



# The California Three Rs Project

*Rights, Responsibility, and Respect*

## Holidays in the Public Schools: Ramadan

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The Muslim holiday of Ramadan is a month-long observance that falls on the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, the holiest month of the year. To Muslims, Ramadan recognizes Muhammad’s divine revelation from Allah, as recorded in the Qur’an, or Koran. Fasting during Ramadan is one of the Five Pillars (fundamental religious duties) of Islam. The time of fasting is also a time of self-examination and increased religious devotion.

People of Islamic faith are encouraged to read the entire Qur’an during Ramadan.

Some Muslims may even recite the entire Qur’an by the end of Ramadan through special prayers known as *Tarawih* held in mosques each night of the month, during which a section of the Qur’an is recited.

Ramadan is also a month for acts of charity. Some Islamic centers and organizations actively take part in charity events and activities. These activities include giving basic necessities, such as food and clothing, to the homeless or donating equipment to schools.



Young Muslims in Patterson, New Jersey, enjoy eating dates during Iftar, the evening meal when Muslims end their daily fast during the month of Ramadan. (U.S. Department of State)

| Ramadan Dates |                         |                       |
|---------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Year          | Ramadan starts on . . . | Ramadan ends on . . . |
| 2016          | Monday, June 6          | Tuesday, July 5       |
| 2017          | Saturday, May 27        | Sunday, June 25       |
| 2018          | Wednesday, May 16       | Thursday, June 14     |
| 2019          | Monday, May 6           | Tuesday, June 4       |

During Ramadan, Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset, taking neither food nor water during daylight hours. Their time is focused on prayer, charity, and self-reflection. Since many public schools in California have summer school classes in July, the daylight hours for their Muslim students will be both hot and long.

It is important to be aware of potential religious-liberty issues and humane issues that may need to be addressed related to the holiday. For example, Muslim students and faculty may have challenges in participating in strenuous activities or events involving food. They may also be tired because they have eaten dinner late in the evening, sometimes attending religious services, and have gotten up before dawn for breakfast. The expectation for participation in a full month of fasting increases with the age of Muslim children. Young students may not fully fast, while healthy pre-teens and adolescents normally do take full part.



Muslim soldiers in the U.S. Army bow in prayer during the Eid al-Fitr celebration to mark the end of Ramadan. (United States Army)

Faculty and students absences may occur, especially on Laylat al Qadr, also known as the “Night of Power,” or the “Night of Destiny.” Laylat al Qadr takes place on one of the last 10 days of Ramadan. One of the most sacred nights in the Islamic calendar year, Laylat al Qadr is identified as the night in which Allah first revealed the Qur’an to the Prophet Muhammad. As many Muslims believe that this day holds more power in prayer than a thousand months, some spend the whole day in prayer and reading the Qur’an. Sunni Muslims traditionally observe Laylat al

Qadr on the 27th day of Ramadan, while Shi’as believe the 23rd day to be the most important. Since the specific day of the revelation is uncertain, many Muslims spend the last 10 days of Ramadan focused on prayer.

Many Muslims in the United States celebrate Eid al-Fitr (also Id al-Fitr, or Eid ul-Fitr) at the end of Ramadan with a three-day feast beginning at sunset on the last day of the long fasting period. Eid al-Fitr is an important Islamic holiday that involves many Muslims waking up early and praying either at an outdoor prayer ground or a mosque. Many Muslims dress in their finest clothes and decorate their houses with lights and ornaments. Old wrongs are forgiven and money is given to the poor. Special foods are prepared and friends or relatives are invited to share the feast. Gifts and greeting cards are exchanged and children receive presents. According to Islamic belief, Eid al-Fitr is a joyous occasion, but its underlying purpose is to praise God and give thanks to Him.

Though Eid al-Fitr is not a federal public holiday in the United States, many Islamic businesses and organizations alter their business hours. In places where there is a large Muslim population, groups campaign for schools to designate Eid al-Fitr as a day off without attendance penalty. Some have been lobbying to have Eid al-Fitr become a school holiday. In 2015, New York City became the first major city to close its public schools in observance of Eid al-Fitr (and one other Muslim holiday, Eid al-Adha). In years when Eid al-Fitr falls on a weekend or, as in 2016, during summer break, this is less of an issue.

## Resources and Lessons

### **About.com: Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr**

<http://islam.about.com/od/ramadan/>

Here is general information about Ramadan and the three-day Eid al-Fitr celebration (the Festival of Fast-Breaking) from an academic perspective.

### **Center for Middle Eastern Studies: Ramadan**

<http://cmes.arizona.edu/node/638#R>

This instructional resource, developed by Lisa Adele for the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, includes a PowerPoint, overview for teachers, picture notes, a fact sheet, and classroom activities.

### **Eid al-Fitr**

<http://eid-al-fitr.123holiday.net/>

At the end of Ramadan, Muslims throughout the world have Eid al-Fitr. It is a time to give charity to those in need and celebrate with family and friends the completion of a month of blessings and joy.

### **Eid al-Fitr - Discussion**

<http://www.teachersdomain.org/resource/islam08.socst.world.glob.eidalfitr/>

This four-minute video by *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* features Ramadan at a school and was produced for the general public. The video is accompanied by a background essay, discussion questions, and a transcript for teachers. The materials are free, but users must register.

### **History Channel: Ramadan**

<http://www.history.com/topics/holidays/ramadan/videos/history-of-ramadan#history-of-ramadan>

This short *History Channel* video provides an overview of the Muslim observance of Ramadan.

### **Holidays.net: Ramadan**

<http://www.holidays.net/ramadan/>

During the month of Ramadan, Muslims around the world spend the daylight hours in a complete fast. The Arabic word for “fasting” (*sawm*) literally means “to refrain.” It means not only refraining from food and drink, but from evil actions, thoughts, and words. Note: this site has annoying ads.

### **Islamic Celebrations - Lesson Plan**

<http://www.teachersdomain.org/resource/islam08.socst.world.glob.islamceleb/>

In this video, with transcript and guide from *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly*, members of the Islamic Center of Washington, D.C., discuss the significance of the annual religious observance of Ramadan.

## **Islamic Networks Group: Frequently Asked Questions**

<https://ing.org/ings-frequently-asked-questions/>

Islamic Networks Group (ING) provides these helpful FAQs in order to help educate the public on the beliefs and practices of Muslims. While not specifically related to Ramadan, this background information will be useful for teachers and students alike while learning about the holiday. ING is also represented on the CA3Rs Advisory Council.

## **Muslim Belief and Practice: Ramadan Fasting**

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week809/belief.html>

This 2004 *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* site provides a video clip of an interview by PBS Bob Abernethy of people discussing the reason for fasting at Ramadan.

## **Ramadan is Here**

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/episodes/august-6-2010/ramadan-is-here/6760/>

This *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* site provides a video clip of Muslim adherents from many ethnic background discussing the annual fast for Ramadan and what it means to them.

## **Ramadan Moon**

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/?p=12013>

This 2002 *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* page is an interview by PBS host Bob Abernethy with scientists and clergy who study the moon to determine when is the proper time to begin the Ramadan holiday. For additional information see also

<http://www.moonsighting.com/>.

## **Ramadan Observance - Lesson Plan**

<http://www.teachersdomain.org/resource/islam08.socst.world.glob.lpramadan/>

In this lesson, students investigate the traditions and spiritual aspects of Ramadan using segments from *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly* and other resources. Registration required.

## Children's Literature

- Blackwell, Amy. *Ramadan (Holidays & Celebration)*. Chelsea House, 2009. (middle school)
- Douglass, Susan. *Ramadan*. Lerner, 2003. (elementary school)
- Ghazi, Shuhaib Hamid. *Ramadan*. Iqra' International Educational Foundation, 1996. (elementary school)
- Gnojewski, Carol. *Ramadan: A Muslim Time of Fasting, Prayer, and Celebration*. Enslow Publishers, 2004. (elementary school)
- Heiligman, Deborah. *Holidays Around the World: Celebrate Ramadan and Eid Al-Fitr: With Praying, Fasting, and Charity*. National Geographic Society, 2006. (upper elementary and middle school)
- Hoyt-Goldsmith, Diane. *Celebrating Ramadan*. Holiday House, 2002. (upper elementary and middle school)
- Jalali, Reza. *Moon Watchers: Shirin's Ramadan Miracle*. Tilbury House Publishers, 2010. (elementary school)
- Jeffrey, Laura. *Celebrate Ramadan*. Enslow Pub., 2007. (middle and high school)
- Kahn, Hena. *Night of the Moon*. Chronicle Books, 2008. (elementary school)
- Katz, Karen. *My First Ramadan*. Holt, 2007. (upper elementary grades)
- MacMillan, Diane. *Ramadan and Id Al-Fitr*. Enslow Pub., 2008. (elementary school)
- Marx, David. *Ramadan (Rookie Read-About Holidays Series)*. Scholastic, 2002. (early elementary grades)
- Pirotta, Saviour. *Id-Ul-Fitr*. Rosen, 2007. (upper elementary and middle school)
- Sievert, Terri. *Ramadan: Islamic Holy Month*. Coughlan Publishing, 2006. (elementary school)
- Whitman, Sylvia. *Under the Ramadan Moon*. Whitman, Albert & Company, 2011. (elementary school)
- Zucker, Jonny. *Fasting and Dates: A Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr Story*. Barron's, 2004. (early elementary grades)

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The material above is available at the California Three Rs Project (CA3Rs) website at [ca3rsproject.org](http://ca3rsproject.org). Thanks to CRF Board Member Judge Marjorie Steinberg (Ret.) for her review. For further information contact the CA3Rs office:

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