



A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO MUSLIM STUDENTS

Greetings

Assalam Alaikum (May peace be upon you). The following are several pieces of information that were put together to help educators better understand the Muslim students.

Muslims in the USA

- ★ Less than 18% of the 1.5 billion Muslims worldwide are Arabs.
- ★ Not all Arabs are Muslims.
- ★ About 15% of all Arabs are Christians.
- ★ There are over 8 million Muslims and 2000 Islamic centers in the USA.
- ★ American Muslims come from different backgrounds: 42% are American and only 12% are of Arabic origin. Over 45% of Muslims have at least a Bachelor's Degree.



Islam & Muslims

Islam:

The word Islam is derived from the Arabic word "salam," which means "peace." Islam is based on "peace through submission to the will of God." To achieve this peace one must follow God's guidance and commandments. **Islam is not just a religion but it is a complete way of life.**



Muslim:

The word "Muslim" means the one who submits to the will of God, this definition applies to all Muslims regardless of race, nationality, or ethnic background. The followers of Islam are called Muslims, not "Islamic" or Muhammadains.

The Islamic Greeting: *Assalam Alaikum*:

It means, "May peace be upon you." The reply is "*Wa Alaikum as salaam*" meaning "may peace be upon you too." This is a universal greeting for Muslims all over the world. It symbolizes both the essence of Islam and the brotherhood of its message and teachings.

Expressions of Personal Modesty

Islam prescribes that both men and women behave and dress modestly. Islam emphasizes modesty and encourages society to value individuals for their wisdom, skills, and contributions to the community, rather than their physical appearances.

Men and boys are always to be covered from the navel to the knee in public. Muslim females are required to wear loose-fitting and non-revealing clothing which includes a head covering. The wearing of a head covering may lead to teasing by other students. Teachers should work to prevent classmates from pulling on or removing a female Muslim student's scarf.

The Pillars of Islam

Every action done with the awareness that it fulfills the Will of God is considered an act of worship in Islam. However, there are specific acts of worship prescribed by Allah (God), termed the Pillars of Islam, which provide the framework of Muslim spiritual life. These are given below:



1. **The Declaration of Faith (*Shahada*):** Is the declaration that "There is no deity except God and Muhammad is his last messenger."
2. **Prayer (*Salat*):** Islam prescribes a brief prayer or ritual worship five times a day. Muslims perform ablution before prayer. One may pray alone or in a group.
3. **Fasting the Month of *Ramadan*:** This means abstaining from food, beverages, and material desired such as sexual relations from dawn to sunset, and the curbing of negative behaviors, intentions, and wants.
4. **Charity (*Zakat*):** To pay annually 2.5% of one's net savings on which a year has passed, to the poor and needy, in particular, and to the welfare of the society in general.
5. **Pilgrimage to Mecca (*Hajj*):** The pilgrimage to the *Ka'bah* (Kaaba) in *Makkah* (Mecca, Saudi Arabia), once in a lifetime, provided one has the means and health to undertake the journey, and the journey does not carry any risks on one's life.

Please note: Muslims are required to start the above acts when they reach puberty, although some younger children may try. Several categories of people are exempted from some or all the above activities including: people who are elderly, with disabilities, sick, traveling, pregnant, or nursing.

Fasting, Schools, & Students

Fasting students may ask to use the library instead of the cafeteria during lunch. Also they may ask to be excused from strenuous physical activities during fasting.

The Muslim's month of fasting "Ramadan" can be used as a great education opportunity. A teacher may invite a Muslim student or a guest speaker to explain the practices and traditions surrounding the fasting of Ramadan. This will help the Muslim student avoid a feeling of awkwardness about not having lunch with his or her fellow students during this month.

By providing opportunities for students of varied religious backgrounds to share their special occasions, the school helps to support parents and communities in their efforts to teach beneficial values. Such information is also important preparation for students as future citizens.

Prayer, Schools, & Students

Some of the five prayers may fall within regular school hours. It takes less than 15 minutes to accomplish the prayer. It includes:

- **Washing:** Before the prayer, Muslims perform a simple wash with clean water. This is normally performed in the restroom sink.
- **Prayer space and Time:** During the prayer, the Muslim will stand, bow, and touch the forehead to the ground. This may be performed in any quiet, clean room. Total privacy is not required.
- **Attention:** During the prayer, Muslims are fully engaged and they may not respond to a conversation. Students and teachers should not take offense of the worshiper not answering their call. However, in case of an emergency, the Muslim will respond to an announcement by stopping the prayer immediately.

Physical Education

Muslim boys and girls may not take same-sex communal after-sports showers without wearing appropriate covering on their bodies.

Gym classes may be scheduled in a late period when possible allowing the students to shower at home, or a private shower may be made available. School administrators may wish to discuss with the student alternative clothing in physical education classes.

Muslim students should not be forced to participate in joined swimming classes. Some schools that require swimming skills have offered outside certification as an option, or may offer an alternate for of physical activity.

Friday Prayer

In Islam, Friday is the day for the congregational worship, called Jumaha. It is an obligation that must be fulfilled, and it lasts about one hour and takes place at the mosque during midday prayer.

Those who are conscientious about attending this prayer may request a temporary release from school or an extended lunch period. In high schools and universities where the number of students interested in performing the prayer is large, the function can be conducted by students on the school premises.

US Protection of Religious Rights

Prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, religious celebrations as well as dietary and clothing requirements are Islamic practices.

The First Amendment to The Constitution, which protects the free exercise of religion, protects such religious expressions as the activities noted above. Moreover, the Equal Access Act of 1984 (upheld by the Supreme Court in 1990) affirmed the right of student-initiated religious activities in public schools.

Family Life/Sex Education

Family life and sex education materials presented in schools may be another cause for concern for Muslims. In Islam individuals become religiously responsible for their deeds at the age of puberty.

Islam puts a great emphasis on modesty, chastity, and morality and there is a specific set of teachings with regard to human development and its related issues.

Close contact with local Islamic centers is essential to encourage input from the Muslim community. Class materials related to this subject should be available for review, and parents should have the option to remove their children from all or part of the program.

The Islamic Calendar

The Islamic holy days and festivals follow the lunar calendar, which has twelve months. However, a lunar month, which is marked by the appearance of a new crescent moon, may last only 29 days. As a result, the lunar year is about 11 days shorter than the solar year.

Gender Relations

Puberty is a major turning point in the life of any person. For Muslims who have reached puberty, Islam prescribes certain parameters for relations between the sexes. For example, some Muslims are reluctant to shake hands or hug with the opposite sex, even with teachers or administrators. This should not be taken as an insult, but a sign of personal modesty.

Also, Muslims may raise religious objections to coed physical education classes and to school-sponsored dances. Students should not be pressured to participate, or penalized for not taking part in such activities.

Dietary

Islam prohibits the consumption of alcohol, pork, and any pork-by-products or derivatives. Some objectionable food items include:

- ★ Pepperoni, sausage, Bacon by itself or mixed with other foods, & hot dogs containing pork
- ★ Animal shortening or fat - in breads, puddings, cookies, cake, donuts, etc. Vegetable shortening is ok
- ★ Gelatin - in Jell-O, desserts, candies, marshmallows, chocolates, etc.
- ★ Lard - in any product
- ★ Food ingredients containing alcohol such as vanilla extract or Dijon mustard

For preschools and elementary food programs, many school cafeterias have been particularly helpful to Muslim parents and students by labeling such foods with a prominent visual marker, such as a red dot or a picture of a pig, for beginning readers.

Curriculum Issues

Many Muslims feel that their faith has been treated with bias in textbooks and school programs. Although availability of more accurate and balanced materials is increasing, the continued use of outdated materials in classes reinforces perceptions of Islam as a foreign creed and Muslims as enemies. Such divisiveness has contributed to incidents of harassment and violence against Muslim students. In a number of cases, Muslim students have been mocked as "devil worshipers," & "camel jockeys."

School boards may want to review policies and programs in light of the increasing Muslim population in our public schools. Textbooks that contribute to religious prejudice are not suitable. Books that lack reliable information are usually replete with mistakes about the basic Islamic beliefs. Qualified Muslim educators should participate in the textbook selection process, particularly for history, social studies and geography texts.

Islamic Holidays

The major celebrations common to all Muslims are the Eid (holiday) days.

- **Eid al-Fitr** (eed' al fi'-ter), or the "Festival of the Fast-Breaking," one of the two major Muslim holidays, celebrates the completion of the fasting of Ramadan.

- **Eid al-Adha** (eed' al ad'-ha), or the "Festival of the Sacrifice," It falls on the tenth day of the month at the conclusion of the pilgrimage, and is celebrated by all Muslims with special prayers, feasts, gifts, and the sacrifice of an animal (usually a lamb or goat). The meat is distributed to the needy, relatives, and friends.

The festivities include congregational prayer, giving and sharing with the poor and needy, feasts, gatherings, gift giving, fun, and entertainment, especially for children. A typical greeting on these occasions is "Eid Mubarak" or "Blessed Holiday." To accommodate the needs of the students during these observances, schools are encouraged to add/note the Muslim holidays on their calendars.

Celebrating Eid requires that Muslim students take at least one day off from school. There should be no penalty for this religious obligation. Because the occurrence of Eid depends on the sighting of the new moon, the exact date can not be determined with certainty ahead of time. Muslim communities around the country would like to see that Eid receives recognition similar to that given to Christmas and Hanukkah, especially in schools where Muslims constitute a significant segment of the student population.

THANK YOU

Thank you for your time and continued assistance in uniting students of all religions and ethnicities.