

**INTEGRATING ISLAM INTO REGULAR AMERICAN SCHOOL
CURRICULA OF SOCIAL STUDIES AND LANGUAGE ARTS**

Presented

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The Islamic teaching in a regular American school education system is greatly required to empower young Muslims with the knowledge of modern-day sciences based on the foundation of Islam. The intent of this paper is to emphasize the Islamic background and flavor within the Social Studies and Language Arts curricula of schools. When a student graduates from an Islamic School he should not only be prepared for the American college level as any public school student, but also should have attained a solid Islamic foundation. In order to develop this high caliber of student, we need to use a holistic approach, and provide students with opportunities to develop all their skills and talents, which is no easy task.

A major advantage our Islamic School educators have is the wealth of resources, and veracity of those resources. The first and foremost resource is the Holy Qur'an, which is, amongst other things, a Book of wisdom and guidance.

“Verily We have revealed The Book to thee In Truth, for (instructing) mankind.” [39:41]

The Holy Qur'an is a book of guidance for mankind. It is a book of Allah that throws light on all the keywords, topics, sciences and disciplines dealt within its verses. The guidance and light of the Holy Qur'an and the model behavior of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) as a ‘Sociologist’ of social change and development form the basis of the guidelines within the Social Studies and Language Arts curricula.

The second major resource is the hadith, which complements the Holy Qur'an.

“Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave.”

This famous hadith of our beloved Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) confirms that the pursuit of knowledge is a fundamental responsibility for every Muslim, male and female. It also indicates to us that knowledge involves a process in order to obtain and retain information, gain understanding by personal experience, and most importantly, develop a clear perception of truth.

Other resources include the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and other important Muslims, including all the prophets of Allah, the sahaba, family of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), scholars, and leaders in various fields.

Social Studies and Language Arts curricula based on the Islamic foundation must begin with the concept of ‘Tawheed’ that can be defined as oneness, unity, unification and holism. Allah (swt) is the source of all knowledge.

“Say: Travel through the earth and see how Allah begin creation; so will Allah produce a later creation. For Allah has power over all things.” [29:19-20]

The need of modern Islamic references and an overall Islamic ambience in the K-12 Social Studies and Language Arts curricula is very essential. This paper briefly presents the subjects within the Social Studies and Language Arts curricula, and how we can assimilate Islamic values, laws, culture, history, etc., while maintaining the highest level of the American

educational system. We will now demonstrate some ways in which these principles can be used to integrate Islamic studies within the social studies and language arts curricula.

SOCIAL STUDIES

History

There is an immense wealth of information on Islamic history in terms of great leadership, teamwork, integrity and loyalty, events, etc. The amount of information on Islamic History is so vast and diverse that it could be addressed and taught right from Kindergarten level all the way up to 12-grade level.

Teaching children about the mainstream American history is as important. But at the same time, wherever there is an opportunity in the syllabus to include more topics, Islamic history and all references must be included.

Varied History topics like Islamic History, History of Islam in America and other parts of the world, lives of Prophets, Khulafa-e Rashideen, Sahaba and other Islamic personalities and their biographies must be included in curriculum of all grade levels. The achievements of Muslim explorers must be brought home in the minds of the students.

Other examples include American and Islamic personalities who contributed towards the betterment of society, civilization, and social structure. Modern-day Islamic personalities of this century who have played a significant role in the enlistment of Muslim societies need a special mention and place in the textbooks.

Muslim students should have knowledge of Islamic Military personnel or warriors, people of high office and people who fought for the sake of Islam, their battles against all odds, their achievements and losses. History students reading about the American civilizations should also be educated about the nations and civilizations that flourished or perished depending on their obedience or their disobedience to Allah's commands.

Present day events and tragedies that affected the Muslim all over the world should also become part of the curriculum. Events such as massacre in Chechnya and Bosnia, tsunami disaster, and important events signifying not only triumphs but also defeats must be presented.

Geography

“And He adorned the skies nearest to the earth with lights (stars) and made them secure. Such is the determination of the Almighty, the All-knowing.”

Holy Qur'an.

The students must acquire the knowledge of Geography in the Islamic perspective through Quranic references. The holy Qur'an is replete with ayahs on all geographical concepts and theories.

Quranic references to Allah's creation such as the solar system, rivers, landforms, fruits, vegetation, desert, animal life, environmental conservation, and migration of people should be assimilated in the regular curriculum context.

To include some examples, teaching young students the concept of Allah as the only Provider (Ar-Razzaq) of sustenance to all living things can be initiated from the Kindergarten level. More examples can include the abundance of food for human consumption and its value and benefits, dietary restrictions in light of halal and haram foods, Allah's bounties like making of rain and other provisions of water resources, introduction of Hijri calendar. Every Hijri month has a remarkable historical and/or geographical events tied to it. As an example, Ramadan and Zilhajj are named after the Islamic pillars of Hajj and fasting and other months are named after events that occurred during those times.

Students can learn about the works of great Muslim explorers right from the times of Prophet [SWS]. The travels of Muslims to Mecca and Medina for Hajj led them to further explore the lands beyond the peninsula. Muslims geographers have done a significant work in the field of geography. It has been noted that the works of Muslim geographers in the 8th and 14th century were much more accurate than that of the Christian world. Al-Idrisi, Ibn-Batuta, and Ibn-Khaldun, to name a few among many scholars and explorers, have contributed immensely towards world Geography and History. For example, Al-Idrisi determined the circumference of the earth. Ibn Batuta is known as Muslim Marco Polo. His travels in quest of knowledge were the farthest than any had traveled in his time. He had written an encyclopedia on Islamic practices.

Ibn Khaldoun has written comprehensively on world history and geography. He is known as the first environmental determinist for his study of the environment on humans. By translating important Greek and Roman texts and by contributing to the knowledge of the world, Islamic scholars helped provide the information, which allowed the discovery and exploration of the New World in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Politics and Civics

Islamic History provides a wealth of information on forms of government, the purpose of government, law, qualities and duties of rulers and leaders, elections, rights and duties of citizens, equality of race and gender, dealing with tyranny, oppression, etc.

Islamic forms of government, and Islamic leaders, can be studied in the American context. For example, Muslim rulers are elected and have to meet the criteria of piety and good moral character as well as ability. Middle and High school students can compare Islamic forms of government with monarchies, democracies, dictatorships, etc. They can also study the source, development, and enforcement of Islamic law and US law.

Our Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the epitome of the ideal ruler, and the Khulafae-Rashideen are shining examples for modern-day rulers to emulate. Hadrat Salman Farsi (r.a), who came from Persia as a slave, became the governor of Sham, and Hadrat Bilal (r.a), who was an Abyssinian slave when he embraced Islam, was a prominent sahaba and the first muezzin.

Muslim women have played, and continue to play, a major role in government. The sahaba used to consult with Hadrat Ayesha (r.a.) on matters of government (the equivalence of a cabinet member), even though she was a woman, and she is also one of the most important narrators of hadith. Zubeida, the wife of Harun-al Rashid, used her own money to build a canal to supply water for Muslim pilgrims. A Muslim country has had a female ruler. Specific resources for older students include the last khutbah, 'Letters of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)', and Ahmad Deedat's 'Muhammad the Greatest'. Even elementary level students can be exposed to Islamic civics with biographies of rulers, and should be taught that we follow the rules that conform to Allah's will, and that the Holy Qur'an, together with the hadith, form the basis of Islamic law (sharia).

Economics

The Qur'an contains certain fundamental principles, which form the basis of the economic life of an individual and community. On these principles and their interpretation by the Prophet [sww] and his companions, the edifice of the economic life of individual and community is built and the objectives and functions of Islamic state are determined. The system of Zakat and the rationale behind it could be introduced at the primary level with simple examples of the importance of helping the needy, giving money to the poor and how Allah rewards the people who give and share. This can be continued to higher grades with the understanding of the system of Zakat and taxation. The economic teachings of the Qur'an are profoundly interposed with the basic concept of Islam, which acts as an inspiring force. In public school curriculum, the student is taught American Trade and Consumerism, rules of trade, finance, banking, interest and insurance etc. under American laws. Islamic Trade and consumerism, rules of trade, the permitted (halal) sources and means of income can be incorporated in regular teaching in an easy and comprehensible context. The commands of Allah in Qur'an and instructions of the Prophet [sww] in trade, expanding business, finances, and prohibition of interest, all can be introduced right from an early grade level. This can further be continued into higher grades, covering all the aspects and functionalities of the Islamic economic system.

The Holy Qur'an enjoins the values of equity, justice, mutual co-operation and self-sacrifice. The Khulafa-e Rashideen constructed the economic system on the principles of Holy Qur'an. The reformative works of the Caliphs for the socio-economic welfare in the early Islamic period throw light on the profound economic system of the Islamic state. Modern day examples of people, enterprises and countries flourishing by following Islamic economic system should be made prime examples in the curriculum. Ahadees of the Prophet [SWS] in trading with people - both Muslims and non-Muslims, the supply and demand, loans, debts, donations could all be introduced to students as they progress to higher grades.

Other examples can include the Islamic inheritance laws and role and duties of trustees, distribution of wealth and rights of orphans and minors:

“Unto the men [of a family] belongeth a share of that which parents and near kindred leave, and unto the women a share of that which parents and near kindred leave, whether it be little or much - a legal share.” [4:7]

“And let those fear [in their behavior towards orphans] who if they left behind them [economically] weak off spring would be afraid of them. So let them mind their duty to Allah and speak justly.” [4:9]

There are many more ayats and references in the Holy Qur’an that address this subject.

Culture

Culture deals with the customs and traditions of people, and includes topics such as clothing, food, languages, ceremonies or life events (weddings, funerals, etc.), and of course, Islamic holidays.

Islamic customs and traditions are based on The Holy Qur’an and the hadith. Allah (swt) mentions in the Holy Qur’an that some of His signs are that He has created us of various languages and colors, and that He has created us of different nations and tribes so we may know each other. Students should be taught, directly and indirectly, to accept and respect each other’s diversity. This can very easily be dealt with at all grade levels, and can be integrated with other subject areas, especially when the whole school has a multicultural festival. All students can be encouraged to share their cultural heritage with the class and younger students with Show and Tell, and older students with projects and displays.

Islamic holidays (this term is used rather loosely to include Islamic events) can be dealt with in their historical, geographical, economic and even political contexts. The Islamic Calendar can be compared to the Gregorian calendar, so students can understand why Islamic holidays do not coincide with American holidays. More specifically, Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha both have social and economic elements - congregational prayer and charity (payment of Fitra for the former, and distribution of meat for the latter). Some other holidays include Lailatul Qadr, Lailatul Baraa', Ashura, Isra and Meraj.

LANGUAGE ARTS

The English language arts curriculum, which includes reading, grammar, writing, speaking, listening, vocabulary, and literature, can promote appreciation for, and development of, Islamic knowledge and values by incorporating Islamic elements into the lessons, and in most cases, they apply to all grade levels.

Reading

The first word of the Holy Qur’an that was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is “READ” which is also a command of Allah (swt). This indicates the importance of reading, a skill that is required in all disciplines. We should therefore instill in our students a love for reading, and provide them with meaningful and morally appropriate material.

This can be achieved by incorporating Islamic selections, like biographies of important Muslims, both past and present. Many of these biographies can be accessed via the internet. Biographies of the prophets of Allah, especially Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the Khulafae Rashideen, sahaba, Muslim women, will demonstrate to students the high value placed on moral

character, noble conduct, and hard work, and provide students with Islamic role models. It is imperative that we include biographies of present-day American Muslims, like Mohammad Ali, Hakeem Olajawun, so that students see the viability of Islam in their communities.

Narratives and parables are excellent teaching tools; as mentioned in the Holy Qur'an:

“We have put forth for men, in this Qur'an.

Every kind of Parable, in order that they may receive admonition.” [39:27]

Make students aware that there is a syrah named Syrah Quasars (Narration). These same reading selections can then be used to teach grammar, vocabulary, and literature, so that it serves as further reinforcement.

Grammar

Here, the whole language approach is quite useful; it illustrates the application of grammar rules within context, making it more meaningful. Identify common and proper nouns, verbs, and other parts of speech related to Islam. Point out that the word 'Muslim' is a proper noun; and how the use of active and passive voice indicates the author's bias.

Writing

We need to know how to write so that we may record. Allah (swt) states in the Holy Qur'an that we should record contracts and agreements. For free-writing activities, use prompts with Islamic themes. For example, “I was on my way to the masjid to pray maghrib, when ...”, or select an ayat from the Holy Qur'an, or a hadith. There are many expository writing topics to choose from, like “How to do wudu”, “How to behave in the masjid.”, and so forth.

Illustrate to students the need to consider the audience, especially when writing a persuasive paper, or an informative paper. One method would be to assign the same topic to the whole class. Then divide the students into groups and give each group a different audience. Allow the groups to share their essays with the whole class and ask students to compare how the audience determines the content and tone of the final product. A pertinent topic would be “What is a Muslim?” and students would be required to write to Muslim and Non-Muslim audiences.

Speaking and Listening

These can be used as follow-up activities and even evaluation tools for reading, writing, and literature. Students of all ages will enjoy debates, especially if they relate to current events and moral dilemmas. Younger children can be encouraged to bring religious items for Show and Tell.

Vocabulary

Depending on grade level, provide the definition of Islamic terms, or ask students to use the dictionary to find the meaning of the words. Elementary level students should be exposed to daily Islamic words within context, and should be introduced to the Asma-ul-Husna, the Most Beautiful Names of Allah. Synonyms of common Islamic terms can also be taught, example *mashed* and *mosque*, which are used interchangeably. Make students aware of the many English words that are of Arabic origin, or are derived from Arabic. For higher-grade levels, teach students how the meaning and tone of a passage can be determined by words with strong positive or negative connotations.

Literature

Expose students to the various genres, including poetry (Mathnawi) and humor (Nasruddin Hoca). Use videos/DVD's like the Nightline episode of Hajj by David Wolfe, Ahmad Deedat's videos, 'The Message', 'Lion of the Desert' and 'Empire of Faith' to teach cause and effect, sequencing, main idea, and literary tools like metaphors and similes. Keep Bloom's taxonomy in mind when developing worksheets for the videos.

Research Skills

Students should be made aware that the author's perspective and opinions affect how information is presented, and applies to Muslim as well as Non-Muslim authors. Also, when translating from one language to another, some meaning is compromised. When teaching research skills, integrate Islamic studies and social studies themes. For example, students can research how religion affects social and economic classes.

In conclusion, Muslim students today need a comprehensive 'Islamization' of all disciplines – Social Studies and Language Arts and all other sciences and humanities. The teaching objectives of knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation must be based on a strong Islamic foundation. The Islamic Schools in the US provide us the opportunity to develop students into practicing Muslim citizens who can be life-long learners and will benefit the community at large.



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