

Celebrating Ramadan **A Resource for Educators**



John Feeney/Saudi Aramco World/PADIA

The Outreach Center
Center for Middle Eastern Studies
Harvard University





Dear Educator Colleague,

Greetings from the Outreach Center at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies! We are honored that you have chosen this educational resource for your teaching.

The goal of the Outreach Center's educational resources is to assist educators teaching on topics related to the Middle East region and Islam. As such, materials focus on providing added content and curriculum resources to you, the teacher, to augment your existing teaching tools. At the Outreach Center, we try to leave the contextualization of these resources to your individual needs, although we can provide more specialized information or programs upon request.

The Outreach Center is serious about assisting educators and their work in teaching K-12 students about the Middle East region and Islam. I look forward to receiving your professional feedback and critique about this resource.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Paul Beran'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paul Beran
Director

Introduction for Educators

Cultural celebrations and festivals are common to people all over the world. These events celebrate different historical and cultural practices and share important community functions. Often, holidays like these bring together families and communities, and introduce new generations to traditional food, dance, music and handicrafts.

K-12 curriculums incorporate special celebrations in order to introduce students to diverse peoples and cultures. Learning about multi-cultural celebrations allows both students and teachers to identify aspects of cultural uniqueness, while at the same time being part of a global family. Our increasingly globalized world invites people to celebrate diverse holidays and celebrations to experience the beauty and humanity in other cultures. It is in this spirit that *Celebrating Ramadan* has been assembled.

Recognizing the Muslim month of Ramadan provides a valuable way to understand the diversity *and* shared values of Muslims and Muslim communities worldwide. The information and curricular ideas that follow will address the historical, social, cultural and doctrinal elements of Ramadan worldwide. These ideas can be used to discuss similarities and differences among various holiday customs worldwide.

How to Use the Resource

Thank you for choosing to use *Celebrating Ramadan*. Please feel free to pick and choose parts of the resource that most fit with your classroom needs. *Celebrating Ramadan* is composed of books, videos/DVDs, and realia. Before returning the resource, please check-off each item on the checklist that accompanies these materials to make sure they are enclosed for the next user.

An Introduction to Ramadan

The month of Ramadan is a time for both religious and non-religiously observant Muslims, and others in societies where Ramadan is celebrated, to place limits on themselves as way to gain greater personal self-knowledge. While Ramadan is an important month in the Islamic calendar and culture, this resources concentrates are three essential parts of Ramadan, which are, in Arabic:

- *Sowm*, or fasting
- *Iftar*, or breaking the fast on a daily basis
- *Eid al Fitar*, or the end of Ramadan three day feast

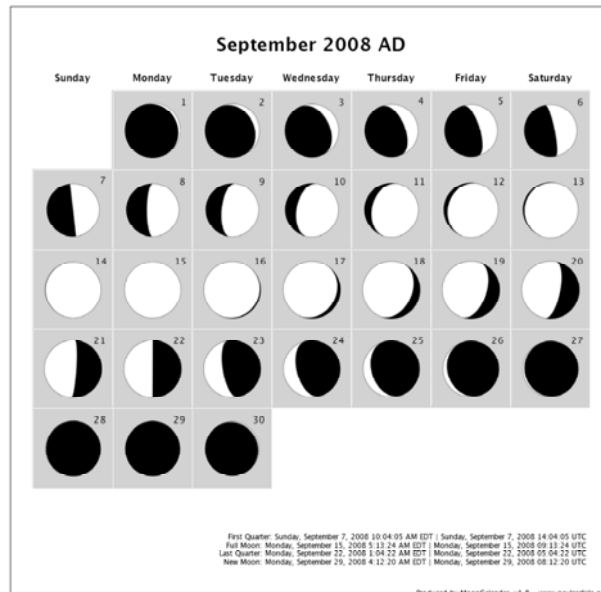
Together, these three parts of Ramadan provide a good introduction to the month and how it is celebrated in the lives of people around the world. However, there are many other parts of Ramadan that can be explored by consulting the bibliographic resources found at the end of this resource.

When Is Ramadan?

Ramadan is the name of the ninth month in the Islamic lunar calendar. The daily calendar in the United States is based on the cycle of the earth's rotation around the sun, which takes approximately 365 and 1/4 days. These days are divided into twelve months that include 28 to 31 days each. The way that the earth orbits the sun creates consistent seasons, so that Christmas in the United States always occurs on December 25th in the winter, while the Fourth of July always happens in the summer. Most Muslim countries today also use the solar or common calendar for government and business purposes. However, the traditional Muslim calendar (called the Hijri calendar) and the dates of holidays in the religious year follow the lunar cycle.

The lunar calendar is based on the moon's orbit of the earth of 29 ½ days. Twelve lunar months make a lunar year, which is 354 days long. Because the lunar year is approximately 11 days shorter than the solar year, Ramadan and other Islamic holidays take place at different times during the solar calendar year. This means that the holiday of Ramadan may occur in the winter during some years, while in the summer during others. According to the Muslim calendar, a new month begins when you can first see the tiniest crescent of moon after the new moon (when no moon is visible at all).

The start of the month of Ramadan traditionally occurs when the thinnest crescent moon is visible. The new crescent, which looks like a backward "c," begins each month. The middle of the month is marked by a full moon. After that, the moon gradually gets smaller until all that can be seen in the sky is a c-shaped crescent again. This is the sign that Ramadan is ending. *Eid al-Fitr* begins when the new crescent appears, which is the beginning of the next Islamic month. The appendix of this curriculum includes transparencies of moon phases for 2008 (reproduced with permission by Peter Caldwell at <http://users.netconnect.com.au/~astronet/phases.html>), as well as for the month of September 2008.



What is Ramadan?

Each day during the month, individuals are invited to fast during daily light hours, to pray and to celebrate with family and friends the end of each day's fast. At the end of the month is a three-day holiday that celebrates the conclusion of the month and prepares the individual to return to their regular daily routine.

Sawm

One of the most recognizable parts of Ramadan is fasting by individuals. Fasting, in Arabic called *sawm*, consists of not eating, drinking or taking part in sexual activity during day light hours during the month. The purpose of fasting is to change the daily routine of fasters to allow for new thinking and reflection. While some countries with significant Muslim communities, such as Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Egypt and Malaysia may have strong communal impulses towards fasting such as closing restaurants and making fasting the societal norm, the act of fasting is always a personal choice of the individual. Not all Muslims fast during Ramadan. Muslims who are not religiously observant may not fast. Those who are observant but are ill, traveling or pregnant do not fast. Many countries where Ramadan is celebrated have significant non-Muslim communities. These communities may also fast or break the fasts with their friends who are fasting and so celebrate the month.

Iftar

While Ramadan is about individuals limiting themselves during day light hours of food and drink, during the evening get-togethers of friends and families over food is usually a highlight of the day. At the end of each day, fasters will break the fast with a meal, called *iftar*. Usually the meal is a simple one designed to provide nourishment, but it may also be a time to gather family and friends for large meals that celebrate being together. For religiously observant Muslims, the breaking the fast time may also be accompanied by special readings of the Qur'an.

Eid al-Fitr

As the end of Ramadan approaches, Muslims prepare for *eid al-fitr*, which draws Ramadan to a close. In countries where there are significant Muslim communities much of society, economy and government life may come to a halt. Schools and businesses often close for three days. *Eid* is a time of gift giving, sharing food, gathering with family and taking a holiday.



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Eid is enjoyed in diverse ways at the end of Ramadan. For example, in Egypt, children parade the night-time streets carrying shining Ramadan lanterns. They go to the homes of their neighbors and friends to sing Ramadan carols and receive candy or coins from adults in return. In India and Pakistan, young girls attend henna parties with their mothers the night before *eid* to get spectacular floral patterns drawn on their hands. These beautiful henna designs are not permanent, but will last a few days.



In the United States and elsewhere, Muslims often purchase and wrap gifts for one another and send *eid* cards at the end of Ramadan. The US Postal Service even has a Ramadan *eid* stamp. Those who are able buy new clothing for the holiday and prepare special holiday dishes that reflect local culture. Muslims from countries such as India, Morocco, Egypt or Indonesia enjoy meals particular to their local cuisine. Muslim children around the world look forward to Ramadan and *Eid al-Fitr* all year, even when they are too young to join the fast, as these special times provide a celebratory atmosphere in their families and communities.

Lesson Plans: Understanding the Phases of the Moon

Activity 1: Observe the Phases of the Moon

Appropriate Grade Level: 2-5

Subject Area(s): Science, Astronomy

Student Goals / Focus: Students will observe and understand the different phases of the moon, as well as learn why the rotation of the earth allows them to “see” different shapes of the moon.

Materials:

- A large ball that can be painted
- Black and white paint
- Paintbrushes
- Black marker

Activity Procedure:

To make a “moon” for this activity, take a large ball and draw a line around the exact center (equator) of the ball with a black marker. Paint one half of the ball white and the other half of the ball black. Allow the ball to dry before proceeding with the activity.

After the ball has dried, the teacher will hold the ball between him/her self and the students. Explain that you represent the position of the sun, and that the students represent the position of the earth. Nominate one student to be the moon, and instruct that student to stand between you and the class, holding the ball so that the white side faces you at the front of the room. Explain that the white side of the ball is reflecting your (the sun’s) light, even though the students cannot see it and stress that the same side of the moon always faces the sun. (Against the black of space, we cannot see the side of the moon that is not lit by the sun.) The teacher may want to turn out the classroom lights to set the mood for this activity.

Ask the student to then walk slowly in a circle counterclockwise (assuming the teacher at the front of the room is 12:00) around the perimeter of the room, keeping the white side of the ball toward the “sun.” As the student begins to walk slowly around the room, the students will observe that they can begin to see part of the white side of the ball. What shape does the white portion of the ball appear to be? [You may have the students draw the shape of the “moon” now and at various points in its circuit around the room.] Instruct the students to watch how the crescent grows until the first quarter moon and then how the shape changes as the “moon” moves toward the back of the classroom where it finally becomes full. When the moon is at the back of the class, everyone will be able to see the whole of the white side of the moon, and none of the dark side.

The student will continue to circle the room, showing the waning phases of the moon. Then, have the student (or another volunteer) go around the room again, this time with the teacher introducing the vocabulary and the students repeating the appropriate

vocabulary related to the various phases of the moon: Waxing, waning, new moon, first quarter, gibbous, full moon, last quarter.

Activity 2: Make a Moonscape

Appropriate Grade Level: 2-5

Subject Area(s): Science, Astronomy, Art

Student Goals / Focus: By creating their own moonscape in an arts activity, students will see and understand the different phases of the moon.

Materials:

- Copies of Template A (on yellow paper) and Template B (on dark blue or black paper) from curriculum kit for each student
- Pens or pencils and scissors for each student
- Markers, stickers, glitter, paint, or any other decorative materials

Activity Procedure:

Find Template A and Template B in the appendix of this curriculum. Copy *Template A: Moon* onto yellow paper and *Template B: Moonscape* onto dark blue or black paper for each student. [Alternatively, you may have students trace halfway around their moons in the shapes shown on their moonscapes.]

Give each student one template each and instruct them to cut their moons out of the yellow paper. Next, advise them to carefully cut along the half circle lines on their moonscape templates *without* cutting all the way to the edge. Remind students to check that their moon fits through the slit on each side—if it is too tight a fit, students can trim their moon slightly.

Encourage students to decorate their moonscape with as night sky full of stars, meteorites, or satellites and spacecrafts if they choose. Students may also enjoy drawing symbols of the Ramadan holiday onto more imaginative moonscapes, such as lanterns, children searching for the crescent moon, etc.

After students have created their moonscapes, they can effectively see the phases of the moon by slipping their moon cutout from behind the slit on the left side of the moonscape. The moon will appear on the front of the moonscape as a backward “c” shape as it emerges. As students continue to slide the moon through the slit, the moon will “become” full. Students will push their moons across the paper and through the slit on the right hand side, so that the moon wanes and finally disappears.

Remind students that the moon is always the same shape, even though we see different shapes of the moon in the sky! Ask students to show family and friends their moonscape to demonstrate how the moon changes shape in the sky.

- Older students can do online research to find the dates of the beginning of Ramadan observed in their communities for the past five years. Students can plot these dates onto a calendar and determine how many days Ramadan moved back in the solar calendar each time.
- The Muslim lunar calendar is called the *Hijri* calendar, named after the emigration (*hijra*) of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina. Students can conduct online research to learn today's date according to the *Hijri* calendar. What is the current month in the Islamic calendar? What is the day of the month? What is the year? Two sites with a helpful conversion function are <http://www.muslim-calendar.com/hijri.asp> and <http://www.rabiah.com/convert/>.
- Students can observe the moon for a month, drawing pictures of the moon each night and bring them into class. The teacher can compare their observations and transfer the drawings onto a class lunar observation calendar.
- Students can learn about the Chinese culture and calendar system, the Mayan culture and calendar, or a calendar system associated with another culture. The teacher can lead the class into a discussion on the differences between the common solar calendar and the Muslim lunar calendar.
- Students can study the similarities and differences between the Christian solar calendar, the Jewish lunisolar calendar, and the Muslim lunar calendar. Questions to ask students include: How have the dates/times of Hanukkah, Christmas and Eid al-Fitr changed in the last two years? Are these three holidays always celebrated around the same times? Why or why not? How is the date of Easter calculated? (This differs for Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians.)

Additional Internet Resources:

- **Why Does the Moon Have Phases?**
http://starryskies.com/The_sky/events/lunar-2003/phases.html
 This is a comprehensive and clear explanation of lunar phases with very well-designed graphics. It is a must-see!
- **Animated picture of the moon's phases**
<http://www.ac.wvu.edu/~stephan/phases.html>

Food During Ramadan: The Importance of Dates



What is a Date?

Dates are the fruit of the date palm tree and may be eaten fresh, but are usually eaten dried. They are inexpensive, healthy and naturally sweet and thus, popular all over the world. In some religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), dates have symbolic importance.

A Quick History of Dates

- Written documents confirm that dates grew well before 3000 B.C.E in Mesopotamia (Iraq).
- In ancient Egypt, people buried kings along with dates. For example, evidence shows that King Tut's tomb included dates.
 - Date palm logs covered royal tombs in ancient Egypt.
 - Date palm fronds and dates appear in ancient Egyptian religious and secular art.
 - Carvings of date palms (called the "tree of life") covered King Solomon's temple in Jerusalem.
 - Since Muhammad broke his Ramadan fast with dates, many Muslims still follow the same custom.
- Moorish Muslims brought dates from North Africa into Spain, where they gained tremendous popularity, in the 8th century.
- As early as the 1700's, Europeans planted date palms in colonies from Brazil to the Caribbean to the Pacific coast.

How Do Dates Grow?

- Date palms need a lot of sun and a supply of water.
- Dry, hot weather provides the best environment for dates, exemplified by the enormity of dates in the Middle East, Mediterranean, and California.
 - Date palms can grow to be 100 feet tall.
 - Date palms can live to be 200 years old!
- It takes about six to seven months for the fruit to ripen.

Lesson Plans: Fasting and Food during Ramadan

Activity 3: Research & Class Presentations on Ramadan Practices/Foods Around the World

Appropriate Grade Level: 4-5

Subject Area(s): Social Studies

Student Goals / Focus: This activity provides an opportunity for students to research and discuss the universal importance of food in religion and culture, as well as both the global and diverse nature of Muslim societies.

Materials:

- Access to school library for books and/or internet

Activity Procedure:

Students will get into pairs to research a particular country's Ramadan celebrations and foods. Students should pay particular attention to common Ramadan traditions that happen in their country, as well as specific Ramadan practices particular to their country's culture. A suggested list of countries that celebrate Ramadan include: India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Libya, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel and the Occupied Territories, Kenya, Mali, Syria, Iran, England, France, Germany and the United States. Each pair should research Ramadan traditions in their country and prepare a short oral presentation (five minutes), explaining how people observe Ramadan and describing a special Ramadan dish in their country of choice.

For Discussion:

Students will share their oral presentations with the class, after which the teacher can lead a discussion about the similarities and differences in Ramadan celebrations and foods practiced around the world. What similarities exist in all of the countries? Are there celebrations/foods that students find as surprising to celebrate Ramadan?

The teacher can also discuss the role of food and fasting in various religious traditions familiar to students. What world religions/cultures incorporate fasting? Why? What does fasting in each of these traditions commemorate, and how is fasting meant to affect the participant? Why do celebrations and holidays include particular foods? What foods do students associate with particular religious and cultural holidays? (For example, lamb is traditionally served at Easter because it is both a springtime food and a symbol of sacrifice in the Old Testament. Also, we eat turkey at Thanksgiving because Pilgrims wished to keep with British customs and eat geese at holiday meals, but turned to turkey because of its abundance in the New World.)

Ask students to think about how American Muslims might celebrate differently/similarly

to Muslims elsewhere. What would be some local Ramadan traditions for Muslims in America? Remind students that some Muslim families might have recently come to the United States from another country, so their traditions might reflect that country's traditions more closely. Other Muslim Americans (whether African-American, converts from other religions, or families who immigrated generations ago) might have very different holiday customs. The teacher can also help students to discuss the similarities/differences in the celebration of Christmas (or another holiday) in the United States versus in Egypt, Hungary, the Philippines, etc.

Activity Extensions:

In their pairs, students can select one of the Ramadan recipes that they find and make it at home to bring and share with the class.

Activity 4: **Ramadan Recipes from around the World**

Appropriate Grade Level: K-5

Subject Area(s): Social Studies

Student Goals / Focus: Students will experience and relate to other cultures by tasting traditional Ramadan foods.

Materials:

- Ingredients in following recipes
- Kitchen
- Adults to prepare the food
- Plastic eating utensils for children

Activity Procedure:

Refer to the following recipes to see if any are of interest to students/parents. If the school allows, and kitchen facilities (or helpful parents) are available, prepare these recipes to give the students a taste of Ramadan dishes.

From the Middle East

Tamar Mahshi (Stuffed Dates)

Since Muslims traditionally break their fast with dates, this is a fun and simple activity for students to make, and the result is both delicious and nutritious!

2 lbs. whole dates, pitted

1/2 lb. blanched whole almonds

Ahead of time, toast almonds

lightly by heating them in a single layer on a baking sheet in a 350° oven for 10-12 minutes, until fragrant and slightly oily. Cool. Insert one almond into each date.

For a slightly sweeter treat, you may stuff the dates with prepared almond paste, or

make your own by grinding the toasted almonds in a food processor or blender. Transfer to a bowl and mix with 1 cup confectioners sugar and 1 tablespoons water until mixture begins to stick together. Form into small slender cylinders and insert into the dates. Serve at room temperature.

Cucumber and Yogurt Dip

Variations of this recipe exist all over the Middle East and South Asia: In Turkey this is eaten as a cold soup, in Greece dill is usually added to the dip, and in Iran chopped walnuts and raisins are mixed in. Be adventurous! To make a thicker dip, use strained yogurt (sold as *labne*) or place yogurt in cheesecloth in a colander over a bowl, cover and refrigerate overnight.

1 medium cucumber, peeled and seeded (you may use English cucumber, which is seedless)
2 cups plain yogurt (drained yogurt makes a thicker dip)
1 clove garlic, crushed
1 Tb finely chopped mint and/or dill
salt and pepper to taste

Chop or grate cucumber. Mix cucumber with yogurt, salt, pepper and any herbs you choose to add. Serve with pita bread, pita chips, and/or baby carrots and celery sticks.

From Senegal/West Africa

Thiacri Senegalais

This is a dessert that is simple to make. Adjust quantities to accommodate class size.

2-3 cups of Moroccan couscous
32 oz vanilla yogurt
1 can sweetened condensed milk
1 tsp. vanilla extract
1/2 cup sugar

Prepare couscous according to directions and put aside. Mix yogurt, condensed milk, sugar, and vanilla extract. Pour milk mixture into small cups. Add couscous to cups and mix well. Eat with spoon.

From India

Fereni Starch Pudding

This pudding can be eaten either hot or cold. Adjust sugar and rosewater to taste.

2/3 cup cornstarch
2 cups milk
6 whole cardamom pods
1/2 cup ground almonds
rose water to taste (a little goes a long way)

1/4 cup blanched slivered almonds
1/4 cup white sugar

Dissolve cornstarch in 1 cup of cold milk. Bring remaining milk to a boil with cardamom and ground almonds. Then add cornstarch mixture and mix thoroughly with a whisk. Add sugar and rosewater to taste. Allow the mixture to boil for three more minutes on medium heat. Remove cardamom and pour mixture into serving dishes. Garnish with slivered almonds.

Activity 5: First Fast – Growing up Muslim

Appropriate Grade Level: K-5

Subject Area(s): Social Studies, Literature

Student Goals / Focus: By reading the following selection, students will learn about children's desires to participate in the Ramadan fast, as well as the experiences of children in the preparation of *iftar* (breaking of the fast).

Materials:

- Copies of the following passage and worksheet for each student

Activity Procedure:

Read aloud, or have students read, the passage on the next page about a boy in Iran and his family's customs during Ramadan fasting. Then, have students complete the worksheet which includes more information and questions about the story.

Resources:

You may also use one of the stories below as an alternative or additional reading.

El-Moslimany, A. P. (1994). *Zaki's Ramadhan fast*. Seattle: Amica Publishing House.

A young Muslim boy wants to try fasting for the first time, just for one day. He learns that it's not an easy task! This is a great book to introduce children to fasting and setting goals. Grades K-3.

Ghazi, S. H. (1996). *Ramadan*. New York: Holiday House.

This book describes the celebration of Ramadan by an Islamic family and discusses the meaning and importance of this holiday in the Islamic religion. Grades K-4.

Hoyt-Goldsmith, D. (2001). *Celebrating Ramadan*. New York: Holiday House.

This book follows a devout Muslim fourth grader living in New Jersey through the holy month of Ramadan. Ibraheem completes his first fast and we see the challenges and joys of a young Muslim in the U.S. Grades 2-7, with reading aloud for younger readers.

Hutchinson, U. (1995). *First Fast*. Beltsville, Md.: Amana Publications.

This book is part of a series on a Muslim American family and their relatives.

Khan, R. (1999). *Azziza's first fast*. In *Muslim Child: A collection of short stories and poems*. Toronto: Napoleon Publishing, 1999.

This is a story about a young girl's experience of fasting. The stories in this volume are somewhat didactic, but do introduce children to the challenges faced by Muslim children growing up in societies as diverse as the U.S., Pakistan, Nigeria and Canada. Includes a craft activity and recipe, as well as sidebars on Islam as well. Grades 2-6.

Matthews, M. (1996). *Magid fasts for Ramadan*. New York: Clarion Books, 1996.

Magid, an eight-year-old Muslim boy in Cairo, is determined to celebrate Ramadan by fasting, despite the opposition of family members who feel that he is not yet old enough to fast.

First Fast by Alireza Doostdar

In my family in Iran, kids between 6 and 10 years of age often did what was called a "*rooze-ye kalleh gonjishki*", or a "little fast" during Ramadan. To do this kind of fast, children would wake up slightly before dawn along with the adults in the family and eat *sahari* (*suhour* in Arabic), which is the predawn breakfast during Ramadan. I often recited passages from the Qur'an along with my parents and brothers, before doing the morning prayer and then going back to bed for another hour or two.

While adults went on to abstain from eating and drinking until dusk, the children in my family on their "little fast" would break their fast around noon, or they would have small snacks and water throughout the day to help them practice refraining from eating larger meals.

At the end of the day, when the time of *iftar* arrived, the children would join others in the family for a fast-breaking meal, along with possibly more prayer and Qur'an recitation. The *iftar* is often an occasion for a party: each night the family might have friends and relatives over for dinner or go to another friend or relative's house for a celebration. I remember helping my mom bake sweets like *halva* and *ranginak* (which literally means "colorful" and is made with dates, walnuts, butter and flour) for these parties. One of my favorite ways to help her was to use a spoon to create intricate designs that spell out a small verse from the Qur'an or one of the 99 names of God onto a *halva* dish, or with cinnamon onto *sholehzard* (a sweet rose-flavored rice pudding with saffron, which makes it a bright yellow).

Usually, children received gifts (toys, books, or money) for their "little fasts" and were congratulated by their parents and friends for their accomplishment. I remember the first time I was to do a "little fast," I made a silent promise to myself to fast for the whole day like my parents. I actually managed to pull it off, and made both myself and my parents very proud!

Worksheet: "First Fast" by Alireza Doostdar

An important part of coming of age in a Muslim family is when a young girl or boy begins to observe Islamic rituals like prayer five times a day or the Ramadan fast. These are important milestones for Muslim children as they grow up and provide a sense of community and responsibility to during the holiday.

Children who desire to fast during Ramadan usually do not fast all day or completely refrain from food and drink. More often, young Muslims ease into the daylong fast through accomplishing smaller fasts—perhaps by fasting only for part of the day or having small snacks or drink throughout the day. Once they get a bit older, children will attempt to keep a full fast.

In Alireza's family, how did children celebrate Ramadan?

Why do you think that Alireza wanted to fast?

In your own family, culture, or religion, what milestones mark children coming of age?

Notice that Alireza helps his mother to make the special desserts that make Ramadan *iftars* special. How do you contribute to your family's celebration of special ceremonies and holidays?

Lesson Plans: Ramadan Lanterns

The creation and hanging of Ramadan lanterns, or *fanoos*, are an age-old Egyptian tradition. Some people believe that the custom has roots from the time of the pharaohs, perhaps from the celebration of the birth of the god Osiris. Others trace it to a Coptic Christian tradition of lighting candles during Christmas. Still others relate it to people welcoming a heroic sultan with lanterns in the city of Cairo, lighting the dark streets during Ramadan in the time of Fatimid, or to children lighting the way for women who walk through evening streets.

Children sing traditional songs as they walk from house to house swinging their bright lanterns on Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr evenings. One such song is listed below:

*Wahawi, ya wahawi
Iyyahah
You have gone, O Sha'ban
You have come, O Ramadan
Iyyahah
The daughter of the Sultan
Is wearing her kaftan
Iyyahah
For God the forgiver
Give us this season's gift.*

The opening lines do not have exact meanings, but most likely allude to fire or candlelight. “*You have gone, O’ Sha’ban*” refers to the month before Ramadan in the Muslim calendar. The “*kaftan*” is a long robe many women wear. “*Give us this season’s gift*” refers to the friends, neighbors and families who give children small gifts as they travel through neighborhoods with their lanterns.

Making Ramadan lanterns is a traditional craft in cities like Cairo. Metal smiths make beautiful creations of molded and punched metal with colored or clear glass insets. Inside lies a candleholder placed so that light shines through the glass and holes in the metal. In addition to these traditional lanterns, children today also love the modern equivalent: Plastic, battery-powered lanterns in bright colors, which often have prerecorded music and flashing lights that turn on at the touch of a button. Making Ramadan lanterns is a great activity for children and an opportunity to discuss and compare holiday customs from around the world.

Activity 6: Ramadan Lanterns in Egypt

Appropriate Grade Level: 2-5

Subject Area(s): Social Studies, Art

Student Goals / Focus: Students will make their own versions of Ramadan lanterns and learn about the holiday from a creative perspective.

Materials:

- Brightly- colored construction paper, including yellow and orange
- Scissors
- Glitter, stickers, markers, and other decorative materials
- Tape, stapler, or glue

Activity Procedure:**Option One**

- Take a piece of brightly-colored construction paper and fold it lengthwise.
- Cut evenly-spaced perpendicular slits through the fold, leaving an uncut margin of one inch on the other three sides.
- Unfold the paper. Decorate it with glitter, stick-on stars or other shapes, or self-drawn designs.
- Lay the slit paper on top of a piece of yellow or orange construction paper. Make sure the paper is positioned so that the fold sticks up and away from the table.
- Roll the paper into a tube, and tape, staple or glue the short sides together. You will be able to see the yellow “light” through the slits in the lantern. Cut off any extra yellow paper that sticks out from the ends of the lantern.
- Cut a strip of paper for a handle and attach it to the top of the lantern.

[Similar activities are often used to create a “Chinese” lantern for the Chinese New Year, so you may find other diagrams and instructions by searching for Chinese lantern crafts online.]

Option Two

Slightly older students may wish to create a more complicated design for their lanterns. Experiment with creating a template that your students can use. You might create a version with three or four sides and encourage students to cut out more complicated patterns on each of the sides before attaching the four facets together over a yellow or orange paper liner. You can find many Islamic arabesque and geometric patterns online for students to copy or adapt to their own artwork.

Option Three

Since traditional artisans often create lanterns with punched tin or brass, you may have students experiment with creating a design on a recycled tin can by using nails. The final product can be enhanced with a tea light to showcase the delightful design. You can find instructions for these and many other lantern crafts on the Internet.

For Discussion:

As students create their lanterns, teachers may wish to pose the following questions:

- How does the custom of Ramadan lanterns in Egypt compare to American holiday customs?
- Are there similarities with Christmas lights, Hanukkah menorahs, the Chinese New Year, the Hindu festival of Diwali, etc?
- What do you think of when hearing the Ramadan carol above?
- Besides creating Ramadan lanterns, can you think of another way you think you would celebrate Ramadan if you were a young child in Egypt?

Bibliography for Ramadan Curriculum Kit

Educational Resources for Elementary Students Available in our Library

Videos

Schlessinger Media (2004, 1996). Holidays for children: Ramadan [DVD].

Children learn about fasting and prayer during Ramadan through the music, history, and literature of Islam. Grades K-4.

McGee, R. (1999, 1997). Ramadan: A fast of faith [VHS]. (Available from Films for the Humanities, Princeton, NJ).

This lyrical program, beautifully filmed in Java and Sumatra, gently unfolds to tell the story of this month long Muslim fast through the eyes of a young couple. From the ritual purification that precedes the observance to the festival of Id-al-Fitr that ends it, Ramadan is described in detail.

IIS Productions (1994, 1991). Ramadan and fasting [VHS]. Alternate title: Syam, fasting during Ramadan. (Available from Islamic Information Service, Altadena, CA.)

This video explains the observance of Ramadan and its importance to Muslims from a Muslim perspective. Grades 2-5.

Islamic Circle of North America (1997). Ramadan Mubarak [VHS]. Adam's World No. 9. (Available from Sound Vision, Chicago.)

This film explains the importance of fasting during Ramadan. Ramadan Mubarak features Ramadan and Eid, a trip to Indonesia, and an introduction to Arabic letters.

Music

Ramadan Song

<http://www.submission.org/YES/child2.html>

For young learners, this Web site provides Ramadan activities and a Ramadan song at the bottom of the page. Grades K-2.

Books

Cooper, J. (1989). *Muslim festivals*. East Sussex, England: Wayland.

This book recounts the basic history of Islam, Muhammad, Ramadan, and other celebrations with photographs from around the world. A Muslim calendar, glossary of terms and index complete this resource. Grades 2-5.

Douglass, S. L. (2004). *Ramadan*. Minneapolis: Carolrhoda Books.

This book provides an introduction to Islamic observances during the month of Ramadan and the subsequent festival of Eid-al-Fitr. Grades K-4.

Ganeri, A. (2003). *Muslim festivals throughout the year*. Mankato, MN: Smart Apple Media.

Introducing the main religious festivals of Islam, this book tells the story behind each festival. It describes how people celebrate Muslim festivals around the world, and provides instructions for related activities. Grades 3-6.

Ghazi, S. H. (1996). *Ramadan*. New York: Holiday House.

This book describes the celebration of Ramadan by an Islamic family and discusses the meaning and importance of this holiday in the Islamic religion. Grades K-4.

Gnojewski, C. (2004). *Ramadan: A Muslim time of fasting, prayer and celebration*. Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Publishing.

This book provides general information on Ramadan including the sky watch for the new moon, mosques, Eid festivities, and craft projects. Grades 2-6.

Hoyt-Goldsmith, D. (2001). *Celebrating Ramadan*. New York: Holiday House.

This book follows a devout Muslim fourth grader living in New Jersey through the holy month of Ramadan. Ibraheem completes his first fast and we see the challenges and joys of a young Muslim in the U.S. Grades 2-7, with reading aloud for younger readers.

Hughes, M. (2003). *My Id-ul-Fitr*. Chicago: Raintree.

Illustrations and simple text describe how one family celebrates Id-ul-Fitr. This book includes sections on Id-ul-Fitr at school, a Quranic school, new clothes, Id night, presents at Id, and the mosque at Id. Grades K-5.

Kerven, R. (1997). *Id-ul-Fitr*. Austin, TX: Raintree Steck-Vaughn.

This book introduces some of the beliefs and customs of Muslims, particularly those connected with the Great Festival of Id al-Fitr. Includes bibliographical references and index. Grades 3-6.

Kezzeia, E. (1991). *The Ramadan adventure of Fasfoose Mouse*. Indianapolis, IN: American Trust Publications.

Fasfoose is a young mouse whose family lives in the closet of a Muslim family. When Fasfoose becomes friends with the daughter of the house, he learns about Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr. Grades K-3.

Knight, K. (1997). *Islamic festivals*. Crystal Lake, IL: Heinemann Library.

This book introduces the festivals celebrated in the Islamic faith and discusses rites, ceremonies and feasts/fasting. Includes bibliographical references and index. Grades 4-7.

Marchant, K. (2001). *Muslim festival tales*. Austin, TX: Raintree Steck-Vaughn.

This series of festival tales (stories, poems, plays, songs) touches on fasts and feasts, Islamic legends, and folklore. Grades 2-5.

Marx, D. F. (2002). *Ramadan*. New York: Children's Press.

This book gives a simple introduction to the traditions and festivities of Ramadan. Grades K-2.

Nazlee, S. (1994). *Imran learns about Ramadan*. London: Ta-Ha Publishers.

From the eyes of a young boy who is too young to fast, this book is a story about the meaning of Ramadan from a Muslim perspective. Discussion questions for children and adults are included.

See also resources in the **First Fast** lesson plan.

Much of this material was previously published in Perspectives: The Newsletter of the Middle East Outreach Council, Winter 2005.