

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

## INTEGRATING ISLAMIC, AMERICAN, AND OTHER RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS INTO THE CURRICULUM

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### INTRODUCTION

One of the strengths of life in the US, is our society of diverse cultures and religions. However, it also presents challenges, which can be overwhelming for

Muslim children, especially for those who are part of multicultural families. They often feel left out (or faced with the dilemma of choosing sides) when it comes to holiday time. We cannot ignore this issue, nor can we force our children to do the same. It is our duty as educators (together with religious leaders) to be a resource for our children, and support them.

One way of helping our children live in a multicultural and diverse religious society, is by teaching them about various holidays; and having structured activities and discussions which strengthen their faith, help them accept and respect their heritage, and define who they are. More importantly, we need to

inculcate in them the Islamic ideal of respect and peaceful co-existence for people of other faiths and cultures.

This paper will consider the rationale behind teaching holidays, which holidays we should teach, and how to integrate them into the curriculum.

### WHAT IS A HOLIDAY?

According to the dictionary, there are various definitions of what a holiday is.

These include:

A holy day.

A day when one is not required to work.

Vacation.

Festivity or celebration.

A period of relief.

A "commemoration of some event".

There are different kinds of holidays (religious, legal or national, festive), each having its own purposes and observances. One holiday can be more than one

kind; a religious holiday is often a legal holiday in a country where that religion is the official religion. The common purpose of holidays is to commemorate, or bring to our attention, a particular historical event, ideal, or value; while the kind of holiday determines how it is observed. For the purposes of this paper, we will consider a wide variety of holidays.

## WHY SHOULD WE TEACH ABOUT HOLIDAYS?

This prompts us to consider the purpose of schools. We generally agree that the purpose of schools is to educate students so they can live successfully in society. This means that schools have to provide students with the requisite knowledge, skills, and ethics for surviving in that society.

There are at least two functions that holidays perform:  
They reflect the values of a society.  
They preserve and transmit the traditions and values of a culture.

Since holidays make us aware of important people, events, ideals, and values, they reflect who, and what, the society considers important. By learning about the holidays of a society, we develop an understanding, and hopefully an appreciation, of that society and its cultures.

Holidays are one of the ways of preserving and transmitting the traditions and values of a culture. Every person belongs to at least one culture, and lives in a society. Subsequently, we are all aware of, and we are all exposed to the holidays in our society. In addition,

Therefore, we need to teach students about holidays for the following purposes:  
So that students develop an understanding and appreciation of other cultures within our society.  
So that students develop an understanding and appreciation of Islamic culture.  
So that students develop an understanding and appreciation of cultures within the Islamic community.  
So that students have knowledge and understanding of Islamic practices, traditions and values.  
So that students incorporate the Islamic practices, traditions and values in their daily lives.  
So that students develop the necessary skills to interact positively with people

of all cultures and backgrounds.

## WHICH HOLIDAYS SHOULD WE TEACH?

In order to answer this question, we need to keep in mind the above-mentioned purposes for teaching students about holidays, and we need to be aware of what kind of society we live in; what our important principles and values are, and the important people who embody those principles and values. It is also helpful to consider that societies are complex and dynamic.

Our students therefore need to study the major holidays (national and religious), as well as those holidays which challenge their faith or Islamic identity. By studying a variety of holidays, students will be able to develop appreciation and understanding of people, deal with challenges, make informed decisions, and participate fully in society. In addition, many state curricula require students to learn about various holidays (legal, cultural, and religious). The following is a basic list of holidays (presented chronologically) that we should integrate into our curricula, either at all grade levels, or at least at one grade level.

### LEGAL OR NATIONAL HOLIDAYS

New Year's Day  
Black History Month  
Valentine's Day  
Memorial Day  
Independence Day  
Thanksgiving Day  
Veteran's Day

### ISLAMIC HOLIDAYS

The Hijra  
Ashura  
Meeladun-Nabi  
Isra' and Me'raj  
Shabe Baraat (15th Shabaan)  
Ramadaan  
Battle of Badr  
Battle of Uhud  
Lailatul Qadr  
Eid-ul-Fitr  
Eid-ul-Adha

## HOLIDAYS OF OTHER RELIGIONS

Easter  
Rosh Hashanah/Yom Kippur  
Halloween  
Hanukkah  
Kwanzaa  
Christmas

Some other holidays which can be included for specific regions and states, or if

there is a large population of that culture, include:

Cinco de Mayo  
St. Patrick's Day  
Chinese New Year  
Pakistan Day

## HOW DO WE TEACH ABOUT HOLIDAYS?

We need to keep in mind that our overall goal is to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and values to be practicing, honorable Muslims, with strong

Iman. We need to guide our students, and be role models, by adhering to Islamic principles of understanding, and tolerance. The specific method of instruction will vary, depending the kind of holiday being taught. However, it would include most of the following:

What the holiday is about, including its history and rationale.

How and when it's observed.

Important lessons we learn. This is especially relevant to Islamic holidays.

We can most easily integrate the teaching of holidays into the social studies and language arts curricula. The relevant references from the Holy Qur'an and

Hadith should also be included. The Islamic holidays can also be included in the Islamic studies and Arabic curricula. However, it is imperative that students are taught about Islamic holidays in English, in order to incorporate them into their daily lives, and to communicate our Islamic beliefs and practices to people in our society. Every effort should be made to include awareness of Islamic holidays into all school activities; including assembly time, decoration of bulletin boards, etc. With very little effort, we can integrate the teaching of Islamic holidays into the math and science curricula,

by at least making students aware of them. For example, a math word problem can

revolve around sharing candy at the time of Eid.

Specific teaching strategies should make instruction meaningful for students; and can include:

Discussions

Art and craft activities

Projects

Interviews done by students

Student presentations

Guest speakers

Field trips

Community service projects

The use of various media.

When teaching about national or other religious holidays, we should consider the

Islamic perspective, when possible. Following are examples from each category.

Black History month: Students learn about the contributions made by African Americans, and use the information to make a crossword puzzle. Older students

can compare the American and Islamic perspectives on issues of race.

The Hijra: Numerous valuable lessons can be learnt from this historical event:

obedience to Allah (S.W.T.), perseverance, trust and faith in Allah (S.W.T.), brotherhood, generosity, and sacrifice. Students can learn about different calendars, and can compare how different peoples observe the beginning of their

new year. The American New Year and Chinese New Year can be discussed at this

time, too.

Christmas: Here we can discuss the original intent of the holiday, and how its focus has changed, especially in the US. The importance of Isa (A.S.) to Muslims and Christians, and how Christians and Muslims view him, should be dealt with. These aspects can be dealt with at all grade levels, with older students going into more depth. Our relationship with Christians can also be explored, in light of the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah.

## CONCLUSION

This paper is intended as an introduction to the very relevant, and unfortunately, neglected issue of integrating holidays into the curriculum; and

invites further thought and discussion. May Allah (S.W.T.) give us

knowledge,  
understanding, and wisdom.

## REFERENCES

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