

Introduction to Islam

Lesson 2: Episode “Little Mosque”

9.24.2023

Objectives: Use first episode as launch into Islam, familiarize youth with function of mosque, and consider UU’s relationship with Islam.

Materials: Laptop/DVD/TV, lesson attachments.

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:

- ▶ Put your initial under either heading:

Have Muslim friend(s)

Don’t have any Muslim friends

- ▶ **توحيد** Try copying this Arabic word for “Unity” (from right to left)

- Teachers complete attendance sheets.

2. Silly Fun: “One Minute, Please!” (5 minutes max)

Pair youth up randomly. Each taking turns, the aim of the game is to talk for one minute straight on a given subject. **Youth must try to speak non-stop for the full duration of their minute!** Teacher announces the topic, and first person begins speaking for one minute on that topic. Teacher calls time, and announces new topic for the second person to speak. Continue alternating as time permits.

Choose subjects to stimulate the imagination and which may be amusing. Topics might include: Whether a hotdog is a sandwich or a taco... Which animals would be rudest if they could talk... 10 things you can do with marshmallows... How many chickens it would take to take down an elephant... 10 things that everyone looks silly doing..... Fads or trends you would eliminate if you could... If all the States in the USA were represented by food, what food each state would be.

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

Teacher reads: (from Sufi mystic, Rumi)

“I searched for God among the Christians and on the Cross and therein I found Him not... I entered the mountain cave of Hira and then went as far as Qandhar but God I found not... Then I directed my search to the Kaaba, the resort of old and young; God was not there even. Turning to philosophy I inquired about him from ibn Sina but found Him not within his range. I fared then to the scene of the Prophet’s experience of a great divine manifestation... but God was not there even in that exalted court. Finally, I looked into my own heart and there I saw Him; He was nowhere else.”

4. **“Little Mosque on the Prairie” Screening and Discussion** (see Episode Viewing Guide)

****Note:** Each episode is about 23 minutes, pausing at several moments during the episode for discussions (amounting to 20 minutes of conversation). Please use viewing-and-discussing time accordingly for the 50 minutes of total classroom time.

Class will watch the episode, but pause before starting and during commercial breaks to reflect on elements of Islam. (Commercial breaks have the logo show up on the screen.) Pause the DVD, summarize the information aloud, and facilitate any discussion that arises. **Important: Teachers should read through content materials ahead of time and be familiar enough to summarize main points and facilitate discussion.**

For teacher reference—Cast of Characters:

- Yasir – contractor, Lebanese, married to Sarah, not a particularly observant Muslim
- Amaar – the new imam, from Toronto, moves to Mercy to serve this new mosque
- Rayaana – Yasir’s and Sarah’s daughter, doctor, feminist Muslim
- Mayor Popowicz – Sarah’s boss, mayor of Mercy, Saskatchewan
- Baber – a very conservative Muslim man (not an imam)
- Rev. Magee – Anglican priest, rents his church out to the mosque
- Fred – bigoted radio show host
- Fatima – owner of local café
- Sarah – converted to Islam when she married Yasir, works for Mayor
- Layla – Baber’s teenaged daughter, her mom died so her dad is a single parent
- Joe – a nervous, bigoted citizen of Mercy

For teacher reference—Plot summary of Season 1, Episode “Little Mosque”

Yasir has rented space in the local church under the guise of using it as an office for his construction business, but really is using it as a mosque for the local Muslim community. This coincides with the arrival of Amaar, who Yasir hired as the new Imam to replace Baber, deemed too orthodox. Amaar’s arrival also coincides with the start of Ramadan, with much community dissent both concerning how to calculate when it begins and

what food should be served after the fast. Fatima wants a traditional goat feast, whereas Sarah wants a lighter meal of cucumber sandwiches. But bigger problems ensue when Reverend Magee and the town finds out about the mosque. Amaar, the new spokesperson for the Islamic faith in Mercy, isn't very proficient in his public relations attempt, and makes matters worse after appearing on Fred's radio show. Perhaps Amaar isn't cut out to be an Imam? He contemplates heading back to Toronto; that is, if he can get a one-way ticket back after his supposed terrorist remark on his flight from Toronto. But all is well for Amaar in Mercy when Reverend Magee supports the mosque, just as long the Muslim community is on the up and up with him about their goings-on in the church. Reverend Magee does exactly the opposite of Fred's editorials.

5. **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.”

6. **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

EPISODE VIEWING GUIDE: “Little Mosque”

BEFORE THE EPISODE

Teacher summarizes: What’s a mosque? A mosque is a Muslim house of worship where people can gather for the five daily prayers as well as Friday congregational prayers and teachings. The Arabic word for mosque is *masjid*.

A mosque includes a prayer hall (which sometimes has separate areas for men and for women and children) that has a carpet/rug and very little furniture, as Muslims stand and bow and kneel while praying. The walls will sometimes be decorated with calligraphic verses from the Qur’an. Larger mosques often have a dome and a minaret, a tower from which a person (a *muezzin*) can call a village or city to prayers.

In areas where there has been conflict between Christians and Muslims, some amazing works of architecture served as both church and mosque at different points in history.

When a person enters a mosque, they remove their shoes as a sign of respect. Before entering the prayer hall, Muslims wash hands and face in preparation. Sometimes mosques have special areas for performing this ritual cleansing (called ablutions, Arabic *wudu*). Prayers are lead by a teacher, often referred to as an *imam*.

Non-Muslim monotheists are welcome inside North American mosques. Some interpret Islamic law as not permitting polytheists inside a mosque. In some parts of the world, if you travel as a tourist, non-Muslims may enter mosques but must follow rules about propriety. Only Muslims may enter the mosque in the holy city of Mecca.

Question for Discussion: Look around the room at the photos of mosques. Feel free to comment on the architecture. What makes each mosque unique and interesting?

FIRST COMMERCIAL BREAK

Teacher summarizes: Islam permeates the life of the faithful. For a Muslim, religion is not what happens on Friday night at prayers; religion is what informs their entire life. Islam’s teachings touch on every aspect of life, from what one wears to what one eats, how one banks to how one treats relatives and strangers. In this episode, you will hear brief references to basic prescriptions for Muslim living. Listen for information about prayer, alcohol, modesty, food, fasting and more.

SECOND COMMERCIAL BREAK

Question for Discussion: What details did you pick up about the Muslim way of life: prayer, alcohol, modesty, food, fasting and more?

Teacher summarizes: Islamic law does not require men and women to be separated in the prayer hall; there is nothing written in the Qur'an about gender separation in mosques. However, traditional rules have segregated women and men, with women most often told to occupy the rows behind men. Traditionalists try to argue that Muhammad preferred women praying at home rather than at a mosque, citing a *hadith* in which Muhammad supposedly said "The best mosques for women are the inner parts of their houses." Interestingly, women were active participants in the mosque started by Muhammad, who told Muslims not to forbid women from entering mosques.

Many mosques today place women behind a barrier or partition or in another room. Mosques in South and Southeast Asia put men and women in separate rooms, as the divisions were built into those mosques centuries ago. In nearly two-thirds of American mosques, women pray behind partitions or in separate areas, not in the main prayer hall. Some mosques do not admit women at all, due to the lack of space and the fact that some prayers, such as *Jumu'ah* or Friday Prayer, are mandatory for men but optional for women.

Although there are sections exclusively for women and children, the Grand Mosque in Mecca is desegregated. There is an important movement in the United States, called the "Pray In" movement, in which women are claiming their right to pray in the main halls of mosques, rather than in separate rooms.

THIRD COMMERCIAL BREAK

Teacher summarizes: Public perception of Muslims is a source of tension in many of the series episodes. You will notice that Yasir is trying to keep the mosque under wraps. Amaal is subject to racial/religious profiling ("flying while Muslim"). It's interesting to consider this alongside Unitarian Universalist history: UUs had to keep our faith under wraps, often mistrusted, persecuted, and even killed as heretics.

Questions for Discussion:

- What were some misunderstandings that occurred in this episode?
- Is Fred (the radio host) a realistic portrayal of mainstream views of Muslims, or is he merely a caricature?
- How do you feel about documented profiling of Muslims by TSA and other government agencies?
- Do you feel that Muslim students at your school are treated differently because of their religious identity? How (not)?

AFTER THE EPISODE

Teacher summarizes: Imagine that some area Muslims needed a place to pray on Fridays, and they asked Unity if they could rent our Parish Hall, like they do in the episode. What do you think our congregation's response should be? Our ministers imagined that they got an email from some neighbors asking for an arrangement as in "Little Mosque..." Here is the email correspondence:

(Have youth read aloud attached email correspondence)

Questions for Discussion:

- Are your feelings about Muslims affected by knowing that we, like they, have also been a misunderstood religious minority in certain countries throughout history?
- If you were the minister at Unity, would you rent space to a Muslim group for prayer?
- (Tough question) Would it change your answer if the Muslim group wanted to have a barrier up in the Ames Chapel between men and women? Does it conflict with our own values around inherent worth and dignity and justice?