



Teaching About Islam Through artefacts

**Some information cards to use with Islamic
artefacts in keys stage 2 RE**



Cambridgeshire
County Council

Children & Young
People's Services



Islamic Artefact Cards

- 1. QUR'AN STAND**
- 2. PLAQUE OF THE KA'ABA**
- 3. PRAYER MAT**
- 4. PRAYER COMPASS**
- 5. PRAYER TIMES CLOCKS**
- 6. POSTER OF THE DOME OF THE ROCK**
- 7. ISLAMIC CALENDAR**
- 8. ARABIC PRIMER**
- 9. PRAYER BEADS**
- 10. PIECES OF CALLIGRAPHY**
- 11. PLAQUE OF THE NAME OF ALLAH**
- 12. EID CARDS**
- 13. IHRAM**
- 14. PRAYER HAT AND HEADSCARF**



Qur'an stand

What is this stand for?

This stand is used as a book rest for copies of the Qur'an. The Qur'an is the holy book of all Muslims. It is very sacred and precious to Muslims because for them it is the actual words of God. Copies of the Qur'an are looked after very carefully. Muslims often keep their copy on a high shelf so that it is not possible to turn their backs on it. It may be wrapped in a special piece of cloth to stop it being damaged or spoilt.

Where does the Qur'an come from?

The words of the Qur'an were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad over several years. He lived in Makkah and used to go out away from the bustle of the city to think quietly on his own. One day he was sitting in a mountain cave. He felt there was a presence there with him. Something began to squeeze his chest so hard he could hardly breathe. A voice said, "Recite! Recite in the name of the Lord your God, who created man from a clot of blood!" The vision of the angel Gabriel told Muhammad what to say. The experience was so powerful that he could not put the words out of his mind.

When he returned to Makkah he was filled with uncertainty and fear. His wife reassured him and listened to the words Gabriel had told him.

This happened again and again.

How did the Qur'an become a book?

The Prophet Muhammad told the words of God to some of his close friends. They wrote them down on anything they could: they carved them on pieces of bone or wood or stone or wrote them on sheets of palm leaf.

After the Prophet died people realised they needed to put all the words of God together into a complete book. They wanted the words to be kept exactly the same, without any changes at all. The words were kept in Arabic just as the Prophet Muhammad had heard them.

Most Muslims learn the Qur'an in the original Arabic, even if their own everyday language is English or French or Urdu or Punjabi or Turkish. Some Muslims honour the Qur'an so much that they learn the whole book by heart.

Muslims are taught that they should live by following the guidance.



Plaque of the Ka'aba

What is this picture of?

This building is in the middle of Makkah, a city in Saudi Arabia. It is called the Ka'aba. It has been there for thousands of years. Muslims believe it was built by the Prophet Ibrahim for people to worship Allah. Many Muslims all over the world think about it several times every day because they turn to face its direction when they say their prayers. Millions of Muslims go there on a pilgrimage every year.

Why is it so special?

When the Prophet Muhammad lived in Makkah about one thousand four hundred years ago the Ka'aba was full of statues and idols. People used to go there to worship them. Muhammad taught the people that this was wrong and that true religion was not to do with worshipping statues or bits of wood or stone. He told them there was only one true God. Muhammad cleaned all the images out of the Ka'aba and made it a holy place for Muslims.

How can we tell it is a very special place for Muslims?

Muslims everywhere turn to face the direction of the Ka'aba when they pray. Muhammad also taught that any Muslim should go to Makkah for a pilgrimage once in his or her lifetime if at all possible. Because Makkah is such a holy city for them, only Muslims are allowed to visit it.

What does the Ka'aba look like?

Nothing is kept inside the Ka'aba now. It is covered with a beautiful black cloth covered with writing from the Qur'an in gold embroidery. People make a new one every year and think it is a great honour and privilege to have the job of doing it.

Is there a special place you would hope to go to at least once in your lifetime?



Prayer mat

What is a prayer mat for?

This soft mat can be rolled up and taken anywhere a Muslim might pray. Devout Muslims pray five times every day, wherever they are. Their prayers include a set of movements when they act out their submission to God by kneeling down and touching their foreheads to the ground. So the place where they pray where they pray has to be clean. The people have to be clean too. They get ready for worshipping God or reading the Qur'an by washing themselves in a special way. This is called wudhu.

When do Muslim people pray?

They can say prayers any time they want to, just like anybody else! But the fixed prayers take place five times a day. Lots of people pray in their own homes or places of work but some go to the mosque, especially for Friday midday prayers. Some even stop in the middle of a journey and pray at the side of the road! They don't have to pray on a prayer mat – they can even use a piece of newspaper provided that it is clean. Most people do use a prayer mat, though. The mats sometimes have pictures on, perhaps of Muslim holy places like the Ka'aba in Makkah or the Prophet's Mosque of Madinah.

Why do Muslims pray five times a day?

Praying five times every day helps Muslims remember God and how he wants them to live right through the day, every day.

Is there anything you do on a regular basis to keep in practice, or to keep up good habits?



Prayer compass

What is this compass used for?

A compass like this can be used anywhere in the world to work out the direction of Makkah (Mecca). Muslims turn towards Makkah when they say their prayers. They can use the compass with the little book to work out the right way to face. There are Muslim people in nearly every country in the world, and of course many Muslims travel on business or study or to visit friends or family.

A compass is only needed for private prayers at home or in a hotel or strange house. In any mosque – the Muslim place of worship – there is a special recess (hollowed out section) in one of the walls showing the direction of Makkah. The recess is called a mihrab and it is often specially decorated with beautiful tiles in Islamic patterns.

Why do Muslims turn towards Makkah?

Makkah is where Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, was born and lived for the first part of his life. Near Makkah he heard the first revelations of the Qur'an. In the middle of Makkah is a holy place, a cube shaped building covered in black. It is called the Ka'aba. Before the Prophet's time it had been filled with idols, but he taught there was only one God. He cleared the statues and idols out. When Muslims turn towards the Ka'aba they are reminding themselves of the one God, whom they address in prayer.

Is there anything you do to help remind yourself about important things?



Prayer times clocks

What is this set of clocks used for?

This board has five clock faces for the five prayer times, and one to show the time of sunrise. At the top (right) it says “Allah” (God) in Arabic, and on the left “Muhammad”, the name of the Prophet of Islam. Linking the two is the phrase “Bismillah al-rahman, al-raheem”, a dedication which means “In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful”. At the bottom the inscription reads, “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his Messenger”.

Why do people need a set of clocks for prayer?

Devout Muslims recite a set of special prayers five times a day. They can pray any time they want to ask for particular things, like the blessing of Allah on their families, or for peace in the world, but the set prayers should be done at particular times of day. The times are linked to the times of sunrise and sunset. The first prayer is at dawn. The second is after the middle of the day. The third is in the afternoon. The fourth is at sundown. The fifth is night prayer. The clock faces on this board can be adjusted every day because there are slight differences according to the time of year and the changing position of the sun and earth. In winter in the northern hemisphere the prayers will all be closer together. In summer they will all be farther apart.

Do Muslim people always need these clocks?

For Muslims in tropical countries like Malaysia the prayers would be at more or less the same time all year round. In a mainly Islamic country people wouldn't need a set of clocks like this. They would hear the muezzin making the call to prayer from every mosque around the town or village. If you visit a country like Nigeria you may get woken up at dawn by the sound of the call to prayer from a mosque near by, and then another and another echoing all around. The call to prayer says, “God is great! God is great! Come to prayer! Come to success!” in Arabic.

When a new Muslim baby is born, somebody will whisper those words in its ear, so that the very first thing it hears is the call to come and worship God.

The whole day is punctuated by prayer. Any time a person might be tempted to do something wrong, they would soon be coming up to another prayer time which would remind them again of the need to live according to the will of God.



Poster of the Dome of the Rock

Where is this building, and why is it special?

This beautiful building is the third most holy place for Muslims, after the Ka'aba in Makkah and the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah. It is in Jerusalem and is built over a great outcrop of rock. This is how it gets its name. Muslims believe this is the rock from which Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, was taken up to Heaven on his miraculous night journey. He was taken by God to the heavens and saw the complete version of the Qu'ran, the Muslims' holy book. Muslims have always revered the site where they believe this happened.

Who goes there?

Muslims who live in the city of Jerusalem feel it is a special honour to be able to go there for Friday midday prayers – the time when Muslims gather together to pray at a mosque rather than at home. Friday is not a day of rest from work, but many Muslims go to the mosque and hear the weekly sermon there, when the imam teaches them about how to lead a better life and follow the will of God. Jerusalem is a holy city for Muslims and also for Christians and Jews.

What is the building like?

The Dome of the Rock itself is a magnificent building, with a dome covered with gold leaf. The walls are covered with tile work using Islamic symmetrical patterns and inscriptions from the Qu'ran for decoration. People who are going there to pray will wash themselves at special fountains in the courtyard before going in. As in all mosques, people who go in have to dress modestly, and women cover their heads. People take off their shoes to go in, because it is a sacred place, which must be kept clean. Muslims kneel and touch their heads to the ground in submission to Allah when they pray.

What is the most beautiful building you have ever been into?



Islamic calendar

What is special about the Islamic calendar?

The Islamic calendar is different from the Western (Christian) one. The system of dating years 'A.D.' and 'B.C.' is a way of calculating time by referring to the birth of Jesus. The Islamic calendar starts with the year when the Prophet Muhammad and a small group of his followers fled from Makkah. They were in danger of their lives. They moved to the city of Madinah and started the first Muslim community there. Their move is called the 'hijra' and the letters A.H. stand for 'anno hijriyyah' or 'year of the migration'. The Christian calendar has months of different lengths. It is related to the movements of the sun. The Islamic calendar has twelve months of equal lengths. They are related to the waxing and waning of the moon, so time is measured on a lunar calendar.

Are there any special times or festivals in the Islamic year?

During the twelve months of the Islamic year there are some important festivals and commemorations. Because of the lunar calendar these are not on a fixed date; they come ten days earlier (by the Western calendar) each year. The most important one is Ramadan, which is the month of fasting. During this time devout Muslims will not eat, drink or smoke during daylight hours. They do this to show they can follow the will of Allah, even if it is difficult. It also helps them to experience what it is like to be poor and never to have enough to eat. At the end of the month there is a great celebration called Eid ul Fitr.

Another Eid (festival) takes place in the month of pilgrimage, and it remembers the story of Ibrahim and his son (like the story of Abraham and Isaac in the Bible). Another special time is the Mawlid al-Nabi (the birthday of the Prophet). Another special time for Muslims is Ashura. This is a very sad day when they remember the killing of the Prophet's grandson and his followers. One group who are called Shi'a Muslims act out plays showing the events which led to their deaths and have street processions when they show their sorrow for what happened.

What are the special points in the year for you?



Arabic primer

Why do Muslims from different countries want to learn Arabic?

Arabic is the language of the Muslims' holy book, the Qur'an. Devout Muslims learn parts of the Qur'an in the original Arabic, even if their own everyday language is Urdu, Malay, Punjabi, English, Turkish or French. They believe the Qur'an contains the actual words of God, so they think it is impossible to translate them properly. They think the meaning might get changed. There are Muslims in most countries in the world, and they all use the same prayers in the language of Arabic. So somebody travelling to a different country would be able to feel at home in a mosque saying their prayers with other Muslims.

How do Muslims children learn about the Qur'an?

Many Muslims learn to recite parts of the Qur'an in Arabic. Some learn the whole book off by heart. A person who can do this is called a 'hafiz'. Some Muslim teenagers in Britain can do this. Sometimes people just learn it from the memory to show their devotion, without always understanding exactly what it says. Most Muslims try to learn some Arabic to help them understand the Qur'an. They may go to special classes after their ordinary school day is over. These classes are usually at a 'madrasah' or mosque school. The children and young people will learn how to read Arabic. They will learn about the traditions and teachings of their religion.

This book is called a 'primer', that is a beginner's book. It contains the Arabic alphabet and some letters put together into simple words. It is made of plastic because a small child would take it to and from madrasah. If it got dropped it wouldn't be spoilt in the way a paper book might be.

***Have you ever tried to learn something important off by heart?
Do you know anyone else who has done?***



Prayer beads

What are the prayer beads used for?

Muslim people sometimes use prayer beads to help them concentrate on worshipping God. There is loose thread between the beads so that you can slide them along as you say the word or phrase for each one. Some strings have 99 prayer beads. Others are divided into 3 sections with 11 beads in each. The whole string has 33 beads. If you count each bead three times this comes to 99. Muslims have 99 names for Allah (the Muslim word for 'God'). People learn and say these to try to think about what Allah is like. Here are just a few of the names:

The Wise
The Maker
The Powerful

The Forgiving
The Holy
The Generous

The Everlasting

The Glorious
The Merciful
The Guide

The Loving
The Provider
The Just

People might use the prayer beads to say a series of other short prayers, to help them concentrate or to remember the number of prayers.

Why are there so many different names for God in Islam?

Muslims believe it is wrong and also impossible to try to draw or paint God. Instead they think about God's qualities or attributes, that is, what God is like. These many names give some idea.

Some prayer beads have things written or carved on them. These might be the Arabic words for "Praise God" or "God is great".

There is an Arab story about the camel. The camel always has a very smug expression and looks very pleased with itself. People say this is because the camel is the only creature, which knows the hundredth name of Allah ...



Pieces of calligraphy

What is calligraphy?

Calligraphy means “beautiful writing”. It has been developed as a main art form in Islamic culture. It is often used for decorating mosques and other buildings. In most parts of the Muslim world people believe it is wrong to try to draw or paint God or any great religious figures. They believe there is a danger people will worship the pictures and statues, not God. So for most of Islamic history, pictures of people have not been used for decoration. Instead mosque walls are covered with symmetrical patterns of flowers and leaves or sometimes just geometric patterns. Arabic writing is also used a lot for decoration, often using quotations from the Qu’ran, the Muslims’ holy book.

How is writing used to decorate things?

Painting is not as important in the Islamic world as in the west, but decorative art has always been important. Glass, metal, pottery, stone, plaster, wood and other materials have been carved or painted with calligraphy so that objects of all kinds are made beautiful by being decorated with the words of Allah.

People often use these for decoration in their houses too. Stickers like this can sometimes be seen in windows or above front doors of the houses of Muslim families. The texts would help to remind people about the most important beliefs of their faith.

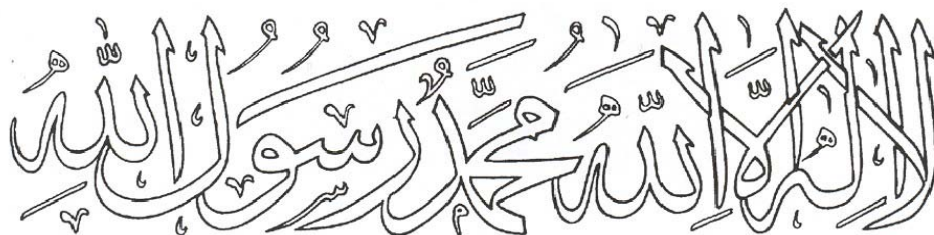
The piece of writing on the top right hand corner of this card says:

“In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful”.

Muslims often say or write this as a dedication before starting something, e.g. giving a talk.

The text at the bottom of this page says:

“There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of “Allah”.
This statement is called the Shahadah. It is the first pillar of Islam.



Plaque of name of Allah

Where might you find a plaque like this?

Muslim families might have a plaque like this in their homes. The writing says "Allah" which is the word for "God" in Arabic. Muslims have the word instead of a picture. They think it is wrong for humans to try and draw pictures of Allah. How can humans have any idea of what God looks like? Muhammad, the great prophet of the Muslim religion, taught that if people have pictures or statues or images of God they may end up worshipping pictures instead of God. So most Muslims never use pictures to help them think of God when they pray. Instead they decorate their homes and places of worship with pieces of writing from their holy book, the Qu'ran. Sometimes there are also beautiful patterns, which swirl around the walls and ceilings to remind people of the unending perfection of God's creation.

But there are no pictures of God or the Prophet Muhammad or his early followers or other great people from Islamic history.

There have been Muslims in some parts of the world or in some times in history who don't feel so strongly about this. In Turkey and Iran and northern India several hundred years ago, people used to draw beautiful miniature pictures showing scenes from Muslim stories. Sometimes they drew a flame instead of the head for holy people like the Prophet Muhammad, or his cousin Ali.

The most important belief for Muslims is that there is only one God. This is why many of them feel so strongly that it is wrong to try to draw God.



Eid cards

Why do people send these cards?

Muslims often send cards to each other to celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr, the celebration at the end of Ramadan. They may also have new clothes to wear, give each other presents, and get together with their families for a special big meal. Many of them will think about people who are poor or who need help, and give money to Muslim charities. Lots of people will go to the mosque to pray to Allah and to celebrate the end of Ramadan with their fellow Muslims.

What does Eid ul Fitr mean?

Muslim people often celebrate in a big way at Eid ul-fitr. The word 'eid' simply means 'festival'. 'Fitr' means 'breaking' because it is the festival, which breaks or ends the fast of Ramadan. To fast means to go without food or drink of certain kinds or to go without food altogether. This is not the same as going on a diet – fasting is often done for a religious reason.

What happens during Ramadan?

For Muslims the month of Ramadan is a time when they should not eat or drink from dawn to sunset every day for a month. The fast starts at dawn (as soon as it is possible to tell a black thread from a white one). Then people eat and drink nothing until sundown. It's very hard to go without food or water for so long. By mid-afternoon people often start feeling tired. But families often make a real effort in Ramadan to celebrate together at the evening meal. The moment when everyone can start to eat again is a special time. They have experienced how difficult it is to go without food but at supper they can all relax and really enjoy their meal together. It is a specially hard time for whoever is preparing the meal. They have to do all the cooking and smell the delicious smells of the food but not give in and taste anything.

If it is so hard, why do people do it?

Muslims fast at Ramadan because they believe it is the will of Allah that they should, and they are following the example of the Prophet Muhammad. It helps them to understand what it is like to be poor, and never to have enough to eat. It also helps them to show their self-control. It is a very hard thing to do, but everyone who does manage to fast can feel proud of themselves afterwards. You might hear people say to each other "Ramadan kareem" which means "Ramadan is generous".

The feeling that they have shared a hard day but have succeeded in resisting the temptation to eat makes people feel closer to each other. In countries with a lot of Muslim people the atmosphere in the evenings is almost like a festival every night.

Nobody is expected to fast if they are ill or travelling or (for women) if they are expecting a baby. If for any reason someone misses a day they should make it up later, after the end of Ramadan.

Do young Muslim children have to fast?

They don't have to, but a lot of them want to! When everybody else is doing it, children want to be able to join in; it's a sign that they can do as well as the grown ups. Most children would be encouraged to start sometime after they were seven years old, maybe fasting for just one or two days. They might try to fast the whole month when they were about 12 or 13.



Ihram

Who would buy this garment?

This would be bought by a Muslim man or boy who was going on a pilgrimage to Makkah. When they arrive in Makkah, pilgrims change the clothes they have worn on the journey. It may be a suit or a robe or a shalwar kameez or jeans and a T-shirt. For the pilgrimage they all wear the same, whether they are rich or poor, young or old. This shows they are all equal in the sight of Allah. Many Muslims keep their ihram to be buried in when they die.

What is the garment like?

It is two pieces of plain white cotton. They are wrapped round the top and lower half of the body like a robe. Makkah is the city where the prophet Muhammad was born and taught people to be Muslims. When Muslims come to Makkah on pilgrimage, as well as all wearing the same clothes, they all take part in the same activities. They all say the same prayers, in the same language (Arabic). All these things help to remind them they are part of one great worldwide community of Muslims.

What do people do on the pilgrimage?

They go to the Ka'aba, a holy place which is a building shaped like a cube. Pilgrims walk round it seven times – they may not get very close as they will be just one of hundreds of thousands of people carried along by the human wave. Then they go to two low hills, a place which reminds them of the story of Ibrahim, Hagar and their son Ishmael. They go to the plain of Arafat, where they stand and pray, and hear a sermon. On the following day they throw stones at three pillars, which for some people represents throwing stones at the devil and driving him out of their lives. Then they sacrifice a sheep or goat, just as the prophet Ibrahim did in place of his son Ishmael.

This may sound easy but it is not. For most of the year it is intensely hot in Makkah, and it is quite hard to stand outside even for a few minutes, never mind to walk long distances. As well as wearing their ihram, most pilgrims take important everyday things like parasols to shade them from the sun and water bottles so they don't get faint from thirst.

What else do people do on the pilgrimage?

People often visit the second great holy place of Islam – the city of Madinah where the prophet Muhammad is buried. He set up the first Muslim community in Madinah in 622 CE, and the Islamic calendar starts from that year. Some pilgrims bring goods to sell, to help to cover the cost of their journey. Many of them buy religious souvenirs to take home for their families and friends. For many Muslims it would be very special to be given a present from Makkah; they turn to face it five times a day in their prayers, so they think about it a lot. Every Muslim who can afford to, and is in good enough health, has a duty to make the pilgrimage once in his or her lifetime.

Is there a special place you would want to visit on a 'once in a lifetime' journey?



Prayer hat and headscarf

Do Muslim people wear special clothes?

One of the first things people may notice about a group of Muslims is that they dress modestly. Even in hot countries, Muslim men generally wear clothes, which cover much of their body (e.g. in Egypt or the Gulf States they often wear long galabiyas, and working on farms or building sites will be more likely to wear jeans and a T-shirt than shorts and no shirt). It is the same for Muslim women; they often prefer to wear clothes which cover their bodies and their hair.

Why do Muslim people feel so strongly about dressing modestly?

The Qur'an (the holy book of Islam) teaches that people should dress modestly. They should take care of their bodies, and not just flaunt them about for anyone in the world to look at. At home with their families people wear whatever they feel most comfortable in. They will just put on something more covering when they go out.

People interpret this teaching in different ways. Some people feel it is best to be covered up from head to foot and have as little of their body showing as possible. Others feel it means you should wear things which are quite loose fitting and reasonably covering.

Sometimes non-Muslims think this is a problem for Muslim women. But many of them prefer to dress this way because then people judge them on what they are like as human beings, not because of how glamorous they are. Many Muslim women cover their heads, often by wearing a headscarf. To cover your head is seen as a sign of respect and respectability. Men will often wear prayer hats when they go to the mosque – or in some cases wherever they are. In Britain you often see Muslim boys wearing prayer caps and girls wearing head scarves.

Is it the same all over the world?

No! If you go to a place where you can meet Muslims from many parts of the world, like the London Central Mosque near Regents Park, you will see Muslim men and women wearing a vast range of different types of head coverings and clothes. However it is likely in all cases that they will be modest.

What clothes do you feel happiest wearing? Do you think that what people wear affects the impression they give?