

## Deconstructing Stereotypes Related to Islam and Muslims

### Overview

With 1 billion Muslims worldwide, diversity is the norm within Islam. However, Islam and Muslims have historically been reduced to a few, often negative stereotypes, particularly in the West. This lesson aims to help students understand the common stereotypes they may encounter related to Islam and builds a toolkit for unpacking and challenging narrow representations of Islam.

### Grade

9-12

### Subject

Social Studies, but could easily be adapted for other courses when in conjunction with topics connected to Islam.

### Essential Standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9 - Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.
- 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.11-12.8 - Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.
- 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.9-10.7, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.7 - Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question or solve a problem.
- 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.

### Essential Questions

- What are some of the common stereotypes about Islam and Muslims?
- Where do stereotypes come from and how are they often perpetuated?
- How can we help students begin to deconstruct these stereotypes?
- How does learning about differences within a group help to dispel stereotypes?

### Materials

- Deconstructing Stereotypes of Islam and Muslims PowerPoint
- Deconstructing Stereotypes of Islam and Muslims student worksheet (attached)
- Teacher access to YouTube, projector and speakers
- YouTube video of the Call to Prayer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUHDYIJHaOQ>
- Daily Show clip, "Terror UNC": <http://www.cc.com/video-clips/z42tvv/the-daily-show-with-jon-stewart-terror-unc>
- Student access to internet for concluding activity

### Duration

90-120 minutes

## Student Preparation

This lesson is best used after students have already learned the basic tenets of Islam.

## Procedure

### Introduction

1. Begin the lesson by assembling students into pairs or small groups to discuss the following questions. Have groups briefly share responses, about 5-10 minutes (questions are on slides 2-4). Be sure to set the parameters for appropriate and safe conversation. Make sure students understand that sharing examples of stereotypes they've heard or been exposed to does not imply an endorsement of those ideas by the teacher or anyone else in the classroom.
  - What is a stereotype?
  - Have you personally ever felt the impact of stereotyping? Explain.
  - What are some common stereotypes you've heard about various religious groups?
  - What do you think are some of the most common stereotypes related to Islam and Muslims?
2. Remind students of the power of stereotypes. Show slide 5, and discuss the Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie quote. As a class, discuss where stereotypes might come from and what might perpetuate them.

### The Qur'an Controversy in North Carolina

3. Pass out the student worksheet and play the Call to Prayer (*adhan*) out loud. Have students read along with the text on the handout while the Call to Prayer plays (slide 6). Ask students to review and identify 3 basic tenets or facets of Islam that they observe in the call to prayer, and fill in the appropriate section on their worksheet.
  - This version of the call to prayer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUHDYIJHaOQ> is done by Muadin Hafiz Mustafa Özcan. It is the same version that accompanies the opening musical selection from Michael Sells' book: *Approaching the Qur'an*.
4. Ask students to share their impressions and observations out loud. Ideally, students should be able to identify the following elements:
  1. Islam is a monotheistic faith
  2. Muhammad is the messenger of God
  3. Prayer plays an important role in the daily life of Muslims
  4. Prayer is a multi-sensory experience in Islam
5. Explain to students that the book referenced in this previous activity was the subject of a national controversy in 2002 (slide 7). Show the following clip from the Daily Show: <http://www.cc.com/video-clips/z42tvv/the-daily-show-with-jon-stewart-terror-unc>. Ask students to identify as many stereotypes related to Islam and Muslims as they can from the clip as it plays, and write it on their worksheet. After playing the clip, discuss students' findings as a class.
  - For teacher reference, here are some links to background information on the controversy
    - UNC Libraries Exhibit Online Exhibit on the Controversy: [http://exhibits.lib.unc.edu/exhibits/show/academic\\_freedom/summer-readings/quran-controversy](http://exhibits.lib.unc.edu/exhibits/show/academic_freedom/summer-readings/quran-controversy). This page includes images of postcards and letters sent to UNC about the controversy.
    - Religion and Ethics Newsweekly clip: "Qur'an at UNC" <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2002/08/23/august-23-2002-quran-at-unc/18695/>.

### Exploring Common Stereotypes Related to Islam and Muslims

6. Inform students that the next phase of the lesson involves an exploration of some common stereotypes of Islam and Muslims. This will provide a starting point for then deconstructing some of the common stereotypes related to Islam and Muslims.
7. Show slide 8 and ask students: “what role has the news media played in perpetuating stereotypes of Islam and Muslims?” Allow students to share examples. Then, in partners or small groups ask students to discuss “What role has Hollywood played in contributing to the development of stereotypes?” (slide 9). Give partners/groups 3-5 minutes to think of as many examples as they can. Then, allow students to share out loud. Examples might include: scenes of violence, terrorism, airplane hijacking, oppression of women, poor English language abilities, thick accents, camels, desert scenes, specific kinds of clothing, etc.
8. Tell students that they will now watch clips from various movies that perpetuate stereotypes related to Islam and/or Muslims. Play the clips from Aladdin and “Planet of the Arabs” on slides 10-11. As students view the clips, they should list as many examples of stereotypes as possible on the worksheet.  
→ **Teacher note:** Be sure to preview slide 9. There are images associated with violence and graphic language. This clip is best used with older students. The first two minutes provide plenty of context.

### Deconstructing Common Stereotypes Related to Islam and Muslims

9. Tell students that now they will deconstruct stereotypes that are often portrayed in the news media and/or Hollywood films. Sides 12-30 are punctuated with discussion and reflection prompts related to the diversity of Islam.
10. Begin with slide 13. Ask students when they think Islam first arrived in the United States. Share that there has been a long history of Islam in America (slide 14). Use the example of Omar Ibn Said to show a North Carolina connection to Islam’s long history in the Americas. Play the Backstory segment on Omar Ibn Said (4:38 minutes in length): <http://backstoryradio.org/blog/the-writing-on-the-wall>. You might also share the following to highlight the presence of Muslims in the early Americas: in December 25, 1522, Muslims lead a revolt against Diego Columbus. Armed with machetes used to cut cane, 15 colonial settlers were killed before the insurrection was stopped. Spanish records show requests for Queen Isabella to stop shipments of enslaved Muslims.
11. Show slide 15. Ask students: “What comes to mind when you think of Islam and the arts?” Allow students to share examples. After students share examples, tell students you’ll be sharing some examples related to Islam and the arts on the slides that follow. Show the images and play clips on slides 16-18.
12. Show slide 19. Ask students: “What comes to mind when you think of the relationship between Islam and women?” Allow students to share examples. Acknowledge that there are situations where Muslim women are experiencing oppression. However, that is true in connection with a variety of factors... often cultural, in various religious contexts. Slides 20-30 explore selected counter-stereotypes related to Muslim women. As you move through these slides, students should complete the second page of their worksheet. Tell students to be prepared to discuss their thoughts with the rest of the class at the end of these counter-stereotypes.
13. After showing the clips on slides 20-30, have students take a moment to share some of their observations within their small group. Then, as a class, discuss (slide 31):
  - What did you write?
  - What counter-stereotypes did you observe?
  - What surprised you?

- What do you have questions about?

### **Culminating Writing Assignment**

14. As the culminating assignment for this lesson (either in class or as homework), students will create digital “Mythbuster” handbooks on common stereotypes related to Islam (slide 32). The handbook should incorporate a “Top Five” list of some of the most prevalent stereotypes and misconceptions related to Islam with accompanying counter-stereotypes or counter-narratives for each. They should include specific examples of these stereotypes in action (as evidenced in advertising, popular film, cartoons, news media, etc.) as well as a way to counteract or deconstruct it. Handbooks should include a diverse range of topics and sources (news media, print media, advertising, textbooks, popular media (film, music, visual art, etc.)). Students can find these guidelines at the bottom of page 2 on their worksheet.
  - For example, students could write: Stereotype: All Muslims are Arab; Counter-stereotype: Images and captions illustrating the diversity of Islam (an Indonesian Muslim, a white American Muslim, a Senegalese Muslim, etc.).

## Deconstructing Stereotypes of Islam and Muslims

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

“The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.”

-Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Aladdin clip	“Planet of the Arabs” Clip
List the stereotypical images or impressions you note from the clip:	What kinds of things to these clips suggest about Muslims and/or Arabs?

### Let’s Review!

Call to Prayer (adhan) (Sunni)	What are some of the basic elements of Islam based upon the call to prayer?
Allahu Akbar (God is most great) (4 times)	
ashhadu an la ilaha illa llah (I testify that there is no god but God) (twice)	
ashhadu anna muhammadan rasulu llah (I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of God) (twice)	
hayy ‘ala s-sala (come alive to the prayer) (twice)	
hayy ‘ala l-falah (come alive to the flourishing) (twice)	
allahu akbar (God is most great) (twice)	
la ilaha illa llah (there is no god but God) (once)	

**Terror UNC:** List as many stereotypes as you can that are referenced in the Daily Show clip:

**Deconstructing Stereotypes:** As you view the following clips, record your observations. What do these examples suggest about Islam and women? How do they challenge common misconceptions and stereotypes?

<i>Hijabi:</i>	<i>Salome:</i>
<i>Hwages:</i>	<i>Stephanie Kurlow:</i>
<i>Wadjda:</i>	<i>What Will They Say About You?:</i>
<i>Teen Boxer:</i>	<i>Life Without Basketball:</i>
<i>MuslimGirl:</i>	<i>Afghan Cycles:</i>

**Culminating Writing Assignment**

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- Example, Stereotype: All Muslims are Arab; Counter-stereotype: Images and captions illustrating the diversity of Islam (an Indonesian Muslim, a white American Muslim, a Senegalese Muslim, etc.)