

Introduction to Islam

Lesson 1: Introductions and Creating a Covenant

9.17.2023

Objectives: Introduction to community and course topic.

Materials: Lesson attachments including “Islam Intro” card game (5 sets), sticky notes.

Time allotments suggested for 50 minute class, followed by 25 minute closing service.

1. Nametags and Graffiti Wall (5 minutes before class begins)

- Make nametags using blank paper, markers, and holders. Youth can create their own unique but LEGIBLE nametag. Make it a regular practice to wear nametags.
- “Graffiti Wall” questions: Write the following on whiteboard. Invite youth as they arrive to grab a marker and weigh in with their responses:
 - ▶ Name countries you know that are predominantly Islamic?
 - ▶ Name one favorite show from another country?
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.

2. Silly Fun: Human Bingo (10 minutes)

Each person gets a human bingo card listing various descriptions/facts (e.g. “someone who has visited a foreign country,” or “someone who hates getting their feet wet”). Youth move around the room trying to match persons to facts, trying to be the first to complete the card and declare “Bingo!”

3. Chalice Lighting: Light the chalice, saying together: “We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith, the light of truth and the warmth of love.”

Teacher reads: All of our opening words will come from Sufi poets, Rumi (13th century) and Hafiz (14th century). Sufis are mystics within Islam, preferring to experience Allah with their senses and living out their love of God in every moment. Some Muslims see Sufis as outside their faith, as heretics. We UUs appreciate heretics like ourselves, noting that the word comes from the Greek *hairesis*, meaning “taking or choosing for oneself.”

If you look in the back of our hymnal, you will find that most of the Islamic sources of wisdom are Sufi poets wrestling with the same questions we do today. So... from the Sufi, Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad **Rūmī**:

“All day I think about it, then at night I say it. Where did I come from, and what am I supposed to be doing? I have no idea. My soul is from elsewhere, I’m sure of that, and I intend to end up there.”

4. Important Agreements (10 minutes)

Extend community sharing to discuss what community practices and agreements will help “learning together.” Because this class, unlike many other classes, is not just about learning new information but learning about ourselves, how do we create a community where our best selves can emerge? Write these agreements up on flipchart and tape on the wall to refer back as needed in future classes.

One important agreement for Junior High youth: Weekly classes will conclude with worship in Ames Chapel, so that youth can experience regular worship that is at the heart of every faith community. Additionally, youth will attend worship in the main Sanctuary *at least once a month* with their families/friends (at either a *Story Sunday* or *Family Sunday* that occurs once each month). Unlike their younger siblings who may exit after the children’s story moment in worship, Junior High youth will stay for the full service.

5. Card Game (15 minutes) (See attachment)

Youth will play an introductory card game to explore their existing knowledge of Islam. Group youth into about fours, with each group playing the card game in their group. Here are the rules:

- TO WIN: Be the first person to lay down ALL your cards.
- TO START: Deal everyone 4 cards. Put the remaining cards in a “pond” like in *Go Fish*.
- TO PLAY: On your turn, starting to the left of the dealer, you can do one of FOUR things:
 - a) Lay down any PAIR(S) of matching cards, exempting you from answering the question written on the card.
 - b) Lay down a card to which you KNOW the answer. You must read the question and say the answer out loud. A teacher or youth referee will circulate with answers to confirm correct responses. *Youth who listen carefully might learn answers to cards in their own hands.*
 - c) Draw ONE card from the pond if you have no pairs or don’t know any answers.
 - d) Trade ONE problematic card from your hand but draw TWO from the pond as a penalty.
- Allow play to continue for 15 minutes. When the pond is dried up, it’s dried up. Not every game will have a winner in 15 minutes, but that’s okay. If there is a winner, give them a round of applause for what they already know about Islam!

6. Introduction to the course: Know and Want to Know (5 minutes)

Tape up two pages of flipchart paper, with these headers on each page:

- “What do we **KNOW** about Islam?”
- “What do we **WANT** to learn about ISLAM?”

Give each youth 4 sticky notes. On 2 of them, ask youth to write something they already know for sure about Islam (religion) or about Muslims (people). On the other two, have them write two questions they have about the faith or its practitioners. When they have written these, have them stick their notes on the appropriate flipchart paper.

7. Course Resource: “Little Mosque on the Prairie” (10 minutes)

Hand out attachment on Zarqa Nawaz.

Teacher summarizes: For each class, we will watch an episode of the Canadian TV series *Little Mosque on the Prairie*. The series focuses on the Muslim community in the fictional prairie town of Mercy, Saskatchewan, as they engage with a post-9/11 world. It will serve as a jumping-off point for discussions and learning activities. Some facts:

- The sitcom premiered to record ratings in 2007, and finished in 2012 after 6 seasons, and was broadcast in over 80 countries.
- In the post 9/11 times where any media depiction of Muslims was deemed too controversial, the Canadian Broadcasting Company made the bold move in creating an entire show about Muslims. Not only were the central characters Muslim, the show revolved around a mosque which played a key role in the community’s life.
- The creator and writer of the show, Zarqa Nawaz, is a Muslim woman of Pakistani origin. *[Invite volunteer youth to read aloud attached excerpt.]*
- The show was not aimed so much at educating people about Islam, or solving problems faced by Muslim, as it was in simply raising timely and important questions.
- If youth have access and want to watch the series, the entire series streams on *Hulu*.

Questions for Discussion:

- What do you think Nawaz was trying to do with satire and humor when Islamophobia was becoming an increased public concern in our culture (and still remains so)?
- How can humor and satire serve as constructive social criticism, and how might it also be misunderstood? Specifically, how can we tell the difference between Nawaz poking fun at stereotypes of Muslims or Christians versus simply reinforcing them?

(Hint: Think about shows like The Daily Show with Trevor Noah or The Late Show with Stephen Colbert. How do they use satire and humor to expose corruptions and jolt viewers into recognition of wrongs? Satire demands critical reflection.)

- What will help us to view the sitcom with respect, appreciation, and curiosity for another's religion, without letting judgement hinder our learning?

8. Say goodbye until next time: Extinguish the chalice, saying together:

“May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts.”

9. Help clean up classroom before leaving: Please keep regular practice of readying classroom for the next class.

- leave lesson plan and all materials organized
- wipe the whiteboard clean
- tables and chairs neatly returned
- nametags collected in Ziploc bag
- leave any comments for RE staff on attendance sheets