

Opening up Islam

Primary

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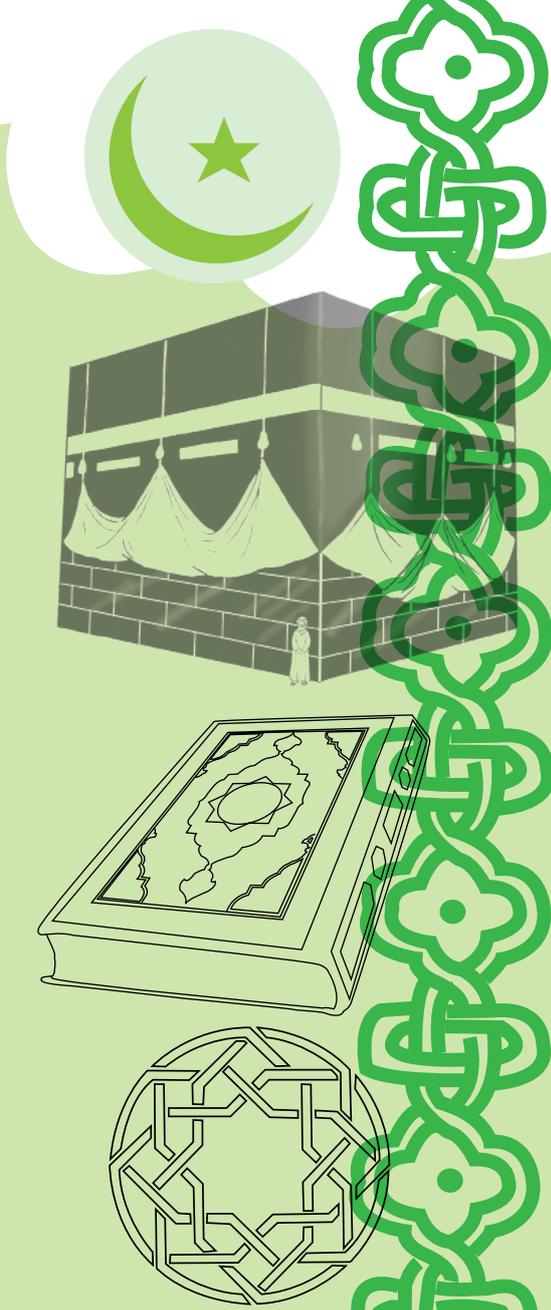
Helping children learn about and learn from Islam in the primary school has an important contribution to make to the lives of all children – and to wider ‘community cohesion’ as a whole. Imaginative teaching and learning about Islam can help children to see the importance of religion in the lives of Muslims, to counter stereotypes, and to appreciate what it is that attracts more than 1 billion followers from all parts of world today.

Getting to the heart of what it is to be a Muslim in Britain today in an open and accessible way is the challenge for good RE. Enabling children to encounter faith stories, meet believers, ask questions, and express their own ideas and beliefs in response to Muslim beliefs is central, as is giving teachers the confidence to ‘have a go’ at an area which, for some, feels fraught with sensitivities. This publication aims to help with both.

On these pages we share some suggestions and practical activities for exploring Islam and for supporting the subject leader. As well as focusing on RE outcomes (our main priority!), cross-curricular links are identified to help schools take learning about Islam into art, music, literacy and even mathematical understanding! At all times we aim to ensure the accuracy and appropriateness of the materials – and we express our thanks to Nasima Hassan, our faith community consultant, for her help and advice.

Joyce Mackley

Editor



Web links: RE Today website

The RE Today website offers subscribers some free additional resources and classroom ready materials related to this publication. Look out for the ‘RE Today on the web’ logo at the end of selected articles.

The password for access can be found in each term’s *REtoday* magazine.



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CREATIVE STORYTELLING WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN: FOCUS ON ISLAM

In this section, Marilyn Bowles, an early years specialist from Leicester, describes a creative storytelling approach adapted for use in RE, which she developed with Michelle Green and Kerrie Wood using a NATRE Curriculum Bursary. Further materials from this project can be found on the NATRE website (www.natre.org.uk) where 14 stories, 2 from each of the main faiths and 2 secular stories, can be downloaded.

For the teacher

Stories are an integral part of all religious traditions and help to explain and sustain people's belief and faith. Listening to stories is a wonderful way to engage children with these experiences.



Creative storytelling is an interactive way of bringing a story to life through the use of artefacts and enabling children to respond creatively. The story line is reinforced with opportunities for children to **interpret the story for themselves** through painting, writing poetry, using assorted materials for making models, or pens for drawing. These activities help children to engage with the story, remember it, and begin to recognise its significance within a faith tradition.



A Year 1 class come quietly into the storytelling circle, where a lit candle in the centre, quiet music playing and the waiting storyteller set the scene for this shared time.

The approach

The stories are told in a specific way using artefacts and models; a script is used with each story.

At the end of the story there follows some 'I wonder' discussion, followed by an opportunity for the children to create a representation of some part of the story or to make something that the story has made them think about. Two adult teachers/helpers gently support these activities.

The children's creativity is a vital part of the storytelling experience, involving children in an emotional response to what they have heard.

15-20 minutes is set aside for this; then the children come together with their artwork to share in the circle.

Cross-curricular links

Literacy: creative storytelling encourages speaking and listening, shared critical thinking and the use of new vocabulary with the support of artefacts



Art: using materials to create their own work, thinking and talking about the artwork of others

Social development: opportunities for collaborative work.



The creative storytelling process: step by step

1 Opening the story box

The storyteller has a **story box** containing the artefacts for use in the telling of the story and a script if needed (see sample script). The storyteller opens the box and reveals its contents, one at a time. For this particular story it might be a piece of coloured fabric to represent a field, a plant to represent the date tree, some stones and dates, and model figures to represent the boy and the farmer.



Figures can be made easily from polystyrene shapes using felt pens for hair, face and features, and fabric glued on for clothing.

2 Setting the story scene

A simple **discussion** is held to set the story scene:

- 'What do you think this fabric might represent?'
- 'In what way might these stones be used in the story?'

Praise the children's suggestions and then explain what they do represent (which may of-course be what they suggest). Place them on the floor. The characters are then introduced and placed on the floor.



The contents of 'The boy who threw stones at the date tree' story box

3 Telling the story

During the telling of the story the **artefacts** are used sensitively to bring the story to life, being moved into position as the story unfolds.

Sample Script

- 'Look at this special box' (show it to the group).
- 'This box looks like a present doesn't it?'
- 'It has the 'gift' of a precious story inside.'
- 'This story has been given to us from the Muslim tradition.'
- 'Let's look inside and see what story is here.'
- 'This story is important to Muslims because it teaches them about the wisdom of Allah and Prophet Muhammad and the importance of caring for the natural world.'



4 Following the story

After hearing the story, children are given opportunities to **talk about and express their ideas** from the story.

a Talking together: At the end of the story, the storyteller asks some **'I wonder' questions**, allowing time for children to respond. For example:

- 'I wonder how the boy felt when he was told he'd damaged the date palm?'
- 'I wonder what would have happened if the farmer had not forgiven him?'
- 'I wonder why the Prophet Muhammad suggested this solution to the problem?'
- 'I wonder whether you have ever harmed something and regretted it?'

This **philosophical discussion** can embed the children's ideas and spark new learning.



Making time to think ideas through

b Responding to the story: After this discussion there is opportunity for the children to **create a representation** of some part of the story or to make something which the story has made them think about. The two helpers gently support these activities. The children leave the circle one by one to go to **choose their task**, starting with the child to the left of the storyteller. The storyteller stays sitting down as they choose. The **children's creativity** is a vital part of the storytelling experience, involving children in an emotional response to what they have heard. Fifteen or twenty minutes is set aside for this, then the **children come together** with their artwork to share in the circle. To conclude the activity, share a small **'feast'** together: sharing dates from the story, thinking about how dates are a favoured dried fruit for many Muslims, how they grow in hot climates, can be eaten fresh or dried, and are a 'healthy option'!



Harkiran spent a long time forming the date palm, watching other children and then focusing back.



Anesah and Anesu discuss the story as they paint.



Yusuf uses his drawing to explain the 'problem' and how the Prophet Muhammad provided a 'solution.' Yusuf has drawn the Ka'bah in the corner of his picture to show that Allah is there.