Ramadan and Public Education

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Carolina K-12
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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)
• 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


