

Introduction to Islam

Lesson 3: Episode “The Barrier”

10.1.2023

Objectives: Familiarize youth to the role of women in Islam.

Materials: Laptop/DVD/TV, blindfold, lesson attachment.

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:
 - ▶ What are some of your favorite Middle Eastern foods?
 - ▶ Do you think of yourself as a feminist? Why or why not?
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.

2. Silly Fun: “Guess Who Loves You” (5 minutes max)

Put a chair in the middle of a circle. Have everyone stand in a circle around the chair. Get a volunteer to be “IT,” who sits in the chair with blindfold over eyes. Shuffle the circle around. Teacher points silently to one of the youth, who then DISGUISES voice and says “I’m a _____” (select your type of diet: omnivore, vegetarian, vegan, pescetarian, ovo-lacto vegetarian, etc.) and “IT” tries to guess the correct identity. Give anywhere between one and three guesses, depending on the size of the class. If “IT” guesses incorrectly, “IT” has to take one more turn.

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 the Sufi mystic, Rumi)

“We are born of love; Love is our mother.”

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 “The Barrier”

Baber is facing a battle of the generations and battle of the sexes. His daughter Layla is vexing him with her choice of running attire. She also experiences her first menstrual period, which she hides from Baber since that transition into womanhood would mean having to wear a shawl over her head. Rather than confronting her, Baber decides to wait until the next month. At the mosque, his battle of the sexes centers around erecting a barrier between prayer areas for men and women. Feminist Rayaana thinks this is medieval thinking. Even Fred comes to the rally cry for the women of Mercy. The situation, however, is not so clear-cut as traditional Muslim Fatima wants the barrier. Amaar, as the Imam, makes his final decision: half the mosque will have the barrier, half the mosque will not, so that each person can make up their own mind. No one is happy, but as Amaar says, unhappiness is the Muslim way.

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: “THE BARRIER”

BEFORE THE EPISODE

Teacher summarizes: What is the role of women in Muslim community? Most scholars see the rise of Islam as a milestone of progress in the history of women’s rights in the Middle East. Prior to the 6th century, most Middle Eastern societies viewed women as property, inferior to men in all aspects and without rights in society. Abuse of women was culturally normal.

Mohammed advocated for the treatment of women as equals. *Shariya*, the code of law according to Muslim teachings, provides women with protections they did not have before the spread of Islam. Under *Shariya*, according to the Qur’an:

- women and men are equals before Allah and will receive equal rewards and punishments for their conduct
- women must consent to being married and have the right to divorce
- a dowry remains the property of the wife after marriage
- women have a right to education
- women can inherit property
- women can work outside the home in a variety of fields
- women have the right to lead prayers and engage in Islamic scholarship

Since September 11, 2001, much media attention has been paid to the treatment of women in Muslim societies. Some perceived inequalities are universal to Islam and justified by Qur’anic scholarship. Other unjust practices are cultural rather than Islamic, though the distinction between religion and culture is never as clear as we may want to draw. Different societies interpret teachings differently from the Qur’an and *hadith* (non-Qur’anic teachings of Muhammad). The oppressive policies of the Taliban captured the attention of Western society, though they are not representative of majority Muslim policy or thought. Other cultural Muslim practices have captured the attention of Western societies, including:

- Women not being able to leave the home without a male relative as a chaperone (*mahram*). This comes from cultural and historical codes of modesty and safety. There are no verses in the Qur’an that mandate this limited mobility. Different cultures interpret rules about protecting women and their modesty differently. Under Taliban rule, women could be stoned if they were outside their homes without a *mahram*.
- Before the policy was lifted in June/2018, there was a longstanding prohibition on women drivers in Saudi Arabia. There is no Qur’anic justification for this practice, and Saudi Arabia was the only Muslim country with this prohibition. Saudi women can drive now, but overcoming beliefs about gender are much more difficult.

FIRST COMMERCIAL BREAK

Teacher summarizes:

ABOUT DAILY PRAYER—Muslims pray five times daily. The exact time of these scheduled prayers changes every day depending on the time of sunrise and sunset. Muslim teenagers can get apps for their *iPhones* or text service for their cell phones to remind them of the day's prayer times.

ABOUT THE QUR'AN—The Qur'an, according to Islamic faith, is the final revelation of God's teachings for humanity as dictated to Muhammad by the angel Jibril (Gabriel). The Qur'an has 114 chapters. (Notice in the episode that Rayaana tells Fred that being on the radio is prohibited in Chapter 115. Funny lady!)

ABOUT HIJAB—*Hijab* is the word most Westerners associate with the head covering worn by Muslim women. However, the Arabic word *hijab* means modesty in general and the concept in Islam applies both to men and women. Many Muslims believe that the basic requirements are that when in the presence of someone of the opposite sex (other than a close family member), a woman should cover her body and walk and dress in a way which does not draw sexual attention to her. This protects her from unwanted attention from men. Some believers go so far as to specify exactly which areas of the body must be covered. In some cases, this is everything save the eyes; but generally, most require covering everything save the face and hands. Pants are usually not seen as modest. In nearly all Muslim cultures, young girls are not required to wear a *hijab* and there is not an agreed age when a woman should begin wearing a *hijab*. However, in many Muslim countries, puberty serves as the dividing line. Other Muslims take a relativist approach to *hijab*. They believe that the commandment to maintain modesty must be interpreted with regard to surrounding culture. What is considered modest or daring in one culture may not be considered so in another. It is important, they argue, for believers to wear clothing that communicates modesty and reserve in the specific situations they find themselves.

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:

ABOUT ZAKAT—Did you notice that Layla tries to get her dad to allow her to run in the 10K because it's for charity? She argues that charity is a really Muslim thing, right? Indeed! Charity is so important to the Muslim way of life that it is one of the Five Pillars or core practices of the faith. *Zakat* translates as "the giving of alms" and is required of all Muslims. The Qur'an does not say how much, but later teachings specify 1/40 of one's excess wealth. Sunni Muslims (one branch of Islam) interpret the law to mean that everyone must give 2.5% of their excess wealth to the poor. Shiite/Shia Muslims (another branch of Islam) give 5%. Once you hit puberty, you are considered an adult and *zakat* applies to your life. There is a

minimum amount of wealth (a threshold of poverty) that draws the line between who must give and who may receive alms.

Questions for Discussion:

- Do you have a savings account? How much is in it? Or do you get an allowance?
- If you had to give 2.5% of that amount to charity, where would you donate?

THIRD COMMERCIAL BREAK

Questions for Discussion:

- What do you think of the way Baber is handling the situation with his daughter, Layla? Is he more like or more different from your parents or your friends' parents?
- When was the last time you and a parent had a real difference over a moral or religious issue?

AFTER THE EPISODE

Questions for Discussion:

- Why do you think Fred Tupper advocates for removing the barrier? What's his motivation?
- Why do you think the town's women show up to picket the mosque? What's their motivation?
- What gets socially and politically complicated when Sarah calls on Fatima's rights as a woman of color?
- What does the response of the protesters say about our relationship with both racial and religious minorities in our society?
- (Asked in a previous lesson) If Unity were hosting Muslim neighbors for prayers, how do you think the congregation would respond to a prayer barrier? How would YOU feel? Where do Muslim religious rights and our values intersect?
- In France, a 2010 law banned the wearing full face-coverings in public. A prior 2004 law banned the wearing of religious symbols, including Muslim headscarves, Jewish skullcaps and large Christian crosses in public schools. Should we have a similar law in our schools? Is it similar to or different from the prohibition of school-sponsored prayer?