



**UNION**

*Religious Worlds of New York • Curriculum Development Project*

## **Islam as a Lived Religion: In Maine, the United States, and Around the World**

*Joel Lesinski, Westbrook High School, Westbrook ME*

### **Abstract**

This mini unit is part of a larger Comparative Religion unit that is completed in a World Studies I class by 9th and 10th graders at Westbrook High School in Westbrook, ME. This unit will examine the history of Islam, the practices and beliefs of Islam and how they are manifested in local communities, as well as some communities abroad. The mini unit will last for 1 week, along with other religions from the Comparative Religion unit, which will last a total of 8 weeks. Students will conduct interview, fieldwork, and study primary and secondary sources in order to complete a short writing task on Islam and engage in a Socratic Seminar comparing how Islam is practiced in Maine to other parts of the world. This particular mini unit will contain accommodations for ELL students.

The overall Comparative Religion unit will cover the religious traditions of Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism. The aspects that are present in this unit that reflect the lived religion model will also be applied to the other religions covered in the Comparative Religion unit. For example, there is a Hindu Temple that is within walking distance from the school. There will be a planned site visit to this temple. There will also be planned site visits to a Christian house of worship and a local synagogue that hosts various events for the Civil Rights Team at Westbrook High School. In addition to the site visits, there will be panels representing other religions with local community members speaking to students about their experiences practicing religion in the United States.

Our overarching theme will be to compare lived religions in different locations in the United States and around the globe. We will then use what we learn from these experiences to gain a better understanding of what religion means, and how it impacts our lives and the interactions that we engage in as a community. In addition to covering these religious traditions, we will also have a mini introductory unit to the concept of lived religion using concepts drawn from essays by the historian of religion [Robert Orsi](#).

## **Main Topics**

- A brief history of Islam
- Beliefs, practices and teachings of Islam as explained in the Qu'ran and Hadith
- Islam as a lived religion in Maine
- Diversity of Islam in the United States and around the world

## **Enduring Questions** – Revisited throughout the Comparative Religions unit

1. What is the purpose of religion?
2. What does lived religion look like in Islam?
3. How location can change the way religion looks?
4. What is the difference between what is religious and what is not religious (secular) and how can we tell the difference?
5. What can we learn from studying lived religion?

## **Essential Questions** – Specific to Islam Unit

1. What are the origins, stories, teachings, beliefs and practices of Islam?
2. How is Islam practiced in the United States and around the world today?
3. What do we mean when we say Islams, instead of Islam?
4. How is Islam practiced here in Maine?
5. What does lived religion look like for Muslims practicing in the world today?

## **Assessments**

- 500 word writing task answering the following questions - 1. How has Islam changed from its origins to today regarding how it is practiced by its followers? 2. What are the differences and similarities between how Islam is practiced in Maine compared to how it is practiced in Karachi, Pakistan or Jakarta, Indonesia?
- Socratic Seminar - a discussion on the teachings and practices of Islam, the history of the origins of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad, how Islam is practiced today in Maine and in other parts of the world.
- Writing Thank You letters to the older students and panel participants with the following prompt in mind – “Before you came to visit I thought this . . . After talking to you I learned this . . .”

## Sources:

Excerpts from *No God But God* by Reza Aslan

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R\\_NQvjYBmk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_NQvjYBmk) - clip of Reza Aslan talking about the diversity within Christianity and Islam.

Excerpts from *I am Malala* by Malala Yousafzai

Excerpts from the Hadith and the Qu'ran

Stories from *The Telling Room*

Excerpts from *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi

"Gate A4" - Naomi Shihab Nye

"Different Ways to Pray" - Naomi Shihab Nye

Imam Suleiman Konate's video of Eid prayers in Harlem

Muslims of the World - Sajjad Shah (motivational speaker, could potentially speak to students).

## Individual Lesson Plans

### Day 1 - Jigsaw activity on the Origins of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad's story, the beliefs and teachings according to the Qu'ran and the Hadith

Aim: What are the origins, stories, teachings, beliefs and practices of Islam?

Tasks - We will complete a scaffolded jigsaw activity dividing into 4 groups and having each group research a different aspect of the origins of Islam (Group #1 - The story of the Prophet Muhammad, Group #2 - The History of Islam leading up to the Prophet, Group #3 - The beliefs and practices of Islam (Qu'ran and Hadith), Group #4 - The teachings of Islam (Qu'ran and Hadith))

### Day 2 - Islam around the World

Aim: How is Islam practiced in the United States and around the world today?

Tasks: We will engage and interact with a number of resources (videos, short articles, pictures, objects) that come from different parts of the US and the world (mainly Pakistan, Indonesia and China). We get a glimpse of how Islam is practiced in these different parts of the world by responding to questions and discussion our thoughts on these different media sources. We will also address our enduring questions after looking at these media sources.

**Day 3 - Interviews with Muslim Students - Muslim students from the school (and the class) can participate in interviews - record them and transcribe excerpts.**

Aim: What do we mean when we say Islams, instead of Islam?

Task and Questions - Students will interview upperclassmen Muslims who will be prepared to answer questions about their faith and to be recorded so students can engage in the practice of conducting interviews and practice transcribing answers.

**Day 4 - Panel of Young Adult Muslims Come to discuss Muslim life in Maine**

Aim: How is Islam practiced here in Maine?

Tasks and questions - A group of older Muslims will come to the school to do a panel discussion about their experiences as a Muslim, how they became Muslim, What it means to them and How they practice. - How is Islam practiced? How do you practice Islam? Address tension within the religion during the seminar

**Day 5 - Islam as a Lived Religion**

Aim: What does lived religion look like for Muslims practicing in the world today?

Tasks - Students will be completing two writing tasks. The first will compare the way Islam is practiced here in the United States using one of the examples that we have look at in class to Islam practiced around the world using one of the examples we looked at in class.

Students will then engage in a socratic seminar discussion demonstrating their thoughts and what they learned about Islam from our experiences as a class. Students will revisit our enduring questions during this discussion

***For information about the Religious Worlds of New York summer institute for teachers, and more resources to enrich your teaching on religious diversity, see: [www.religiousworldsnyc.org](http://www.religiousworldsnyc.org).***