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# 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](#), one copy for each student
- “In schools, on streets and TV, children feel Muslim backlash” (AP News, December 14, 2015, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/a27f6b61b1fc42449c2e5c20e5e7aebe/schools-streets-and-tv-children-feel-muslim-backlash>), 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](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLIRc84VHZc))
- [Be An Ally: Six Simple Ways](#), 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 [Glossary of Education 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?*

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**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*.

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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 [Be an Ally: Six Simple Ways](#) 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.

# MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT MUSLIM PEOPLE AND ISLAM

## Myth #1: All Muslim people are Arab or Middle Eastern.

### *The Facts:*

Although Islam began as a religion in the Middle East and its holiest sites are located there, the region is home to only about 20% of the world's Muslims. As of 2010, there were 1.6 billion Muslims in the world, which is roughly 23% of the world's population, according to a Pew Research Center estimate. While many people think that most Muslims are of Middle Eastern descent, in actuality Indonesia (in Southeast Asia) currently has the single largest Muslim population. Projections into the future estimate that India (in South Asia) will have the world's largest population of Muslims by the year 2050.

In terms of Muslims in the United States, 75% of all U.S. Muslim adults have lived in this country since before 2000. The Muslim American population is significantly younger and more racially diverse than the population as a whole, with 30% describing themselves as white, 23% as black, 21% as Asian, 6% as Hispanic and 19% as other or mixed race.

## Myth #2: Islam is a violent religion and Muslims identify with terrorism.

### *The Facts:*

Within every religion, there exists a spectrum of attitudes and behavior and extremism is not unique to one particular belief system. There are people who sincerely view themselves as Muslims who have committed horrible acts in the name of Islam. These people, and their interpretation of Islam, is rightly called "extremist;" they are a minority within Islam and the vast majority of Muslims reject their violence and consider their interpretation a distortion of the Muslim faith. Extremism is not unique to Islam.

According to a 2015 Pew Research Center study collected in 11 countries with significant Muslim populations, people overwhelmingly expressed negative views of ISIS. It is important to keep in mind that Islam, like other Abrahamic religions, includes a large pool of opinions and different ways to understand the traditional holy text that was written in a different era. Terrorists use radical interpretations of Islam, which take a small number of texts that were meant to regulate warfare in the early days of Islam. Terrorists then apply these interpretations to contemporary times.

There is also a perception—even among many Muslims—that Muslim groups and leaders do not sufficiently denounce acts of terrorism. A 2011 Pew survey found that about half of all U.S. Muslims said their own religious leaders have not done enough to speak out against terrorism and extremists. However, it is useful to note that there are many Muslim heads of state, politicians, organizational leaders and individuals who regularly condemn these acts. For example, after the 2015 terrorist attacks in France, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar and Egypt led condemnations of the attacks. A coalition of leading national and local American Muslim groups also held a press conference to condemn the attacks. Further, thousands of Muslim clerics worldwide passed a "fatwa" (i.e. Islamic legal opinion) against terrorist organizations such as ISIS, the Taliban and al-Qaeda and requested that these terrorist groups not be branded as "Muslim organizations."

Muslims are also subject to increased incidents of hate crimes. In 2014, there was an overall decrease in hate crimes in the United States, but the number of hate crimes targeting Muslims grew from 135 in 2013 to 154 in 2014. And this is most likely an underrepresentation of the number of Muslims targeted because the numbers reflect only those crimes reported to police.

It is important to remember that terrorist attacks in the United States have been committed by extremists who have adhered to a wide range of ideological beliefs including the Ku Klux Klan, white supremacy, anti-government, Islamic extremism and others. No one ideology is responsible for terrorism in the United States.

### **Myth #3: You can't be Muslim and be patriotic to America.**

#### *The Facts:*

Based on a 2011 Pew Research Study survey, there are an estimated 2.75 million Muslims in the United States (some estimates of the Muslim population are larger), making up a little less than 1% of the total population. A 2011 Gallup poll found that the majority of Muslim-Americans say that they are loyal to the United States and are optimistic about the future even though they experience bias and discrimination. In a 2011 study by Pew, a majority of Muslim Americans (56%) reported that most Muslims who come to the United States want to adopt American customs and ways of life. Muslim Americans are equally as likely to identify with their faith as they do with the United States; 69% identify strongly with the U.S. and 65% identify with their religion. A 2013 Pew study found that most Muslim-Americans (63%) say there is no inherent tension between being devout and living in a modern society; as a point of comparison 64% of American Christians felt that way. There are currently two members of the United States Congress who are Muslim-American (Keith Ellison of Minnesota and Andre Carson of Indiana) and 5,896 members of the U.S. military self-identify as Muslim. (Note that of the 2.2 million members of the military, 400,000 of those have not reported their religion so the number of Muslims in the military is likely higher.)

### **Myth #4: Islam oppresses women and forces them into a subservient role.**

#### *The Facts:*

A common perception is that Muslim women are oppressed, discriminated against and hold a subservient position in society. The role and status of Muslim women in society cannot be separated from the role of women in the larger society because women around the world of all races, religions and nationalities face inequality on many levels. Muslim women are not alone in this. The Quran explicitly states that men and women are equal in the eyes of God and forbids female infanticide, instructs Muslims to educate daughters as well as sons, insists that women have the right to refuse a prospective husband, gives women the right to divorce in certain cases, etc. However, interpretation of gender roles specified in the Quran varies with different countries and cultures and in the Islamic world, there exist principles and practices that subjugate and oppress women (e.g. forced marriages, abductions, deprivation of education, restricted mobility). Many contemporary women and men reject limitations put on women and reinterpret the Quran from this perspective. It is also important to understand that, similar to other religions, people in positions of power will sometimes use religion as an excuse to justify oppression of women.

The head scarf is often cited as an example of oppression. The Quran directs both men and women to dress with modesty but how this is interpreted and carried out varies a great deal. Many people think that Muslim women are forced to wear a hijab (head scarf), niqab or burqa. While it is true that in some countries with significant Muslim populations women are forced to wear the hijab, this is not the reason Muslim women wear the hijab in most cases, particularly in the United States. In fact, many women choose to wear a hijab, niqab or burqa on their own and do so for a variety of reasons including a sense of pride in being Muslim, a collective sense of identity or to convey a sense of self-control in public life.

Another measure of women's roles in Muslim society is leadership. Since 1988, eight countries have had Muslim women as their heads of state, including Turkey, Indonesia, Senegal, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Bangladesh (two different women), Pakistan and Mauritius. Many Muslim countries—including Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia—have a higher percentage of women in national elected office than does the United States.

# BE AN ALLY

## TAKE ACTION. STOP BULLYING.

Here are some simple things you can do to be an ally to targets of name-calling and bullying. And remember—always think about your safety first when deciding the best way to respond.

### 1. Support targets, whether you know them or not.

Show compassion and encouragement to those who are the targets of bullying behavior by asking if they're okay, going with them to get help and letting them know you are there for them. Ask what else you can do and make sure they know they're not alone.



### 2. Don't participate.

This is a really easy way to be an ally because it doesn't require you to actually do anything, just to not do certain things—like laugh, stare or cheer for the bad behavior. By refusing to join in when name-calling and bullying occurs, you are sending a message that the behavior is not funny and you are not okay with treating people that way. The

next step is to speak up and try to put a stop to the hurtful behavior.

### 3. Tell aggressors to stop.

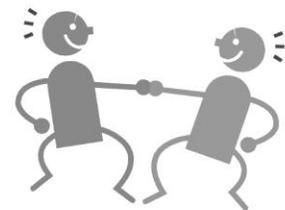
If it feels safe, stand tall and tell the person behaving badly to cut it out. You can let them know you don't approve on the spot or later during a private moment. Whenever you do it, letting aggressors know how hurtful it is to be bullied may cause them to think twice before picking on someone again.

### 4. Inform a trusted adult.

Sometimes you may need extra help to stop the bullying. It's important to tell an adult who you trust so that this person can be an ally to you as well as the target. Getting someone out of trouble is never "tattling" or "snitching." So don't think twice—reach out to a parent, teacher, guidance counselor, coach or someone else who will get involved.

### 5. Get to know people instead of judging them.

Appreciate people for who they are and don't judge them based on their appearance. You may even find that they're not so different from you after all.



### 6. Be an ally online.

Bullying happens online, too, and through the use of cell phones. Looking at mean Web pages and forwarding hurtful messages is just like laughing at someone or spreading rumors in person. It is just as hurtful, even if you can't see the other person's face. All the rules above are just as important to follow when texting or emailing. So online and offline—do your part to be an ally to others.