

Draft Only

This information is currently in draft form as it is subject to further consultation with representatives of religious groups.

Islam

Teacher's notes and background information

Any person who believes in Islam is called a Muslim. Muslims believe in submission to the will of Allah (Arabic for God). The will of Allah was made known to his prophet Muhammad. The messages given to Muhammad are recorded in the Qur'an (sometimes known as the Koran) and is considered to be the declaration of Allah's will. The Qur'an is written in Arabic so Muslims learn to read the Qur'an in Arabic even if they live in a non-Arabic speaking country. Even though the Qur'an has been translated into many different languages it is considered more appropriate to read the Qur'an in Arabic as this is exactly the way Allah revealed his will to Muhammad. To Muslims Allah is considered the sole God, Creator, Sustainer and Restorer of the world.

Muslims believe that Islam began when God created Adam and Eve. As disbelief (*kufur*) increased God sent many thousands of messengers or prophets to the world to guide mankind to become righteous and true Muslims. Prophets included Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. The final and most important prophet was Muhammad in the 7th Century AD who was entrusted with the mission of spreading Islam by God's revelations which are now known as the Qur'an.

Islam has many followers throughout the world with the majority in the Middle East, parts of Africa and Europe, western Asia such as Pakistan and Afghanistan as well as south east Asia, particularly Indonesia. As these are very different cultures Islam may be expressed differently, showing the diversity of different countries. Muslims have common beliefs and a sense of responsibility to the teachings of the Qur'an and to Islamic law.

Islam is a religion but can also cover all aspects of society particularly in some countries that are Islamic states. There are currently 57 member states of the OIC (Organisation of the Islamic Conference). People who are non Muslims (unbelievers) may be persecuted in some Islamic countries while other countries have an official policy and practice of multiculturalism. Some Muslims see Islam as a 'holy struggle' or *jihad* to take Islam to the rest of the world.

Muslims have five basic duties, the *Five Pillars of Islam*. They are:

- the declaration of faith (*Shahadah*),
- five prescribed daily prayers (*Salat*),
- contributions to charity (*Zakat*),
- fasting during the month of Ramadan (*Sawm*)
- a pilgrimage to Mecca (*Hajj*).

The drinking of alcohol and using recreational drugs is forbidden as is immoral behaviour. Muslims dress modestly. They do not gamble. They do not eat pork.

Through these observances and by leading a holy life Muslims believe that at Judgement Day they will be granted eternal life.

About 2% of the Australian population¹ are followers of Islam. Many of these Muslims have been born here. Those who chose to immigrate here have come from over 70 different countries but mostly from Lebanon and Turkey in the past 50 years. Features of these cultures are now part of our way of life, particularly Lebanese and Turkish foods. The earliest contact with Islam was between Aboriginal people and the Macassan trebangers (fishermen) from Indonesia along the northern coastline of Australia and the 'Afghan' cameleers who took part in expeditions to explore inland Australia.

Resources:

Belief in Action, DET 2002, *Places of worship* page 74

Belief in Action, DET 2002, *Going by the book: An overview of holy books* page 80

Belief in Action, DET 2002, *Symbols of religions* page 84

Belief in Action, DET 2002, *Islamic community radio* page 14

Belief in Action, DET 2002, *Muslim traders in Australia* page 44

¹ *calculated from ABS data2001 B10 Religious affiliation by sex*