

WHAT ARE SOME SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ISLAM, JUDAISM, AND CHRISTIANITY AND HOW DO THESE RELIGIONS VIEW TERRORIST VIOLENCE?

(this activity is adapted from *The Middle East in Transition*, SCIS, 1994)

ACTIVITY OBJECTIVE

The students will examine some of the similarities and differences between the world's major monotheistic religions and assess how they view terrorist violence.

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

- Worksheet 1, "Introduction to Christianity, Islam, and Judaism"
- Teacher Resource 1, "Introduction to Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, KEY"
- Worksheet 2, "Quotations from Holy Books"
- Handout 1, "Three Faiths Form One Feuding Family"

STRATEGIES

Islam is the religion practiced by the majority of the people living in the Middle East. However, the region is the birthplace of all three of the world's major monotheistic religions: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. The vast majority of the followers of each of these religions reject religious violence, though there are also examples of violent acts perpetrated in the name of all three. This activity allows students to explore similarities and differences between these religions and discuss how they address religious violence.

Begin this activity by dividing the class into groups of three to four students. Distribute to each group Worksheet 1, "Introduction to Christianity, Islam, and Judaism." After the groups have had a chance to fill in their worksheet, use Teacher Resource 1, "Introduction to Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, KEY," to discuss similarities and differences between the three religions with the class.

Although some students may be familiar with the Old Testament and New Testament, many will probably be less familiar with the Qur'an. Continue this activity by distributing Worksheet 2, "Quotations from Holy Books" to the groups. After the groups have completed their worksheet, raise the following questions with the class:

- Which of the quotations do you think come from the Old Testament? [*none*]
- Which of the quotations do you think come from the New Testament? [*none*]
- Which of the quotations do you think come from the Qur'an? [*all ten passages are from the Qur'an*]
- Do you think most people recognize the connections between these three religions?

Conclude this activity by distributing Handout 1, "Three Faiths Form One Feuding Family." After the students have had a chance to read the article, raise the following questions with the class:

- How do many Americans view Muslims? [*The article points out stereotypes, such as people living in desert areas, American athletes such as Muhammad Ali and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, and terrorists*]
- What is the world's most populous Islamic country? [*Indonesia*]
- Why are struggles between Jews, Christians, and Muslims “family feuds”? [*Because of common geographic roots and religious frameworks*]
- How do Judaism, Christianity, and Islam compare when it comes to accepting or rejecting violent attacks like the terrorist attacks of the World Trade Center and Pentagon? [*Though there are exceptions, the overwhelming majority of Christians, Muslims, and Jews reject such heinous attacks*]
- Does the Taliban represent the views of the majority of Muslims? [*No*]
- Why do some Muslims feel threatened by Western culture? [*Because they feel that they are exploited by Western capitalism and that their cultural values are compromised by expanding Western influences*]
- What is a jihad? [*“a struggle in the path of God” against aggression or for justice; a jihad has strict rules against the harming of innocent people*]

INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIANITY, ISLAM, AND JUDAISM

Directions: For each statement below, determine whether the question applies to Christianity, Islam, or Judaism. Each statement may apply to more than one religion. Write the appropriate letter (C, I, or J) in the blanks.

- _____ 1. Their Holy Book is called the Qur'an.
- _____ 2. Jesus is considered the Son of God.
- _____ 3. This religion accepts both the Old and New Testaments as Holy Books.
- _____ 4. Followers participate in a pilgrimage to Mecca.
- _____ 5. This religion is the oldest of the three.
- _____ 6. Abraham is regarded as the father of their people.
- _____ 7. This religion believes in one Supreme Being.
- _____ 8. This religion accepts the Old Testament as its only Holy Book.
- _____ 9. Abraham and Moses are considered prophets.
- _____ 10. Jerusalem is considered a holy city.
- _____ 11. Followers of this religion call themselves Muslims.
- _____ 12. The Ten Commandments are accepted as guidelines for ethical behavior.
- _____ 13. Jesus is recognized as an important prophet.
- _____ 14. This religion has a number of denominations or sects.
- _____ 15. This religion believes in the divine creation of the universe.
- _____ 16. This religion is the second oldest of the three religions.
- _____ 17. Their Holy Book includes the story of the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem.
- _____ 18. Their place of worship is a church.
- _____ 19. Their place of worship is a mosque.
- _____ 20. Their place of worship is a synagogue.

Adapted from: Materials developed by the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, University of California, Berkeley.

INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIANITY, ISLAM, AND JUDAISM: KEY

Directions: For each statement below, determine whether the question applies to Christianity, Islam, or Judaism. Each statement may apply to more than one religion. Write the appropriate letter (C, I, or J) in the blanks.

- I 1. Their Holy Book is called the Qur'an.
- C 2. Jesus is considered the Son of God.
- C, I 3. This religion accepts both the Old and New Testaments as Holy Books.
- I 4. Followers participate in a pilgrimage to Mecca.
- J 5. This religion is the oldest of the three.
- I, J 6. Abraham is regarded as the father of their people.
- C, I, J 7. This religion believes in one Supreme Being.
- J 8. This religion accepts the Old Testament as its only Holy Book.
- C, I, J 9. Abraham and Moses are considered prophets.
- C, I, J 10. Jerusalem is considered a holy city.
- I 11. Followers of this religion call themselves Muslims.
- C, I, J 12. The Ten Commandments are accepted as guidelines for ethical behavior.
- I 13. Jesus is recognized as an important prophet.
- C, I, J 14. This religion has a number of denominations or sects.
- C, I, J 15. This religion believes in the divine creation of the universe.
- C 16. This religion is the second oldest of the three religions.
- C, I 17. Their Holy Book includes the story of the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem.
- C 18. Their place of worship is a church.
- I 19. Their place of worship is a mosque.
- J 20. Their place of worship is a synagogue.

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QUOTATIONS FROM HOLY BOOKS

Directions: Each statement below comes from a Holy Book. Indicate whether you think the source of each statement is: (A) the Old Testament or Torah; (B) the New Testament; or (C) the Qur'an.

_____ 1. And We said: O Adam! Dwell thou and thy wife in the Garden, and eat ye freely of the fruits thereof where ye will; but come not near this tree lest ye become wrongdoers.

_____ 2. O Children of Israel! Remember My favor wherewith I favored you and how I preferred you to all creatures.

_____ 3. And remember when We deliver you from Pharaoh's folk, who were afflicting you with dreadful torment slaying your sons and sparing your women.

_____ 4. We believe in God and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the prophets received from their Lord.

_____ 5. And when the angels said: O Mary! Lo! God hath chosen thee and made thee pure, and hath preferred thee above all the women of creation.

_____ 6. And when We did appoint for Moses forty nights of solitude, and then ye chose the calf, when he had gone from you, and were wrongdoers.

_____ 7. And I come confirming that which was before me of the Torah, and to make lawful some of that which was forbidden unto you. I come unto you with a sign from your Lord, so keep your duty to God and obey me.

_____ 8. She said: My Lord! How can I have a child when no mortal has touched me? He said: So it will be! God createth what He will.

_____ 9. And remember when the angel said: O Mary! Lo! God giveth thee glad tidings of a word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, illustrious in the world and the hereafter, and one of those brought near unto God.

_____ 10. One among them said: Kill not Joseph, but if ye must be doing, fling him into the depth of the pit. Some caravan will find him.

Atlanta Journal and Constitution, September 19, 2001.

THREE FAITHS FORM ONE FEUDING FAMILY

Muslims, Jews, Christians share patriarch, moral code

BY GAYLE WHITE

For many Americans who hear the word Muslim, one of three images comes to mind: a Bedouin on a camel, an American athlete in silk shorts, or an international terrorist.

Each is correct to a limited extent.

Many of the world's Muslims do live in desert areas. Some prominent American athletes --- Muhammad Ali and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, for instance --- are Muslim. And a few Muslims have attempted to justify terrorism through their religion.

But Islam is much broader and deeper than any of those snapshots. More than a billion people are Muslims, and Islam is the majority religion in more than 50 countries from Indonesia to sub-Saharan Africa, from Central Asia to Eastern Europe.

To label Islam a "Middle Eastern religion" is as misleading as to classify Christianity or Judaism in those terms, said Abdullahi An-Na'im, professor of law and a fellow of the Law and Religion Program at Emory University.

Although all three faiths were founded in the region, they spread beyond it.

Today, more Muslims live in sub-Saharan Africa than in the Middle East, he said, and Indonesia has more Muslims than any other country.

In the United States, many African-Americans have converted to Islam. Most are Sunni, or orthodox Muslims, although a small percentage are affiliated with the more separatist Nation of Islam.

Besides their common geographic roots, Judaism, Christianity and Islam claim a common father in Abraham and share a moral code in the Ten Commandments, said An-Na'im, an internationally recognized scholar on Islam and human rights. Struggles between Jews, Christians and Muslims, therefore, are actually family feuds.

Islam is the youngest of the world's three great monotheistic religions. Its founder was Hadhrat Muhammad, a merchant's son born in Saudi Arabia about 570.

Muhammad said that when he was about 40, he was visited by a figure identified as the angel Gabriel. Some two years later, he again claimed to receive messages from God, which continued through his life.

Many of these messages coincided with the teachings of Judaism and Christianity.

"The framework for this new religion was decidedly biblical," said Devin Stewart, chairman of the Department of Middle Eastern Studies at Emory University. "This is seen in many aspects of the new faith, not least in its insistence on monotheism . . . the idea that there is one and only one God, who created and sustains life and, therefore, should be worshipped and thanked. The concepts of sin, the soul, the afterlife, heaven and hell, the Day of Judgment, are all familiar."

And, just as some Jews and Christians sometimes cite their religion to justify their political positions, so do some Muslims.

"People tend to think of what's happening now --- the Taliban and bin Laden --- in terms that are purely religious," said John Iskander, assistant professor in religious studies at Georgia State University. "They de-politicize what's happening and focus entirely on Islam. They ask, 'Is Islam a violent religion?'"

The answer is yes and no, he said. "Islam is practiced in all

kinds of different ways, but the history has been more tolerant than intolerant."

Many Muslims have opposed the Taliban because they believe it is not representative of true Islam, he said, just as most Christians denounce the bombing of abortion clinics by people who claim their authority is based in Christianity.

Other Muslims who reject the indiscriminate violence of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon may have some sense of satisfaction that America has been humbled, said Fred Denny, an Islamic specialist at the University of Colorado in Boulder. They feel threatened by the spreading of Western culture and values, and exploited by Western capitalism.

Even though Arab Muslims own the land over much of the world's oil supply, many do not feel they control the oil, said An-Na'im of Emory.

"It is physically controlled by Muslim countries, but it is economically controlled by Western interests."

"There is a sense that Muslim values are compromised increasingly as Western power has extended influence throughout the world," said Denny. "There is also a very great sense of grievance on the part of some Muslim peoples --- Afghanistan is one place --- that have been subjected to modern totalitarian regimes. . . . So, we've got extremist groups, mostly fairly small, that will commit extreme acts."

Those acts are frequently couched in religious terms, especially jihad.

The word is often equated with a holy war, but actually means "struggle in the path of God."

"Jihad may include armed conflict, but it has strict rules --- one of which is not to harm innocent people," Denny said.

Add to that the fact that suicide is condemned in Islam, and hijacking airplanes into buildings occupied by office workers is "sincerely and formally rejected as utterly inauthentic by the highest Muslim authorities," Denny said.

The vast majority of Muslims in the world want to be participants in the larger world "and not left behind," he said.

"I think one of the hopes for Muslims is in the large Muslim diaspora in Europe and the Americas --- not just North America but Brazil, Chile, Mexico and Argentina," Denny said. "I think the future hope may lie in mediation between Western Muslims in those countries and their nations and regions of origin --- and a lot of hard work, patience and diplomacy."

As someone who has spent his life studying Islam and has visited and lived in Islamic countries, Denny feels grief both over the situation in the United States and over those in some of the world's Muslim nations.

He has hope that they can live in peace.

"I'm not optimistic in a foolish sense," he said, "but I'm not giving up."

Nations with largest Muslim population:

Country.....	Muslims.....	Total population
1. Indonesia.....	170 million.....	212 million
2. Pakistan.....	136 million.....	157 million
3. Bangladesh.....	106 million.....	129 million
4. India.....	103 million.....	1 billion
5. Turkey.....	62 million.....	67 million
6. Iran.....	61 million.....	68 million
7. Egypt.....	54 million.....	69 million
8. Nigeria.....	48 million.....	112 million
9. China.....	37 million.....	1 billion

Sources: Adherents.com; World Christian Encyclopedia, 2001; CIA World Factbook; The Top 10 of Everything; Knight Ridder Tribune

TIMELINE FOCUS: THE ISLAMIC WORLD

Circa 610: Prompted by what he says are divine revelations, the Prophet Muhammad begins espousing a new version of pure monotheism in pagan Mecca, a town located in what is now Saudi Arabia.

622: Muhammad migrates to Medina and establishes an Islamic community. The Muslim calendar begins.

632: Death of Muhammad.

632-661: Islamic rule extends to North Africa, Persia (Iran), Jerusalem, Damascus and Central Asia.

732: Muslim advance into Europe is halted in France by Christian armies.

750-925: Islam's "Golden Age." Under a unified empire, Islamic legal, religious and political thought flowers.

1096: European Christians launch the first Crusade to take the Holy Land from Muslims.

1099: Crusaders conquer Jerusalem.

1258: Mongols conquer the Islamic center of Baghdad.

1291: Islamic forces defeat the last Crusader stronghold in Palestine.

1453: Constantinople (now Istanbul) becomes a Muslim city when it is conquered by the Ottoman Turks.

1492: With fall of Grenada, Muslim rule ends in Spain.

1683: Muslim Turks, controlling much of southeastern Europe, attack Vienna.

1798: The French, under Napoleon, invade Egypt.

1832: French forces occupy Algeria.

1920: European colonial governments control ex-Ottoman lands of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Transjordan.

1932: Saudi Arabia established.

1947: Muslim state of Pakistan established.

1948: Israel established. First Arab-Israeli war.

1967: Second Arab-Israeli war.

1973: Third Arab-Israeli war.

1979: Islamic government established in Iran. Soviet Union invades Afghanistan.

1989: Soviets withdraw from Afghanistan. Islamic rebel forces overthrow the Communist government.

1990: Iraq invades Kuwait.

1991: Muslim-dominated former Soviet republics in Central Asia gain independence. U.S.-led forces push Iraq from Kuwait.

GLOSSARY

Allah: "The God." Muslims believe that he is the Supreme Being, the one and only God. Allah is the same God worshipped by Jews and Christians.

Islam: Religion preached by the Prophet Muhammad. It means "surrender" or "submission to the will of God."

Jihad: A Quranic term for the legitimate struggle against aggression or striving for justice.

Mosque: House of worship for Muslims.

Muhammad: Islam's final prophet, Muslims believe he received revelations from Allah that were transmitted by the angel Gabriel.

Muslim: A person who submits to Allah and follows the teaching of Islam. Muslims accept some Old Testament books, including the story of Moses receiving the Ten Commandments.

Quran (or Koran): The holy book of Islam.

Shi'ite: A branch of Islam found primarily in Iran and parts of Iraq that split from the Sunni in a disagreement over Muhammad's successor.

Sufism: Islamic mysticism, based on renunciation of wealth and devotion to religious study and meditation.

Sunni: The major branch of Islam, representing about 90 percent of the world's Muslims. Its name is derived from the word sunnah, or path.

FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM:

Shadah, or confession of faith: The declaration that there is no God but God and Muhammad is his messenger.

Salat, or prayer: Required of Muslims five times daily.

Zakat, or almsgiving: A means of "purifying" wealth.

Siyam, or fasting: Refraining from food, drink and sexual

relations during daylight hours
of the holy month of Ramadan.

Hajj, or pilgrimage: Obligatory
visit to Mecca for every Muslim
who is physically and
financially able.

--- Sources: Michael D. Coogan,
"Illustrated Guide to World
Religions"; Encyclopaedia
Britannica; World Book
Encyclopedia

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