

# ISLAM: STORY OF MUHAMMAD



# ISLAM: STORY OF MUHAMMAD

## Description

Through the investigation of selected writings and various electronic resources, including primary and secondary sources from across the Islamic world, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain in detail the story of Muhammad, what tradition says about his role as the prophet of Islam.

## Subjects

World History

## Grade Level

11-12

## Duration

90 minutes

## Tour Links

- Islamic Cultural Center, Madrid, Spain
- Mosque of Cordoba, Spain
- Hagia Sophia, Istanbul
- Various mosques around the world

## Essential Questions

- Who was Muhammad? Why is he called the “Prophet”?
- How do Mohammad and his revelations fit into the story of Islam?

## Academic Summary

### Selections from the Life of Muhammad by Ibn Ishaq, 773 CE

It is alleged in popular stories (and only God knows the truth) that Amina d. Wahb, the mother of God's apostle, used to say when she was pregnant with God's apostle that a voice said to her, "You are pregnant with the lord of this people and when he is born say, 'I put him in the care of the One from the evil of every envier; then call him Muhammad.'" As she was pregnant with him she saw a light come forth from her by which she could see the castles of Busra in Syria....

Halima the apostle's foster mother used to say that she went forth from her country with her husband and little son whom she was nursing, among the women of her tribe, in search of other babies to nurse. This was a year of famine when they were destitute.... They could not sleep the whole night because of the weeping of her hungry child. She had no milk to give him, nor could there she-camel provide a morning draught, but we were hoping for rain and relief. 'I rode upon my donkey which had kept back the other riders through its weakness and emaciation so that it was a nuisance to them. When we reached Mecca, we looked out for foster children, and the apostle of God was offered to every one of us, and each woman refused him when she was told he was an orphan, because we hoped to get payment from the child's father. We said, "An orphan! and what will his mother and grandfather do?" and so we spurned him because of that. Every woman who came with me got a suckling except me, and when we decided to depart I said to my husband: "By God, I do not like the idea of returning with my friends without a suckling; I will go and take that orphan." He replied, "Do as you please; perhaps God will bless us on his account." So I went and took him for the sole reason that I could not find anyone else. I took him back to my baggage, and as soon as I put him in my bosom, my breasts overflowed with milk which he drank until he was satisfied, as also did his foster-brother....

When we used to have him with us my flock used to yield milk in abundance. We milked them and drank while other people had not a drop, nor could they find anything in their animals' udders....

[A learned man] told me that some of the apostle's companions asked him to tell them about himself. He said: "I am what Abraham my father prayed for and the good news of [my brother] Jesus. When my mother was carrying me she saw a light proceeding from her which showed her the castles of Syria. I was suckled among the B. Sa'd b. Bakr, and while I was with a brother of mine behind our tents shepherding the lambs, two men in white raiment came to me with a gold basin full of snow. Then they seized me and opened up my belly, extracted my heart and split it; then they extracted a black drop from it and threw it away; then they washed my heart and my belly with that snow until they had thoroughly cleansed them. Then one said to the other, weigh him against ten of his people; they did so and I outweighed them. Then they weighed me against a hundred and then a thousand, and I outweighed them. He said, 'Leave him alone, for by God, if you weighed him against all his people he would outweigh them...'"

Islam ...

It is the fastest growing major religion in the world. Today, over 1.2 billion people, approximately 1/6 of the world's population, adheres to its teachings. It has been around for almost 1400 years, and yet confusion and distrust of the religion permeate many corners of the globe, particularly in western countries like the United States and much of Europe.

Unfortunately, many westerners today see Islam as a religion of terrorism and repression. Images of fanatics, bombs, planes and towers often cloud the issue, but at its heart Islam is a religion of peace.

First, a few definitions for clarity...

(Note: the words below are written using the most common English spellings, but translations from Arabic to English can produce different spellings of the same words.)

- 1) Islam – Arabic word for submission
- 2) Muslim – Arabic word meaning one who submits
- 3) Allah – Arabic word for the one God
- 4) Quran – Islam's holy scriptures

Many westerners do not realize that Muslims pray to the same God to which Christians and Jews pray. All three religions share a common heritage, and yet they have also been at odds over the centuries. The problem is how each interprets God's messages to humanity.

According to the Quran, God (Allah) gave his message three different times to humanity. First came Judaism, where God revealed himself through the Jewish prophets of the Old Testament. Later came the message of God's love and redemption through his prophet Jesus. Muslims refer to Jesus 93 separate times in the Quran (never in a bad way), but they see him as a man and a prophet, not God's son.

Finally, about 1400 years ago, God decided to send Muhammad, an Arab trader from Mecca, Saudi Arabia, as his final prophet to humanity. Tradition holds that Muhammad, a man whose early life historians and believers know very little about, received a series of revelations from the Archangel Gabriel. Those revelations became the basis for the new faith and were later written down by Muhammad's followers in what became the Quran.

Unfortunately, much of the prophet's early life is shrouded in mystery and legend. Stories written after his death say that he was born around 570 CE in Mecca, a cosmopolitan and multicultural city on the Arabian Peninsula.

At age 40, after a lifetime of doubt and questions about his beliefs, Muhammad was meditating in a cave outside the city when received a series of visits and revelations from the Archangel Gabriel. The angel commanded Muhammad to speak the word of Allah. The recitations were later written down by his followers and became the basis for the Quran. Since Muhammad himself wrote nothing, some traditions even say that he might have been illiterate.

After receiving his messages, Muhammad began to preach in public, first in Mecca (where he was rejected) and later in Medina, a city about 200 miles north of his home (where his words were accepted). By 630, the prophet's followers had concurred most of the Arabian Peninsula, including Mecca which in turn became the center of the new faith. Two years later, in June 632 CE, Muhammad died in Medina. He was approximately 62 years old.

Today, his simple tomb is covered by a mausoleum built by the Ottoman Turks in the 13th century.

Today, no one knows what Muhammad looked like. Various images can be found around the world, but according to the Quran, the prophet ordered that no contemporary images of him be painted as he feared that he would be worshipped as an idol. Many Islamic representations of the prophet show him as a man with a blank or veiled face. Others show different Arab male figures. Believers say it doesn't matter since Muhammad was only a man, not divine. No one knows for sure.

Through the investigation of selected writings and various electronic resources, including primary and secondary sources from across the Islamic world, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain in detail the story of Muhammad, and what tradition says about his role as the prophet of Islam.

## Objectives

1. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain what is known about the story of Muhammad.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain what tradition says about the role Muhammad played as the prophet of Islam and how he is seen today.

## Procedures

### I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: Who was Muhammad? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of the primary sources and readings from the websites listed below. (5 min)

### II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Brief overview Islam and the last prophet Muhammad. (30 min)
- Video Excerpts – Muhammad (15 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the primary sources and articles on Islam and Muhammad, taking notes as appropriate. (15 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles for homework the night before class to prepare for class discussion.
- Group Activity – Discussion on Muhammad the Prophet of Islam. (15 min)

### III. Closure

- Assessment – Short Essay / DBQ: Explain in detail the story of Muhammad and what tradition says about his role as the prophet of Islam.

## Extension

### On tour: Islamic Cultural Center, Madrid

While on tour in Madrid, students can visit the Islamic Cultural Center where they can see for themselves the largest such center in Spain. Dedicated to serving the Muslim population in the city and across Iberia, the center hosts a mosque, library, assembly hall and school. The land the center sits on was donated by the city. It was opened in September 1992 and is open to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. There is also an Arabic restaurant on the site, which claims to serve real Arabic meals at "reasonable prices."

## Web Links

### Lesson Plan Websites

- [www.saudiembassy.net/about/country-information/Islam/the\\_coming\\_of\\_The\\_Prophet.aspx](http://www.saudiembassy.net/about/country-information/Islam/the_coming_of_The_Prophet.aspx)  
The Coming of the Prophet (website) – from the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia
- <http://www.pbs.org/muhammad/>  
Muhammad Legacy of a Prophet (website) – from PBS
- [www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/muhammadi-sira.asp](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/muhammadi-sira.asp)  
Selections from the Life of Muhammad by Ibn Ishaq, 773 CE (primary source) – from the Medieval Sourcebook at Fordham University
- [www.islamic.net.au/index.htm](http://www.islamic.net.au/index.htm)  
Serenity Islamic Research Academy (website). SIRA, an Islamic research center in Australia, runs this website dedicated to disseminating unbiased information on Islam. Highly recommended for all students, especially those looking for more in-depth explanations.
- <http://qurango.com/english.html>  
Quran in the English Language (primary source)
- [http://wncre.bangor.ac.uk/Outline%20of%20Islam%20and%20schemes%20of%20work%20\\_draft%203\\_.pdf](http://wncre.bangor.ac.uk/Outline%20of%20Islam%20and%20schemes%20of%20work%20_draft%203_.pdf)  
Islam: A Resource Pack for Teachers (PDF worksheet packet)
- [www.teachingandprojects.com/Other%20Religions/02-%20LIFE%20OF%20MUHAMMAD.ppt](http://www.teachingandprojects.com/Other%20Religions/02-%20LIFE%20OF%20MUHAMMAD.ppt)  
Life of the Prophet Muhammad (PowerPoint) – from Clarice Acord, Social Studies teacher at Cal Young Middle School in Eugene, Oregon
- [www.slideshare.net/mhutchinson/the-five-pillars-of-islam-1530526](http://www.slideshare.net/mhutchinson/the-five-pillars-of-islam-1530526)  
The Five Pillars of Islam (PowerPoint)
- [www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1](http://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1)  
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video). Great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA. Highly recommended for teachers.
- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=MvaW\\_xh5rc4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MvaW_xh5rc4)  
The History Channel: Muhammad the Prophet (video) – from the History Channel this 45-minute video works well for most kids.
- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSIsB5TRfUY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSIsB5TRfUY)  
The Life of the Prophet Muhammad (video). This 3-hour video, produced by the BBC as a 3-part series, is obviously too long for most classes, but it is extremely well done. It is narrated by Rageh Omaar, a Somali born and Oxford educated BBC journalist who also happens to be a Muslim. Omaar does a great job explaining the history of Islam and Muhammad's role as its prophet from the perspective of an educated historian. Highly recommended for all AP and Advanced students, especially as an out-of-class assignment.
- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mdp3v9feoSA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mdp3v9feoSA)  
Inside Islam (video). This 90-minute video, produced by the History Channel shortly after the 9/11 attacks, is probably too long for most in-class showings, but it is worth it. The video does a great job explaining the Five Pillars, the origins of the faith, Muhammad's place and Islam in the world today.

### Background Information

- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad>  
Muhammad – Wikipedia article
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam>  
Islam – Wikipedia article

### Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/spain/al-andalus-islamic-spain](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/spain/al-andalus-islamic-spain)  
Al-Andalus: Islamic Spain
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/spain/reconquista-of-iberia](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/spain/reconquista-of-iberia)  
Reconquista (711-1492)
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/holyland/islam-muhammad-the-prophet](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/holyland/islam-muhammad-the-prophet)  
Islam – Muhammad the Prophet
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/holyland/islam-five-pillars](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/holyland/islam-five-pillars)  
Islam – The Five Pillars
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/turkey/byzantine-istanbul-constantinople-hagia-sophia](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/turkey/byzantine-istanbul-constantinople-hagia-sophia)  
Byzantine Empire – Constantinople: Hagia Sophia
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/turkey/byzantine-istanbul-fall-of-constantinople-1453](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/turkey/byzantine-istanbul-fall-of-constantinople-1453)  
Byzantine Istanbul – Fall of Constantinople 1453
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/england/medieval-britain-richard-the-lionheart](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/medieval-britain-richard-the-lionheart)  
Medieval England – Richard the Lionheart

## Key Terms

- Allah
- Five Pillars
- Islam
- Mohammad
- Muslim
- Prophet
- Ramadan
- Quran

