




Ramadan and Public Education

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To view the accompanying webinar on YouTube,
Ramadan and Public Education: How Teachers Can Meet
the Needs of Muslim Students during COVID-19 and
Beyond, click here.

Agenda

- Understanding the purpose of Ramadan
- Rules of fasting, clarifying misconceptions
- Cultural practices
- Supporting students observing fasting
- Impact of COVID-19 on Muslim community and Ramadan practice
- Suggested resources (outreach and literature)
- Open for questions

Purpose and Philosophy of Ramadan

- Ninth month of Islamic calendar (lunar); changes each year
- One of five pillars of Islam ("sawm"/fasting)
- Described in surah al-Baqarah in Quran
- Month of purification, recommitment to faith
- Empathy for the poor
- Practice self control and abandon bad habits
- Humility and service to community and those in need
- Culminates in Eid al-Fitr; 1-3 day holiday, no fasting, payment of zakat (pillar, alms tax)



RAMADAN 2020

Fasting hours around the world



Rules/Observances

- Abstain from all food and drink from before dawn to after sunset (fajr prayer/maghrib prayer)
- Refrain from expressing anger/fighting, no sexual relations
- Some individuals also refrain from watching television, listening to music, and/or engaging in “frivolous” activities
- Encouraged to recite entire Quran
- Increase charitable acts
- Elderly, children, pregnant/breastfeeding/menstruating women, individuals with chronic illness exempt
- Unlawful to cause self harm, if fasting is physically intolerable observe fast later in year and/or pay “tax” based on amount to feed one person for a day
- Rules fluctuate between communities

A day in the life... (based on 2020 time)

- Suhoor (pre-dawn meal) approx. 4:30 am
- Fasting begins at fajr prayer approx. 4:55 am
- During day: recite Quran, perform charitable acts, duas (supplemental prayers)
- Two afternoon prayers (dhuhr/noon, asr/late afternoon)
- Attend mosque for maghrib (sunset) prayer, approx. 8:25 pm (with some variation)
- Iftar meal. Water and dates first consumed (tradition, not law)
- Perform night prayer (Isha)
- Timing of prayers changes daily in accordance to the sun (increasing in length as we approach summer solstice)
- Mosques provide time periods for all days of the year, variation amongst different denominations



Cultural Practices

- Daily attendance at mosque for khutba (sermon) which ends at time of iftar ("breakfast")
- Communal prayer and meals
- Sunni community observes Taraweeh prayers
- Ramadan markets, special food (particularly desserts)
- Muslim-majority countries and places with large Muslim populations such as Dearborn, MI may reduce daytime working hours with public celebrations at night (festivals)
- Hosting iftars for family and friends; encouraged to eat in community and share food
- Although some individuals abstain from watching tv, in Muslim majority countries special tv programming (think Muslim version of Hallmark Christmas shows)
- Top right Dearborn, MI Ramadan festival (Credit:AP), lower right Jamkaran mosque, Iran (Credit: The Iran Project)



What it's NOT

- A bummer; Muslims truly look forward to Ramadan
- Oppressive; fasting is a challenge to cultivate humility not a punishment for sins
- Unreasonable; if one is ill or becomes ill during the fast they *must* break their fast
- Inflexible; accommodations always made for people to make up fasts at easier point in year/observe a time zone with shorter daylight hours if in areas like Alaska/upper northern hemisphere
- Bad for you; don't get me started on the "newly discovered" benefits of intermittent fasting diet trends
- Self-serving; time of charitable acts, donations to poor, feeding communities at large (not just Muslims), many mosques have outreach programs

Supporting Students

- Fasting observed at onset of puberty (roughly middle school years); younger children may “practice” fasting by skipping lunch though this is not expected and unlikely in very young children
- Fasting is meant to be a challenge (except in cases of illness or extreme duress); one does not abstain from normal activities including work, school, etc.
- Students should still participate in class, but understand they may be more lethargic or less talkative
- Providing alternative space during lunch time
- Possible exemptions from physical activities/alternative activities during PE courses
- Normalizing Muslim observances; greet students with “Ramadan Mubarak” or “Ramadan Kareem”
- Recognition of Muslim holidays in course curriculum
- Possible absence due to Eid (three day holiday, actual start date only determined on lunar sighting and may vary community to community)

The Challenges of COVID-19

- Most mosques totally shut down; no communal prayers or iftar meals
- No community gatherings/festivities
- Increased isolation especially amongst students away from home and essential workers who maintain isolation from family
- Healthcare providers facing extreme physical duress due to COVID-19; fasting compounds stress on immune systems
- Accessing halal foods during shortages, economic hardships
- Several prominent religious leaders in multiple communities made exemptions for essential workers
- Increased hate rhetoric/Islamophobia in response to COVID-19; traumatic for individuals
- Articles included in references



Teaching Resources and Outreach

- Scholastic: “Celebrating Cultural Diversity with Ramadan” (pre-K to grade 3 focus)
<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/celebrating-cultural-diversity-ramadan-1/>
- PBS Collection: “Promoting Understanding: Islam”. Ramadan video link:
<https://unctv.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/c242a960-8ebc-43c3-a155-b985b78a719d/ramadan/>
- Pinterest/Google: Vast array of activities and crafts for age groups.
- Local NC resources: Islamic Association of Raleigh <https://raleighmasjid.org/> (Sunni)
IABAT Center <http://iabat.org> (Shia)
Muslim Student Associations (MSA); most college campuses

Suggested Readings

- Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, UC Berkeley. “Islamophobia” resource/reading pack and database. <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/global-justice/islamophobia>.
- Ebrahimji, A. (2020, April 23). How coronavirus has changed Ramadan for Muslims this year. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/23/us/ramadan-celebrations-coronavirus-trnd/index.html>.
- Abdelaziz, R. (2020, May 5). Muslim Doctors Fight COVID-19 - And Islamophobia - On The Front Lines. Retrieved from https://www.huffpost.com/entry/muslim-doctors-covid-19-coronavirus_n_5eb0691dc5b607baecd608d0.
- Aziz, S. (2020, April 23). How will the coronavirus pandemic change Ramadan for Muslims? Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/coronavirus-pandemic-change-ramadan-muslims-200420074054279.html>.