



Carolina Center for the  
Study of the Middle East  
and Muslim Civilizations

Duke  
UNIVERSITY

MIDDLE EAST STUDIES  
Center

CAROLINA  
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K-12

## Muslims in America

### Overview

This lesson is designed to highlight the legacy and contributions of Muslims in America. Students will understand that American Muslims represent a diverse group of individuals, gaining a greater understanding of the history of Muslims in America and appreciation for the various cultural and faith practices of this group.

### Essential Questions

- What are some of the diverse practices and faith expressions seen in America by Muslims?
- In what ways have Muslims influenced American society and culture?
- What issues and debates in the United States are affecting Muslims?

### Grades

10 - 12

### Subjects

Middle East Studies or World Cultures Elective

### Essential Standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7 - Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media in order to address a question or solve a problem.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9 - Integrate information from diverse sources into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.9, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.9 - Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

### Materials

- Students will need access to the internet.
- Video: [“The Secret History of Muslims in the U.S.”](#) (3:20)
- Article: National Geographic – [How Muslims, Often Misunderstood, Are Thriving in America \(May 2018\)](#) and worksheet (attached)
- Multi-media source: [25 Most Influential American Muslims](#)
- Students will be able to choose to create a product electronically, or using construction paper, markers, and crafting supplies.

### Duration

1 class period (90 minutes)

### Preparation

Prior to beginning this lesson, students should have learned about major world religions including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Teachers could assign reading from the Pluralism Project on Islam (a project out of Harvard University that engages students in studying the new religious diversity in the United States), or all three religions, to have an understanding of the practice of these faith traditions in the United States superficially: [Christianity](#), [Judaism](#), and [Islam](#).

*This lesson was created by Jeff Crisp as part of the Middle East and African Cultures Teacher Fellows Program. For more information about the program, please visit [ncmideast.org/meac-teacher-fellows](http://ncmideast.org/meac-teacher-fellows)*

## Procedure

### Warm up: "The Secret History of Muslims in the U.S."

1. Tell students that Muslims have been in the United States since the time of the earliest explorers and they have played an important role in society. Play the short 3:20 minute video from the New York Times, "[The Secret History of Muslims in the U.S.](#)" Ask students:
  - a. How long have Muslims been living in the United States?
  - b. How have Muslims influenced American society and culture?
  - c. Which of the contributions of Muslims in America were most surprising to you? Why?
2. Using the PowerPoint, "Muslims in America," emphasize three large waves of Muslim immigration to the United States. Using slide 3, explain that some of the earliest known Muslims in America were enslaved Africans, such as Omar ibn Said, who ended up in Fayetteville and is known for writing his autobiography in Arabic (time permitting, students could read "[Oh ye Americans': The Autobiography of Omar ibn Said](#)" and discuss life as an enslaved Muslim in the United States).

Referencing slide 4, explain that the second wave of Muslims to the United States largely stemmed from Arab immigration to the country in the late 1800s-1921. While most of the Arab immigrants from this time were Christian, there were several Muslims who immigrated as well. Finally, using slide 5, share that the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 changed American policies to open the door to immigrants from the entire world. Thus, since the late 1960's the number of Muslim immigrants has increased from many different countries.

Today, "Muslim Americans are largely an immigrant population: Roughly six-in-ten U.S. Muslims ages 18 and over (58%) were born outside the U.S., with origins spread throughout the world. The most common region of origin for Muslim immigrants is South Asia, including 9% who were born in Pakistan. An additional 13% of U.S. Muslims were born elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific region (including Iran), 14% in the Middle East or North Africa, and 5% in sub-Saharan Africa (Source: [Pew Research Center 2017 survey of U.S. Muslims](#))."

### "Being Muslim in America"

3. Students will read and answer questions to the National Geographic Article titled "Being Muslim in America". Pass out copies of the article and ask students to respond to the worksheet (attached). Go over answers as a class. Additional questions for discussion include:
  - a. What kinds of challenges do Muslims in America face, as compared with other faith groups?
  - b. What is the role of mosques in American Muslim life?
  - c. How are Muslims influencing the communities that they work and live in?

### Practice: Most Influential Muslims in America

4. Students will research a prominent contemporary Muslim American figure and create a three-part brochure or electronic presentation to demonstrate their findings.

In 2018, [CNN developed a crowd-sourced list of 25 influential American Muslims](#). Using this list, have students either choose a figure, or assign students a figure to study. Students should use information from the CNN website, but also conduct individual research.

Each brochure/presentation should include each of the following:

- a. Background information on this person (where they are from, career, education)
  - b. Current issues impacting the Muslim population in America that this figure works on
  - c. Contributions from this person to society
5. Students will present what they create with the class and discuss any interesting findings or questions.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## **How Muslims, Often Misunderstood, Are Thriving in America**

1. In the section titled "Progress in Spite of Prejudice", use the statistics to answer the following questions:

- How many Muslims live in the United States? \_\_\_\_\_
- Where/what areas is that population growing the fastest? \_\_\_\_\_
- How many mosques are now in the United States? \_\_\_\_\_
- What % of Muslims in America are immigrants? \_\_\_\_\_

2. What are some of the many ways the article notes that Muslim communities in America are thriving?

3. What are some of the people, practices, and organizations the article describes that show the diversity of Muslims in America?

4. What impact did Muhammed Ali have on Islam in America? Why do you think American Muslims are still inspired by him today?

5. What are some of the ways that the IMAN organization has worked to improve the image of Islam on the Southside of Chicago?

6. Why do many of the people interviewed for the article say that America is the best place to be Muslim?

7. What else did you learn or find interesting from the article?

# Muslims in America

A Brief introduction to Muslims in America from Founding to Present



# 3 Waves of Immigration

- Colonial/Early American Slave Trade
- Late 1800's Arab Immigration
- Post 1965 Immigration

# Colonial and Early American Slave Trade



- Perhaps 10% of enslaved Africans brought to the Americas were Muslim
- Many of them “converted” to Christianity, but maintained Islamic practices in secret, such as daily prayer and recitation of the Koran
- Lack of educational opportunities and freedom reduced the practice of Islam among Africans
- [Autobiography of Omar ibn Said](#)

# Arab Immigration to America (late 1800's- 1921)



- This significant period of Arab immigration saw an approximately 110,000 people enter the U. S.
- Most of them were from the Ottoman province of Syria, although that area today also includes Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine.
- Large numbers of these immigrants entered through Ellis Island in New York and settled in major urban areas.
- The large majority of Arab immigrants during this time were Christian. Around 10% were Muslim and faced more difficulty assimilating.

# Muslim Immigration since 1965



- 1965 legislation changed American policies to open the door to immigrants from the entire world. Thus, since the late 1960's the number of Muslim immigrants has increased rapidly.
- Countries of origin of the modern day immigrants include Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Egypt
- Primary reasons for this immigration are Refuge from economic, political, religious, and ethnic persecution, and education
- There are currently about 3.5 million Muslims in the United States