



ANTI-MUSLIM BIGOTRY AND BEING AN ALLY

After the recent terrorist attacks in Paris, Beirut and San Bernardino, California, there has been an increase in incidents targeting the Muslim community and those who are perceived to be Muslim. Since the Paris attacks on November 13, 2015, there have been at least seventy-five incidents in the United States, including assaults, vandalism and threats. In the wake of these terrorist attacks, the emergence of ISIS combined with a lack of information among the general public and the tendency to conflate Islam with terrorism, there has been a surge in anti-Muslim sentiment in our public discourse, political rhetoric and everyday interactions. This trend is similar to the anti-Muslim sentiment that escalated following the September 11th terrorist attacks in 2001.

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to learn more about these incidents, reflect on the connection between these anti-Muslim acts of bigotry and the misunderstandings and stereotypes about Muslim people, and identify ways they can be allies in the face of bias and discrimination.

[NOTE TO TEACHER: It is important to consider that you may have students in your classroom who are Muslim or perceived to be Muslim. Be prepared and sensitive to those students, taking into account the extent to which they are a minority or majority of your classroom and plan accordingly. Some students who are Muslim may feel relieved and comfortable discussing these issues in class and others may feel nervous, uncomfortable or angry to be talking about a topic so close to home. Also, it is possible that other students in the class may or may not know that student(s) in the class are Muslim. That information should only come from the students directly and be aware that young people do not always feel comfortable sharing this information with other people. You may want to talk with students who are or perceived to be Muslim in advance and determine how they can discuss this topic while feeling comfortable and safe.]

See these additional ADL resources: *Current Events Classroom* "[Terrorist Attack in Paris and Scapegoating](#)," [Helping Students Make Sense of News Stories about Bias and Injustice](#), [Myths and Facts about Muslim People and Islam](#) and [ADL Reports at Least 75 Anti-Muslim Incidents In US Since Paris Attacks](#).

Grade Level: grades 7–12

Time: 60 minutes

Common Core Anchor Standards: Reading, Speaking and Listening, Language

Learning Objectives:

- Students will understand more about some of the recent incidents targeting the Muslim community and those perceived to be Muslim.
- Students will explore myths, stereotypes and misinformation about Muslim people and Islam and dispel them with facts and background information.

- Students will identify ways to be an ally to the Muslim community especially during this difficult time.

Compelling Question: What is anti-Muslim bigotry and what can we do to address it?

Material:

- Myths and Facts about Muslim People and Islam (www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/myths-and-facts-about-muslim-people-and-islam, one copy for each student)
- “In schools, on streets and TV, children feel Muslim backlash” (AP News, December 14, 2015, <https://apnews.com/article/a27f6b61b1fc42449c2e5c20e5e7aebe>), one copy for each student
- *Vernon Hills students join their Muslim peers in wearing hijabs* video (50 sec., Al Jazeera America News, 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLIRc84VHZc)
- 6 Ways to Be an Ally (www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/6-ways-to-be-an-ally-en-espanol, one for each student)
- Chart paper (11 sheets total: 4 for Myths and Facts activity and 7 more for Being an Ally activity)

Vocabulary:

Review the following vocabulary words and make sure students know their meanings. (See ADL’s [Education Glossary Terms](#) and [Muslim People and Islam: Key Words](#).)

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| • detainment | • graffiti | • massacre | • sentiment |
| • exclusion | • hijab | • mosque | • stereotypes |
| • faith | • ISIS | • Muslim | • terrorism |
| • fearmongering | • Islam | • profanity | • traumatic |
| • generalizing | • Islamophobia | • protective | |

INFORMATION SHARING

1. Ask students: *Have you heard about any recent incidents that involve targeting of Muslims or people perceived to be Muslims? What have you heard about?*

NOTE: If your students are unfamiliar with the word Muslim or Islam, explain that Muslim people follow the religion of Islam, which is based on the words and religious system founded by the prophet Muhammad and taught by the *Quran*.

2. Ask students: *What is Islamophobia?* If they don’t know the word Islamophobia, have students break the word down as “Islam” and “phobia” to see if they can guess its meaning. Define **Islamophobia** as prejudice and/or discrimination against people who are or who are perceived to be Muslim or of Arab descent, and a fear or dislike of Islamic culture.

Then ask students: *What does Islamophobia have to do with stereotypes?* If need be, define **stereotype** as an oversimplified generalization about a person or group of people without regard for individual differences.

3. Explain that we have seen an increase in incidents targeting Muslims, the Muslim community and those who are perceived to be Muslim. A variety of important current events may be contributing to some of

what we've been seeing including: (1) the Syrian refugee crisis and the negative way in which some people have been talking about the refugees, many of whom are Muslim, (2) the recent terrorist attacks in Paris, Beirut, and St. Bernardino, California that involved extremist terrorists who are Muslim and (3) the public conversation and rhetoric about Muslims including in the political arena (e.g. 31 U.S. Governors asserted their desire to ban Syrian refugees from entering their state and different proposals coming from candidates for the 2016 presidential race, including a call for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States).

Share some or all of the following incidents that have taken place recently. Explain that these are anecdotal but several experts have reported an increase in these incidents.

- In Hawthorne, CA, worshipers arrived to the Islamic Center of Hawthorne to see the words, "Jesus is the way" spray-painted on the building. The word "Jesus" was also spray-painted in white on an outer wall of the [Ahmadiyya](#) Muslim Community Baitus-Salaam Mosque in Hawthorne. A "plastic replica" of an object resembling a hand grenade was found in its driveway.
 - In Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a Muslim taxi driver was asked by a passenger where he was from and when he responded that he was from Morocco, the passenger started to talk about ISIS. After arriving at his destination, the passenger said he had to go inside his home to get his wallet and returned carrying a rifle and as the driver sped off, the passenger opened fire and pierced him in his back.
 - In Pflugerville, Texas at the Islamic Center of Pflugerville, torn pages of the Quran smeared with feces were found outside the mosque.
 - Representative Andre Carson, one of two Muslim members of Congress, received a death threat.
 - In Coachella, CA, a man was arrested and charged with arson as a hate crime in connection with at the Coachella Mosque. The fire began 15 minutes before the start of a midday prayer service, and several worshipers were inside the building when emergency crews arrived.
 - In Ohio, a seventh grade student was accused of getting into an argument with a Muslim sixth grader and threatening to shoot and kill him, calling him a "terrorist" and a "towel head."
 - In Philadelphia, PA, a pig's head was found outside the Al-Aqsa Islamic Society. No arrests have been made; a Mosque spokesperson said it was a "hate-motivated act."
 - In Grand Rapids, MI, a man held up a convenience store and repeatedly called the Sikh manager (who he probably mistakenly thought was Muslim) a "terrorist" and suggested he was a member of ISIS before shooting him in the face.
 - In Alameda, California, a brick was thrown through the storefront window of the Islamic Center of Alameda. In addition, they received threatening phone calls including one that said, "Go back home; you're not welcome here."
4. After sharing information about the incidents, engage students in a discussion by asking:
- What is happening here?
 - How do you feel after hearing about these incidents?
 - Why do you think this is happening?
 - What do the incidents have in common and what makes each unique?
 - What do you think can be done to stop these incidents from continuing to happen?

MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT MUSLIM PEOPLE AND ISLAM

1. Before distributing the Myths and Facts handout (see below), explain to students that sometimes people hold stereotypes or biases about particular groups of people because of misinformation and myths they have learned and internalized about the group of people. This can include race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, etc. Explain that you are going to share some statements about Muslim people and ask students if they believe the statements to be true, partially true or false.
2. Using the [Myths and Facts about Muslim People and Islam](#) handout, in advance write each of the four myths on pieces of chart paper and post them around the room, but do not include the word “myth.” Then have students walk around the room, adding a plus (+) to each one that they think is true, a minus (-) to ones they think are false, and a question mark (?) to those they are unsure about or they think are partially true. Students can also add what they think or know about that topic such as “Women are forced to wear a head scarf” or “There are Muslims in the military.” (An alternative strategy, but less anonymous, is to state a few or all of the four myths out loud one-at-a-time. As you read each one, ask students if they think the statement is true, false or partially true.)

After students complete this process (walking around the room or doing it aloud), ask: *What do you notice about our responses? Were there any patterns to our responses?*

3. Distribute the [Myths and Facts about Muslim People and Islam](#) handout to each student. Review the handout by reading it aloud or summarizing the main points. You may also choose to just address two or three of the myths since it will be a lot of material to absorb all at once.
4. Engage students in a discussion by asking:
 - What surprised you about what we read?
 - What did you learn that you didn’t know before?
 - Where do these myths or misinformation come from?
 - What is the impact of people believing the myths to be true?
 - Do you think knowing this information would change people’s points of view about Muslim people and Islam? Please explain.

READING ACTIVITY

1. Distribute a copy of the article “[In schools, on streets and TV, children feel Muslim backlash](#)” to each student. Give them 10 minutes to silently read the article. (You may also assign this for homework the night before the lesson.)
2. After students have read the article, engage them in a discussion by asking:
 - What did you learn by reading the article?
 - What are your thoughts and feelings about what you read?
 - Why do you think this is happening?
 - What do you think should be done to stop it from happening?

BEING AN ALLY

1. Show the following one-minute video, [Vernon Hills students join their Muslim peers in wearing hijabs](#).
2. Share the following recent story with the students aloud:

In Vernon Hills, a suburb of Chicago, a group of high school students participated in the "Walk a Mile in Her Hijab" event, which aims to spread awareness about Muslim cultural traditions and to combat anti-Muslim bias. Six members of the group spent the morning placing hijabs on seventeen non-Muslim girls who wanted to participate in the project. They talked about the meaning of the hijab and facets of the Muslim religion. One student said, "This event is to hopefully denounce negative stereotypes."
3. Engage students in a brief discussion by asking: *Why were the non-Muslim girls wearing hijabs? What are they hoping to accomplish by doing this?* Explain that the students were acting as allies to the Muslim students. Ask: *What is an ally?* Define **ally** as someone who speaks out on behalf of someone else or takes actions that are supportive of someone else.
4. Distribute a copy of the [6 Ways to Be an Ally](#) handout to each student. Go over the document briefly to make sure that students understand all of the six ways to be an ally and the distinction between them.
5. Explain to students that another way to be an ally is to address the issue in a larger way with a group of people (your class, school, community or larger society and world). Elicit and explain that an **activist** is defined as someone who gets involved in activities that are meant to achieve political or social change.
6. Divide students into small groups of 5–6 students each. Explain that each group should think about everything they have learned thus far (the myths and facts, the anti-Muslim incidents, etc.) and come up with a few strategies for addressing anti-Muslim bigotry by being an ally or with activism. Their ideas can include something one does individually, as a class or part of a larger group. Have each group record their ideas on a sheet of chart paper. If time permits, give students the opportunity to create something (art, social media, Power Point presentation, letter, etc.) to illustrate one of their ideas.

CLOSING

Have each student say one thing they can do to be an ally to Muslim people.

ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES

- ["A Running List Of Shameful Islamophobic Acts Since The Paris Attacks"](#) (*The Huffington Post*, November 20, 2015)
- [An A-Z Guide to Being a Muslim Ally](#) (Bitch Media, December 15, 2015)
- ["In schools, on streets and TV, children feel Muslim backlash"](#) (AP The Big Story, December 14, 2015)
- ["How Anti-Muslim Sentiment Plays Out In Classrooms Across the U.S."](#) (Alternet, December 21, 2015)
- ["How should schools respond to anti-Muslim actions against students?"](#) (*The Washington Post*, December 16, 2015)
- ["Muslim-Americans, What Are You Seeing?"](#) (WNYC Podcast, The Brian Lehrer Show, December 17, 2015)
- ["Muslim Parents on How They Talk to Their Children About Hatred and Extremism"](#) (*The New York Times*, December 15, 2015)

- [“The Feds Are Investigating Hate Crimes Against Muslims After the San Bernardino Shootings”](#) (Vice, December 14, 2015)
- [“The Rise of Hate Speech”](#) (*The New York Times*, December 12, 2015)
- [“The Stunningly Long List Of Anti-Muslim Hate Crimes Since San Bernardino”](#) (Talking Points Memo, December 15, 2015)
- [“Young Muslim Americans Are Feeling the Strain of Suspicion”](#) (*The New York Times*, December 14, 2015)

COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS

Content Area/Standard
Reading
Standard 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
Speaking and Listening
Standard 1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
Standard 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively and orally.
Language
Standard 5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings.