their race as Arab, Middle Eastern, Persian/Iranian or in a variety of other ways. About 30% percent are Asian, including those from South Asia, and about 20% are black. About 8% identify as Hispanic, and the other 3% consider themselves mixed with other races. With so much variety, it is no surprise that Muslim educators also differ widely in their appearance, opinions, and religiosity. When in doubt, simply ask and chat.

2. Maintain your expectations

While no administrator, supervisor, or teacher, usually goes out of their way to treat staff members differently, the political climate of our country sometimes leads to the censorship of Muslim educators and a difference in how Muslim educators are responded to. Muslim educators are also expected to be experts on global issues and are sometimes held to different standards. The same standards, rules, and expectations should be held of all staff members. Additionally, just as no other staff member is obligated to explain personal choices about how they dress or practice their religion, Muslim educators should also not be subject to personal questions about how they choose to dress or practice theirs.

3. Acknowledge Muslim holidays

Schools have a responsibility to create a welcoming community, and both staff and administration can set a precedent for fellow staff members and students to follow. A simple “Happy Ramadan” or “Eid Mubarak” goes a long way. No one is obligated to acknowledge someone else’s holiday, but it is one way to make sure your Muslim colleagues and employees feel seen. Some Muslim educators reported that their administrators and staff would host staff iftars (meals during which Muslims break the fast during Ramadan) to be even more inclusive. In a similar vein, not forcing Muslim staff members to participate in winter holiday door decorating contests, Christmas parties, and other school events that center holidays they do not celebrate. Some Muslim teachers love to be involved in these events and that is great, but make sure it is not an obligation that would penalize Muslim teachers if they do not want to participate.



A simple
“Happy Ramadan”
or
“Eid Mubarak”
goes a long way.

4. Educate yourself & be understanding

Most importantly, make sure that you educate yourself and check your own biases. We all have biases and the first step to moving past them is acknowledging they exist. Be careful not to tokenize your Muslim staff members as the “go to” for anything related to Islam, or even more problematic, the Middle East. Remember not to conflate Arab with Muslim. Remember that many Muslims try to fulfill the obligation to pray five times a day and some of those prayers may land during the school day, therefore, some teachers are going to ask for permission to pray somewhere, privately, in the building during their breaks. Remember that it is your responsibility to ask questions and seek answers, www.teachingwhilemuslim.org is a great place to start! Some Muslim teachers love to answer questions about their identities, but not everyone does. Lastly, remember that some Muslim educators will not feel comfortable participating in staff outings that include alcohol, or activities that include physical contact with the opposite gender, such as dances or staff parties. Ensuring that these educators do not feel pressured adds to making them feel more welcome and creates an inclusive environment.

Ultimately, teaching while Muslim could be an exhausting, draining experience, or a fulfilling and positive one. A major factor is how the adults in the building, the other staff members and the administrators, approach and treat their Muslim colleagues. In our globalized world, it is critical for students to be taught by teachers that can provide them with different perspectives. Hiring a Muslim teacher is a great start, but it is important for administrators and colleagues to check biases and ensure that Muslim educators have just as great of an experience in our schools as the rest of the staff. Reading through this means that you’ve already taken the first step to building an even more safe and inclusive school community!

Nagla Bedir is a high school social studies teacher in NJ and the founder and executive director of Teaching While Muslim. She has a Master's Degree in K-12 Social Studies Education from Rutgers University and a Master's Degree in Educational Administration from Grand Canyon University. She serves as the Diversity co-chair for the New Leaders Council and is a recipient of the 2019-2020 Fulbright Teachers for Global Classrooms Program Grant.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To request more booklets or get answers to a question on Islam
icna.org/teachers



GainPeace
 1-800-662-ISLAM



whyislam.org
 877-WHY-ISLAM

Teaching While Muslim
www.teachingwhilemuslim.org

ISPU Educators Toolkit
www.ispu.org/educators

GRADE LEVEL

BOOK TITLE

AUTHOR

Elementary	You Are Beautiful	Robyn Z. Abdusamad
Elementary	Time to Pray	Maha Addasi
Elementary	P is for Palestine: A Palestine Alphabet Book	Golbarg Bashi
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