

The Nickelodeon logo, featuring a stylized orange splat shape above the word "nickelodeon" in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font.

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# TALK AND TAKE ACTION:

# EDUCATORS' GUIDE TO COUNTERING ISLAMOPHOBIA



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## INTRODUCTION

This guide is intended to provide a resource for educators who are looking for information, tools, and tips for talking with students, aged 7-12, about **Islamophobia**. It also provides simple, but empowering, action steps students can take together to create a more inclusive world. It has been written in partnership with The Conscious Kid, an education organization that supports families and educators in taking action to disrupt **racism** and **discrimination**.

Islamophobia is **prejudice**, discrimination, fear of, or hatred towards the religion of **Islam** and the people who practice it, known as **Muslims**. It manifests as unfair treatment, **stereotypes**, and negative assumptions toward people who are, or are perceived to be, Muslim. This prejudice can lead to harmful actions such as hurtful and untrue words and comments, bullying, and social exclusion. Islamophobia can also lead to physical violence and hate crimes, anti-Muslim policies, and discrimination in school or the workplace.

There is a long history of targeted discrimination against the Muslim community, which continues today in the United States and globally. Islamophobia can be an upsetting, scary, and even traumatizing thing for someone to experience. It hurts both individuals and society as a whole by spreading fear and division. Early, open dialogue can help students recognize Islamophobia, stand against it, and better support those who have been impacted by it.

# TALKING WITH STUDENTS ABOUT ISLAMOPHOBIA: BEFORE YOU BEGIN

When preparing to talk with children about difficult or potentially triggering topics, such as discrimination and violence, it is important to frame discussions in ways that will maximize their understanding while at the same time ensuring they won't leave the conversation confused, afraid, or traumatized. This guide includes descriptions of discriminatory acts and persecution, which can be challenging for all of us to read and talk about. Here are tips you can use to support conversations with students about tough topics.

**1. Check in with yourself first.** Take stock of your own feelings and perceptions related to the information included in this guide. Be aware of emotions that you may have when talking about these topics and acknowledge your own **biases**. If your family has been personally impacted by discrimination or hate, it may be difficult to revisit those painful experiences. As an educator, take note of how these feelings impact you before you engage with your students. Consider sharing your thoughts with another trusted educator.

**2. Review the guide.** Creating a safe space to discuss tough topics like discrimination and hate sends a powerful message to your students. However, these topics are challenging and you may need help in preparing for these. If that's the case, take time to look through this guide. It will provide you with an introduction to its topic, a historical and contemporary context for why these conversations need to take place, and discussion starters to support your students' learning. Focus on the information that you feel is most meaningful and relevant to your students' lived experiences and your specific conversation's focus.

**3. Lay the foundation.** Before diving into difficult topics like discrimination, bias, and hate, it's important to lay the foundation for safe, secure, and respectful dialogue. You can do this by sharing Muslim stories of joy, triumph, success, and **activism**. This provides an opportunity for students to co-construct an understanding of the strengths of the Muslim community before discussing the harms of Islamophobia. Set the tone for respectful conversation by establishing age-appropriate Community Agreements. Community Agreements are co-created by group members. They help deepen student connection and accountability, and build rapport with teachers.

**4. Prepare to be transparent.** Talking honestly and openly about difficult topics with children models positive behaviors that foster open lines of communication. Let students know that these kinds of conversations are difficult, even for adults. In fact, acknowledging this difficulty may encourage students to express their feelings, even when it's not easy.

## ESTABLISHING COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

1. Share lesson objective(s) with students: Today we are going to think about how we want to treat and talk with each other as we learn about \_\_\_\_.
2. Briefly explain "the how." We are going to develop a list of Community Agreements. Briefly describe that Community Agreements are shared expectations of acceptable behavior within groups.
3. Ask students to brainstorm the following prompt: What would help us work together best as we learn about \_\_\_\_?
4. Encourage students to answer the prompt by providing an example to begin the discussion: "What would help us work best together is not interrupting each other when someone is speaking?" Develop 3 to 5 Community Agreements based on students' responses.

**5. Gauge what they know.** Kids gain information implicitly, or informally, through what they see, hear, and experience. Asking students what they already know about a topic is a great starting point for conversation. Expand on what they bring up to deepen their understanding and fill in their knowledge gaps. Children often notice and absorb much more than we expect.

- If students repeat misinformation, share the proper and accurate information with them.

**6. Lean in and listen.** In a world full of distractions, now is the time to give students your undivided attention. Encourage them to ask questions and let them know you'll do your best to answer them. Revisit the Community Agreements that guide these conversations. Pay attention to the questions they ask and any emotional responses that may be evoked or suppressed by the information being presented. Look out for body language cues, as well as what they are saying. The goal is for students to feel safe and secure.

**7. Validate their feelings.** Ask students to name their feelings—afraid, frustrated, excluded—and encourage them to explain why they feel the way they do. Explain that being upset about this means this is something important that we need to pay attention to.

- If you notice a student struggling to make a connection to others' perspectives or are expressing a lack of empathy, ask them to think of a time they felt hurt, overlooked, or disrespected. How did that make them feel?
- Remember, some students may be more likely to suppress their emotions due to learned gender, social, or cultural roles.

**8. If you don't know, say so.** Answer questions as clearly and honestly as you can, using developmentally appropriate language and definitions. If you don't know the answer to a question, that's OK! Slow down, pause, and repeat the question. This ensures that you don't answer right away just for the sake of answering or provide information that is incorrect. Sharing that you don't know creates an opportunity to learn together.

Try one of these:

- "That's a really big question! Let's explore it together."
- "That's a great question. Let's find out more together."

**9. Help them frame the situation.** Providing students with context is useful when helping them make sense of acts of bullying, hate, or violence. If they ask why someone would direct hate at someone based on their religion, you could say, "Some people wrongly believe that certain religions are better than others. They may have gotten these wrong ideas from stereotypes we see and hear in the media. Without the correct information, they sometimes commit acts of violence against other people and think it's OK based on their beliefs."

**10. Empower them to make a difference.** Tackling tough topics can sometimes leave us feeling sad, angry, or hopeless. While these feelings are valid, we can use them to engage in meaningful actions to fight against hate and discrimination. For example, showing support for others or volunteering time to a cause can make a big difference. If you need inspiration, this guide includes a list of actions you can take as a class to leave the conversation feeling empowered and prepared to build a more just and compassionate world.

**11. Prepare to reflect.** As an educator, your actions can serve as a powerful tool to combat bias and discrimination. As you move forward in creating an equitable and inclusive learning environment, ask yourself:

- What authors are on my classroom's bookshelves? What stories do they tell?
- What kinds of media do I show my students? What takeaways or values do they communicate?
- What types of music do we listen to? Is there an opportunity to introduce music and artists from different cultures into our classroom or lessons?
- How can I actively introduce my class to positive, authentic, and **counter-stereotypical** examples of **cultures** different from our own?
- What can I do to redirect comments or behaviors that may be harmful or go against our Community Agreements?

**An important note:** If you have Muslim students in your class, talking about Islamophobia may unlock personal connections and experiences of trauma. Please allow your students to contribute to the conversations at any level that feels comfortable for them. Avoid putting them on the spot by asking pointed, personal questions or expecting them to "carry the weight" of these conversations simply because of their religious identity.



# TALKING WITH PARENTS & CAREGIVERS ABOUT THIS GUIDE

It can be helpful to remind parents and caregivers that students are paying close attention to issues related to social justice, bias, and discrimination — even those who we think are too young to see or understand what’s going on. By sharing with parents and caregivers your commitment to being proactive around these issues, you are helping students gain the competency to discuss tough issues and the ability to approach uncomfortable or inequitable situations with thoughtfulness and sensitivity. If your school utilizes social and emotional learning (SEL) curriculum and that information has already been communicated to parents, emphasize how this guide supports and enhances SEL. In addition, SEL competencies will support adults and children to address these complex topics more effectively.

**Communicating with parents and caregivers:** There are caregivers who may push back and assert that their children don’t need to learn about hate and discrimination, or express concerns about what students will be learning. If this happens, acknowledge the fact that addressing the topic of Islamophobia may be uncomfortable. By being transparent about what will be discussed and the goal of supporting an inclusive learning environment that acknowledges important challenges impacting students, you can demonstrate the importance of creating an awareness of these issues and model a willingness to work together.

A SAMPLE NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

Dear Parent/Caregiver,

Students are paying close attention to issues related to social justice, bias, and discrimination — even those we think are too young to understand what’s going on. Upsetting and discriminatory images that appear on social media and in the news, news stories, discussions, and current events are happening all around them.

As an educator, I am responsible for ensuring that my students have access to fact-based sources of information and the ability to ask questions about things that may be confusing. I’m often in the position to field those questions and believe it is important to create a classroom environment that is positive and inclusive. It is also in students’ best interests to ensure they are engaging each other in a respectful manner. These conversations will foster respect, communication, and a safe space for our diverse classroom.

Starting on \_\_\_\_\_, our class will be discussing Islamophobia using a few resources from recognized organizations, such as Nickelodeon and The Conscious Kid, to develop an understanding of how events have shaped and influenced some of the challenges we see today. The guide I’ll be using to guide these tough conversations is designed to support students’ social emotional learning and wellbeing.

Here is a guide for parents and caregivers that you can use if your child has questions:  
**[The Conscious Kid & Nickelodeon Talk and Take Action: Parents’ & Caregivers’ Guide to Countering Islamophobia](#)**

If you have questions about our discussions, please feel free to contact me at \_\_\_\_\_.

# ISLAMOPHOBIA TODAY AND WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO TAKE ACTION

## WHAT IS ISLAM?

**Islam** is one of the world's largest and fastest growing religions. It is practiced by approximately 2 billion people from all over the world and from many different backgrounds. In the United States, the Muslim population is growing. Today, it comprises over 4.45 million Americans and, in 2050, it is projected to surpass 8 million. Muslim Americans are one of the most racially diverse faith communities in the U.S. with no one **race** or **ethnicity** making up a majority. "Islam" is an Arabic word that means accepting, or submitting to, God. It comes from another Arabic word "salaam", meaning "peace". Generosity, peace, and commitment are all important values in the Muslim community. While the Muslim community may share beliefs, customs, and traditions, there is lots of variation in the ways they are expressed.

## LEARNING ABOUT ISLAM

Islam is guided by a sacred book known as the **Quran**, and the Hadiths, which are teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). PBUH is the English-language abbreviation for "peace be upon him". It's a phrase used in the Islamic religion to honor prophets when their names are said or written. Similarly, when Muslims refer to Jesus or Moses, as prophets of God, they include "peace be upon him".

A **hijab** is a type of headscarf that some Muslim women and girls wear to represent their faith and modesty. Hijabs come in many different colors and can be styled in many different ways.

A **mosque**, also called a masjid, is an important place where Muslims go to pray, learn, and connect with their faith and community.

## WHAT IS ISLAMOPHOBIA?

**Islamophobia** is prejudice, discrimination, fear, or hatred towards the religion of Islam and the people who practice it, known as Muslims.

Islamophobia is not new in the world or to the U.S. Unfair and untrue ideas about Muslims have been used for hundreds of years to justify discrimination and even violence against Muslim communities.

Anti-Muslim prejudice is widespread in the U.S. and these Islamophobic attitudes are linked to support for anti-Muslim policies that unfairly discriminate against the Muslim community. In fact, Muslim Americans are the religious group most likely to face discrimination in institutional settings including when applying for a job, receiving healthcare, at the airport, or when interacting with police. In 2022, 62% of Muslim American adults reported experiencing at least one incident of religious discrimination within the last year. And discrimination doesn't just impact adults. Muslim families are the most likely to report their child has faced religious-based bullying of any faith group. Alarming, 20% of families share that this kind of bullying happens nearly every day. This unkind and unjust treatment can have serious impacts on kids' self-esteem, confidence, and overall identity development.



## ISLAMOPHOBIA HURTS EVERYONE

Islamophobia is connected to other forms of prejudice like racism, **anti-blackness**, **white supremacy**, **xenophobia** (a dislike or fear of people from other countries), and other forms of religious discrimination, including **antisemitism**. It also impacts other communities, such as Sikhs, Hindus, and Christian **Arabs** who are mistaken for being Muslim. Remember, all forms of hate and prejudice are harmful. It drives people apart by convincing them differences are a bad thing. The good news is that by speaking up, and letting others know hate is not welcome, you can stop it from growing and spreading. That is why it is important to raise awareness around Islamophobia, amplify your voice, and stand firm against any form of hatred.

## HISTORY OF ACTIVISM AGAINST ISLAMOPHOBIA

There is a long and powerful history of activism against Islamophobia in the U.S. and around the world. People engage in activism when they want to bring about political or social change. They are called activists. Sometimes, even small actions, like standing up to a bully, can be a form of **activism**. Below are a few examples of Islamic activism across history.

### 1500-1800: Transatlantic Slave Trade: Resistance through literacy

Many West African Muslims were captured, sent to the Americas, and enslaved. Their visible religious practices and ability to read and write Arabic made them stand out. Some enslaved Muslims used their literacy to condemn slavery and to document their experiences in letters, diaries, and autobiographies, most written in Arabic.

### 1522: First recorded revolt of Enslaved Peoples in the New World

On Christmas day, 20 **enslaved** Muslim Africans rose up against their **enslavers** on a sugar plantation in the Spanish colony of Hispaniola, now the Republic of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. They freed dozens of people before they were overpowered. After this revolt, the King of Spain banned the capture and enslavement of Muslims.



### 1925-1964: Malcolm X

Malcolm X was a Black Muslim and leader in the American Civil Rights Movement. His activism and thinking inspired the Black Power Movement of the 1960s and 70s, which emphasized pride and empowerment for Black Americans. He became known as el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz after his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1964. In Arabic, a pilgrimage to Mecca is referred to as Hajj.

### **1994:** The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) is founded

CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization. It was founded in 1994 in response to growing anti-Muslim discrimination and Islamophobia. Today, CAIR has 26 offices in communities nationwide that work to protect the civil rights of all Americans.



### **2006:** First Muslim Congressman Keith Ellison is elected to office

Keith Ellison was the first Muslim, and the first Black Minnesotan elected to Congress. During his inauguration, he was sworn in on a Quran that had belonged to Thomas Jefferson. He is now the Attorney General of Minnesota, and was the Special Prosecutor in the trial over George Floyd's murder.

### **2015:** Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) v. Abercrombie & Fitch

In 2008, Samantha Elauf, a Muslim American teen, reported Abercrombie & Fitch to the EEOC after the store would not hire her because of her hijab. They said it "violated their dress code." The case went all the way to the Supreme Court, who ruled in favor of Samantha.

Her courage helped protect the religious rights of millions of Muslim Americans.

### **1971:** Muhammad Ali vs. United States

In 1966, Muhammad Ali, a renowned professional boxer, refused to be drafted into the military during the Vietnam War because it was against his religion as a Muslim. He was sentenced to 5 years in jail, made to pay a \$10,000 fine and even got his boxing license taken away. Still, he did not back down or compromise on his beliefs. In 1971, the Supreme Court overturned his sentence and he got his license back. He then went on to win major fights like the "Rumble in the Jungle" against George Foreman in 1974.

### **2003:** Iraq War Protests

On February 15, 2003, thousands of people in the U.S., and millions worldwide, protested against the Iraq War and anti-Muslim prejudice. These kinds of anti-war protests continued for almost 10 years and were the public's way of letting world leaders know they did not support war.



### **2014:** Malala Yousafzai receives Nobel Peace Prize

Malala Yousafzai is a Muslim activist. At 17, she was the youngest person ever, and the second Pakistani person, to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Malala advocates for the right of girls and all children to receive an education.

## 2018: First Muslim Congresswomen Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar are elected to office

Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar made history as the first Muslim women to be elected to Congress.

Rep. Tlaib, representing Michigan, is also the first Palestinian American woman in Congress. Rep. Omar, representing Minnesota, is Somali American and is the first African refugee to serve in Congress.

She was also the first member of Congress to wear a hijab on the House floor.



Rashida Tlaib



Ilhan Omar

## 2017: Protests against the "Muslim Ban"

A set of orders issued by the President in 2017 limited the entry of refugees and immigrants from many Muslim countries into the U.S. Thousands of people gathered at airports across the U.S., and around the world, to protest the orders because they discriminated against Muslims. By protesting, they showed their support for the Muslim community.

## 2022: United Nations declares March 15 the International Day to Combat Islamophobia

On the fourth anniversary following violent anti-Muslim attacks on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, the U.N. adopted a proposal that declared March 15 as the annual International Day to Combat Islamophobia. The day calls for global discussion and action against Islamophobia, and promotes respect for human rights, peace, and religious diversity.

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

In each of these moments of activism, there was a person, or a group of people, who knew something wasn't right and spoke out against it. Some included Muslim people protecting and advocating for their community's needs and rights, others included people of all faiths, beliefs, and religions working together with the Muslim community to create change. Because activism means standing up for what you believe in, it takes bravery. These activists showed courage in their resistance against Islamophobia.

- In what ways is activism important? In what ways does activism create change?
- Thinking of your own experience, how does it feel to speak up against something you don't think is right?
- What are some other examples of activism that you have seen or heard about? Are there any you, your classmates, or your community members have participated in?
- What other qualities do you think activists need to stand up for what they believe in?
- What are some small acts of activism you can take in your school or community? Who can you ask to help you engage in activism?



### EDUCATOR TIPS:

- Allow students to explore the events highlighted above, then, have them co-create their own version of the timeline to hang in your classroom or community learning space. You could even have them work in small groups to dive deeper into each event or research and add any additional activist movements.
- To activate prior knowledge, and enhance learning, connect the history of activism here to history of activism against other types of hate (e.g., Anti-Black racism, Antisemitism, AAPI discrimination, etc).

# TAKING ACTION! COUNTERING ISLAMOPHOBIA DISCUSSION GUIDES

What can you do as a class to counter Islamophobia?

Here are four major ways you and your students can take action against anti-Muslim hate.



## EDUCATOR TIPS:

- Think about arranging student seating in a way that fosters inclusion and community, for example, a circle instead of rows of desks or chairs.
- Consider discussing each of the four sections below over a four-week period, tackling one section each week. As you review them, think about how these concepts link to or could be incorporated with other subject areas.
- If you are Muslim, reflect on how much you want to share your own experience with the following topics prior to diving in.
- It may be beneficial to have students journal their thoughts about the discussion starters before talking as a group. Remember, if they do not feel comfortable sharing their thinking in conversation, that's OK. You will also want to avoid putting Muslim students on the spot or expecting them to carry these conversations simply because of their religious identity.
- You may also model how to answer one of the discussion starter questions at the beginning of each session.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will increase their knowledge and understanding of Islam.
- Students will be able to understand what stereotypes are and why they are harmful.
- Students will practice their media literacy and critical thinking skills.
- Students will reflect on and consider their own identities and the identities of others.

## LEARN ABOUT THE ISLAMIC FAITH

The single most powerful thing you, as a class, can do to combat Islamophobia is to learn about the Islamic faith. Learning about the basic tenets of Islam and Islamic practice promotes understanding, empathy, and acceptance – all of which are at the heart of anti-bias education. Building knowledge of and experience with Islam will also strengthen students' overall religious literacy. **Religious literacy** is the ability to understand and reflect on religions and religious beliefs. A little knowledge can go a long way! Here are some ways to get learning with your class:

- Explore the basic tenets of Islam. Review kid-friendly resources from trusted sources, like [this one](#) from the United Religion Initiative.
- Introduce the five pillars of Islam and other key Islamic practices. These are important ways the Muslim community engages with their religion.

1. **Faith (shahadah)** – A declaration, or announcement, of faith in God and in the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).
2. **Prayer (salat)** – Muslims pray five times each day facing Mecca (Islam’s holiest city, located in Saudi Arabia).
3. **Giving (zakat)** – Showing generosity and charity to others is a deeply held value of Islam.
4. **Fasting (saum)** – During the month of **Ramadan**, Muslims fast during daylight hours as a way to reflect and feel gratitude for all that they have. **Fasting** means refraining from eating or drinking for a certain period of time.
5. **Pilgrimage (hajj)** – In Islam, a pilgrimage is a journey to the holy city of Mecca.

- Read stories by Muslim authors. Check out this [book list for kids](#) and [this one, for people of all ages](#). You can also find a featured book list at the end of this guide.
- [Celebrate Muslim culture](#) in the classroom. The Islamic faith celebrates values that are important to being a good friend, neighbor, and **Upstander**. Many religious and cultural traditions encourage being compassionate, generous, and giving, and showing gratitude.
- Take a virtual field trip to explore a museum’s Islamic art or heritage collection. You can visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Islamic collection [online here](#) and learn about the [history of Muslims in America](#) with America’s Islamic Heritage Museum.
- Investigate a few of the many incredible Muslim inventions that impact your everyday life. [Get started here](#).
- Research the similarities between Islam and other faith traditions in the U.S. Make a list of their commonalities and shared values, like community, charity, and kindness.



### EDUCATOR TIP:

- As your class starts to learn about Islam and Islamophobia, pay special attention to how your Muslim students respond to the discussions. Some might be excited and engaged, some might feel overwhelmed, and others may feel upset, worried, or scared. Structure in time for them, and all of their classmates, to explore and express their feelings through creativity. This may include dedicated time for journaling, painting, drawing, sketching, or writing a song or a story about their emotions.

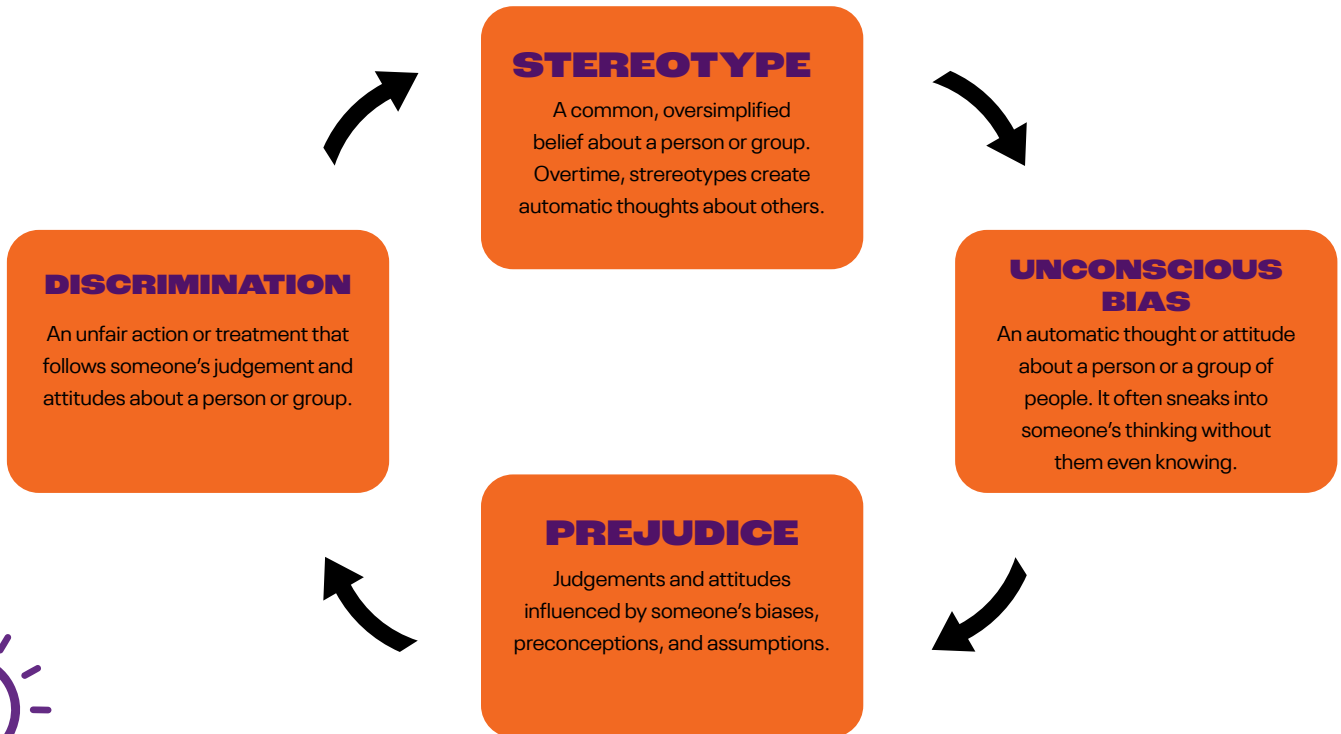
### DISCUSSION STARTERS

- What else would you like to know about Muslim culture, customs, or traditions?
- If you and your family are Muslim, how do you want those around you to show they care about your beliefs and practices?
- What are some other ways you can continue learning about the Muslim community?
- What are small action steps you can take in your school or community to help others feel confident in who they are and what they believe?

# UNDERSTAND THE STEREOTYPE CYCLE

A stereotype is a commonly held but oversimplified belief about a person or group. Stereotypes form when someone groups individuals together based on some part of their identity and forms an unfair or untrue opinion about them. Common stereotypes sneak into people's thinking and create an automatic thought or attitude about a group of people. This is called an **unconscious bias** and can influence a person's judgments and attitudes about another person without even realizing it. Biases lead to discrimination, the unfair treatment of a person because of an aspect of their identity – like their race, ethnicity, gender, disability, or religion.

Each part of this cycle is connected. By disrupting stereotypes, you can combat discrimination.



## EDUCATOR TIPS:

- Print out this Stereotype Cycle graphic and hang it in your classroom for students to see and reference.
- Without providing any explanation or instruction, ask your students to draw a superhero. For older students, you can ask your students to draw a doctor or a scientist instead of a superhero. As they create, prompt them to think about, list, or write the qualities that they associate with this figure. Once complete, hang their drawings around the room and prompt a **"gallery walk"** then, lead a conversation about their observations. Highlight the stereotypes, and counter-stereotypes, included in their drawings. For example, students may depict a superhero as a strong, tall white man. What other ways could a superhero be pictured? How did they get this image in their mind?

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- Have you ever judged someone before getting to know them? How did that change or influence how you treated them?
- Has someone ever had an untrue or judgemental belief about you? How did it make you feel?
- Why may it be important to learn about and consider other people's perspectives?
- What can you do the next time you see or hear someone being judged or stereotyped because of their religion, race, ethnicity, gender, or disability?

## PRACTICE CRITICAL THINKING

Where do stereotypes and anti-Muslim bias come from? People may believe that Islamophobia begins with **collective blaming** (the harmful idea that all members of a group are to blame for acts carried out by individuals) after a violent event, such as the attacks of September 11, 2001. The Institute for Social Policy and Understanding has reported, however, that disinformation and biases about the Muslim community increase during election cycles and when politicians discuss war, rather than immediately following specific events. This suggests that Islamophobia can be used as a political tool to influence how people think or vote.

The spread of stereotypes can also be attributed to the media. A general analysis of media content found that Muslims were the most negatively portrayed community in America. And, although Muslims make up 25% of the world's population, a 2022 report, "Erased or Extremists: The Stereotypical View of Muslims in Popular Episodic Series" from the USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, looked at 200 popular television series and found that just 1% of speaking characters are Muslim. Muslim characters are often antagonists, and linked to violence and **terrorism**. They are also often shown as foreigners or outsiders, and Muslim women are often portrayed as mistreated or obedient. These kinds of harmful portrayals contribute to negative perceptions about Muslims and Islam.



## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- How does the media play a role in spreading stereotypes? Why do you think that is?
- What are some things you can do after watching or reading something that could help you spot misinformation, negative portrayals, or stereotypes?
- Turn to a classmate and share with them something you have learned about stereotypes. How might you share what you've learned with your family?

## PRACTICE PERSPECTIVE TAKING

Considering another person's experience, or perspective, is an essential part of building empathy. It also helps combat stereotypes, lessens biases, and increases connection across differences. To practice perspective taking, you and your class can explore the concept of Windows and Mirrors. Windows and Mirrors was created by [Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop](#), a professor emerita of children's literature at Ohio State University, inspired by work done in the classroom by Emily Styles. It is a way to reflect on the books you read and consider if the story feels like a mirror or a window to you.

- A mirror is a story that is relatable to the reader. It reflects, or portrays, the readers' own identity, culture, lived experience, beliefs, and values. Mirrors are an opportunity for the reader to see themselves represented in a meaningful way that builds confidence and belonging.
- A window is a story that helps the reader gain insight, or perspective, into another person's identity, culture, lived experience, belief, and values. Windows are an opportunity for the reader to explore a new way of thinking or doing, outside of their own experience.

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- What stories in books, TV shows, and movies have you read or seen that felt like a mirror, or a reflection of who you are? How did it make you feel to see a part of yourself represented?
- What stories in books, TV shows, and movies have you read or seen that felt like a window into someone else's world? How did it help you see or think differently?
- What can we do as a class to make sure our library has books that represent, or reflect, everyone?



## EDUCATOR TIPS:

- As a class, practice examining media and the news with a critical eye. This means analyzing, evaluating, and questioning the things you read, see, or review. Take a few minutes after your class engages with a type of media to reflect on its purpose, calling out any exaggerated or dramatic language being used, or checking the facts with a trusted internet source. Here are some critical questions you can ask: What is this article trying to help us understand? What big ideas is it communicating?
- It can be scary to speak up when you hear others using negative stereotypes. Introduce students to the word and meaning of being an "Upstander". Then, practice and/or role play what your students can say when they hear someone using stereotypes. Make this a regular part of your classroom practice so students develop a capacity and comfort to speak up.
- Work with your students to add or edit your classroom's Community Agreements to include combating and dismantling negative stereotypes. For example: "In our classroom, we speak out against negative stereotypes, racism, and hate. If we hear someone engaging in that type of language, we politely say, 'We don't do that here.'"





## EDUCATOR TIP:

- After introducing your students to the ideas of Windows and Mirrors, read a book together. There is a helpful booklist at the end of this guide you can use to choose a story that features characters who identify as Muslim.

Before reading, examine the book's front and back cover, the author, and the illustrator. Together, brainstorm what this book may be about and what we may know about the author or illustrator.

### ASK:

- What do you think this book is about?
- What do you notice about the book?
- What do you wonder about the book?
- Is there anything you see that connects to your experiences?

While reading, observe the words, characters, and the pictures. Be sure to stop and prompt students to share their perspectives.

### ASK:

- What do you notice about the characters – including parts of their identity, culture, beliefs, and feelings?
- What do you wonder about the characters – including parts of their identity, culture, beliefs, and feelings?"

After reading, think about ways your class can connect this book to their own experiences.

### ASK:

- What emotions did you feel while reading?
- What do you notice anything you saw or heard in this story that reminds you of you and your experience?
- What do you notice anything you saw or heard in this story that gave you new insight or information into someone else's identities, culture, religion, or feelings?
- How can you use what you learned while reading outside of our class community?



## EDUCATOR TIPS:

After introducing your students to the ideas of Windows and Mirrors, read a book together and use the prompts below to guide your discussion. If you need help choosing a book that features Muslim stories, check out the list at the end of this resource.

- Everyone is different! Even if they belong to a certain religious, ethnic, or cultural community, they are an individual with unique experiences and perspectives, just like you. This is especially true for the Muslim community. Despite common misconceptions, not all Muslims come from the Middle East or speak Arabic. As one of the most diverse faiths in the U.S., Muslims have different backgrounds, speak different languages, and hold different beliefs or values.
- Some religious cultures, like Islam, have dietary guidelines that they follow. For example, practicing Muslims don't eat pork. Being mindful of food restrictions when organizing social gatherings, get-togethers, or playdates, shows consideration for others' beliefs and practices.
- There are many ways to say hello! While shaking hands, waving, or hugging may be a common way to greet someone, someone's preference may actually depend on their religious beliefs or cultural customs. Follow their lead! Don't be offended if you don't receive a hug or a handshake. In the Muslim community, someone may greet you by placing their right hand on their heart. This is a gesture of warmth!
- Important dates may be different from your own. Take note of when Islamic holidays occur on the calendar and avoid scheduling events on those days. Also consider holidays that other religious communities observe, such as Diwali in the Hindu community or Yom Kippur in the Jewish community.
- Someone's religious practices, like prayer, may also require some additional consideration. Practicing Muslims pray five times a day at specific times. This means that a prayer time may come up during a gathering, meeting, playdate, or class time. As a physical and spiritual ritual, Muslim prayer requires an empty, clean, and quiet space to perform.
- You can also model how to answer one of the discussion starter questions at the beginning of each session.

# KIDS' REFLECTION JOURNAL

## UPSTANDER BRAINSTORM

Practice amplifying your voice to speak out against Islamophobia. Imagine a situation where a person is being picked on or bullied because of their Islamic beliefs. What would you do or say to be an Upstander? An Upstander is a person who speaks up for or acts in support of someone who is being treated unfairly. Here are a few examples to help you get brainstorming:

"No, that's not OK. I don't accept you treating someone like that."

"What you said isn't right. Let's learn why together."

"Hey, that is mean. Remember, your words can hurt people."

Now, write a few Upstander phrases of your own:



## LIST YOUR ACTION STEPS

Islamophobia is harmful and it's important to take actions to disrupt it. Here are a few action steps you can take to counter Islamophobia. Explore the list then add to it. What other ways can you think to take action?

1. Speak up if you hear or see someone being treated unfairly because of their religious beliefs.
2. Learn about the history of Muslims in the United States.
3. Explore books, movies, art, and music created by Muslim authors and artists.
4. Show respect for Muslims' religious beliefs and practices. Remember, wearing a hijab is a way Muslim women and girls express their beliefs.
5. Make a point not to tease, bully, or joke about the Muslim community and their beliefs.
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_

## PAUSE FOR PERSPECTIVE

You may have experienced or seen your classmates experience bullying or prejudice. Being curious about, and imagining another person's perspective is also part of being an Upstander. Be aware of and ask yourself where your ideas about other people come from. Notice when you make guesses about someone else's feelings or experiences, and when those guesses are based on stereotypes.

Think about a time when you were experiencing something new. How did it feel?

Imagine a new kid just joined your class from another community. It's their first day and they don't know anyone. Circle 2 questions you could ask to learn more about them and make them feel welcome.

### Questions about feelings:

- How are you?
- How are you feeling?

### Questions about experiences:

- What books, movies, and games are you into?
- What do you like to do?
- What's your favorite activity?

### Questions about how you can help:

- What do you want to do?
- Need help finding your way around?
- Do you have a question I can answer?

What other questions could you ask to learn more about the new kid or make them feel welcome?

# GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

## **Activism**

The actions people take to stand up for others, and to bring about change to policies, laws, or rules that are unfair or unjust.

## **Anti-Blackness**

Treating people unfairly or discriminating against them just because they are Black or have dark skin.

## **Antisemitism**

The judgment and unfair treatment of Jewish people.

## **Arab**

People who are from or have ancestry from Arabic-speaking countries, which includes countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

## **Bias**

A tendency to favor or oppose a particular thing or group of people. Some people might be biased against a certain race, ethnicity, culture, or religion because they have been told negative things about that group.

## **Collective Blame**

The harmful idea that all members of a group are responsible, or to blame, for acts carried out by individuals.

## **Counter-stereotype**

An idea that goes against or is the opposite of a stereotype. For example, superheroes who have flaws and vulnerabilities have become more common to counteract the stereotype of an invincible, perfect hero.

## **Culture**

Practices, beliefs, values, and creative expression, shared by a community or group of people, which is often seen as important and has been done over a long period of time. Culture is something all people and communities participate in.

## **Discrimination**

Unfair treatment of one person or group of people because of the person or group's identity, like their race, gender, ability, religion, or culture. Discrimination is an action that can come from prejudice.

## **Enslaved**

Being forced to work for someone else without being paid and without being able to leave.

## **Enslaver**

Someone who forces others to work for them without pay and without giving them the freedom to leave.

## **Ethnicity**

The social and cultural groups someone belongs to based on shared traditions, ancestry, language, history, nation, and religion.

## **Fasting**

Not eating or drinking during a specified period of time, often as a religious observance.

## **Hijab**

A type of headscarf that some Muslim girls and women choose to wear to represent their faith and modesty. Hijabs come in many different colors and can be styled in many different ways.

## **Islam**

A religion followed by approximately 2 billion people around the world. People who practice Islam are called Muslims. They believe in one God, called Allah, and follow the teachings of a holy book called the Quran. The Quran is considered by Muslims to be the final Divine revelation conveyed by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to humanity. Islam teaches kindness, honesty, and helping others. Muslims practice their faith through the five pillars of Islam: Faith (shahadah), Prayer (salat), Giving (zakat), Fasting (saum), and Pilgrimage (hajj).

## **Islamophobia**

A prejudice, discrimination, fear of, or hatred towards the religion of Islam and the people who practice it, known as Muslims. It manifests as unfair treatment, stereotypes, and negative assumptions toward people who are, or are perceived to be, Muslim.

## **Mosque or Masjid**

An Islamic house of worship. It is an important place where Muslims go to pray, connect with their faith, to learn, and come together as a community. A mosque is also called a masjid in Arabic.

## **Muslim**

A person who practices the religion of Islam.

## **Prejudice**

Having a preconceived opinion or making a decision about a person or group of people without enough knowledge or information. Prejudicial thinking is often based on stereotypes.

## **Quran**

The holy book for the religion of Islam. The Quran is considered by Muslims to be the final Divine revelation conveyed by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to humanity.

## **Race**

An idea invented by humans that categorizes people into different groups by their perceived physical differences, such as skin color, hair color, or facial characteristics. It is not based on biology.

## **Racism**

The belief that one race is better than another – and having the power to create systems (e.g., educational system, legal system, etc.) that support that belief.

## **Ramadan**

A month of fasting, prayer, reflection and community for Muslims worldwide. It is also known as the month in which the Quran was revealed. For the month of Ramadan, many Muslims spend each night together, listening to the recitation of the Quran. For those who are able, fasting (not eating or drinking during daylight hours) during Ramadan helps some Muslims focus on spiritual growth, gratitude, and being more mindful of their actions and words. It's also a time for coming together with family and friends to celebrate shared values and beliefs.

## **Stereotypes**

A widely held and oversimplified idea about a type of person or group. Racial, religious and cultural stereotypes are harmful, shape interactions between people, impact policy, and are often believed to be true even when they are false.

## **Terrorism**

The use of violence and fear in pursuit of a political or ideological goal.

## **Unconscious Bias, or Implicit Bias**

The attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner or in a way we are not aware of.

## **Upstander**

A person who speaks or acts in support of an individual or cause, particularly someone who intervenes on behalf of a person being attacked or bullied.

## **White Supremacy**

The norms, laws, treatment, power, access, and opportunities that benefit white people and/or Western cultural practices at the expense of people of color and marginalized communities. It is rooted in the false belief that white people and dominant Western cultural norms are superior.

## **Xenophobia**

Dislike or prejudice against people from other countries or people perceived to be from other countries.

# KIDS' READING LIST

Ages 4-8

**The Proudest Blue** by Ibtihaj Muhammad

**Halal Hot Dogs** by Susannah Aziz and Parwinder Singh

**In My Mosque** by M.O. Yuksel and Hatem Aly

**Salat in Secret** by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow and Hatem Aly

**Under My Hijab** by Hena Khan and Aaliya Jaleel

**Amira's Picture Day** by Reem Farqui and Rahmida Azim

**The Gift of Ramadan** by Rabiah York Lumbard and Laura K. Horton

Ages 8-12

**Other Words for Home** by Jasmine Warga

**Unsettled** by Reem Faruqi

**Amina's Voice** by Hena Khan

**Proud (Young Readers Edition)** by Ibtihaj Muhammad

**Yusuf Azeem is Not a Hero** by Saadia Faruqi

**Once Upon an Eid: Stories of Hope and Joy** by 15 Muslim Voices by S.K. Ali and Aisha Saeed

**Grounded: A Novel** by Aisha Saeed, Huda Al-Marashi, Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow and S.K. Ali

## MEDIA RESOURCES FOR OLDER KIDS

Ages 10+

*Films and Media to Explore:*

**Lamya's Poem, 2021**

**Cities of Light: The Rise and Fall of Islamic Spain, 2007**

**Prince Among Slaves, 2007**

Ages 12+

*TED Talks:*

**What It's Like to be Muslim in America**

**Islamophobia Killed my Brother: Let's End the Hate**

**Dr. Alaa Murabit: What my Religion Really Says About Women**

**Lesley Hazleton: On Reading the Koran**

## RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS

*Continue Learning about Islam*

**What You Need to Know about Ramadan**

**Islam: Basic Beliefs**

*Continue Talking About Islamophobia*

**ISPU: Countering and Dismantling Islamophobia: A Comprehensive Guide for Individuals and Organizations**

**National Child Traumatic Stress Network: Talking with your Children about Islamophobia and Hate-based Violence**

**How Teachers Can Support Students During Ramadan**

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