

*History*  
UNFOLDING

# THE RISE OF ISLAM



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# Introduction

## Islam's Golden Age

In the wake of the attacks of September 11, 2001, educators have felt a much stronger need to provide students with more information on and greater insight into Islam and the Middle East.

The effort to give students a better understanding of Islam confronts two distinct kinds of problems. The first is the problem of negative stereotyping and oversimplification. It is easy to see how such a problem can arise in response to the horrors wrought by terrorists claiming to act in the name of Islam. It is vital for educators to do what they can to discredit prejudice by educating students as to the complex facts about one of the world's great religions and the civilization it helped forge.

The second problem facing educators is the opposite of the first. In counteracting negative stereotypes, there is tendency to stress only the most positive aspects of Islamic cultures. As with every great civilization, Islamic civilization has given rein to both the most admirable and most despicable of human traits. Student cannot gain a real understanding of Islamic civilization if all they get is a "smiley-face" version of it—and only real understanding can ever lead to respect.

Designed to avoid both of these pitfalls, this set is the first of three taking the story up to the present time. The other two sets are *Islam and the West in the Age of the Ottomans* (HS835) and *The Rise of the Modern Middle East* (HS948). This set takes the story up to the end of the reign of the Abbasid Caliphs in 1250 CE. It uses 12 visual displays to focus on some of the key themes in the history of the rise of Islam. Each lesson uses three visual displays to explore one broad topic in the overall story. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

### **Islam and Its Prophet**

The images focus on the setting in which Muhammad lived and on his story as it is handed down in the Qur'an and in other Islamic traditions.

### **The Empire of Islam**

The rapid rise of Islam as a social movement and political empire is the focus of the illustrations here. Within a century of Muhammad's death, Islam united a huge crossroads region extending from Spain to the borders of India and China.

### **Islam: Beliefs and Practices**

A closer look at some key aspects of Islamic belief, its rituals and daily practices, and some of its teachings about social and political life.

### **The Golden Age of Islam**

In the Abbasid era, Islam was open to influences from all of the world's great civilizations. The flowering of philosophy, science, and art that this produced is the focus of the images in this lesson.

## Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

## How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

**A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET** This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

**DIGITAL IMAGES** The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

### **DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS**

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.

*The Rise of Islam***OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will better understand the setting and conditions in which Muhammad appeared and began to preach.
2. Students will better understand the central place of Muhammad and the Qur'an in Islam.

# Islam and Its Prophet

*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Illustrations 1A & 1B**

In the seventh century CE, Islam arose on the Arabian peninsula. It quickly spread and came to dominate the entire Middle East. Its rise is one of the great success stories of human history. Why did it occur, and why in the Arabian peninsula? This map focuses on some key factors that may help explain this huge transformation. By the sixth century, a complex network of overland and sea trade routes already linked the Byzantine and Persian empires with civilizations far to the east. Arabian caravans such as the one shown here carried some of this trade, bringing ideas as well as goods to nomadic tribes and oasis towns along the routes. Tribal gods may have begun to seem less powerful or convincing to many Arabs as they learned of the monotheistic beliefs of Byzantine Christians, Zoroastrians from Persia, and Jews throughout the region.

**Illustration 2**

According to Muslim teachings, Islam was founded by a man named Muhammad who lived from around 571 to 632 CE. Historians actually know little about him with certainty. But traditional Muslim accounts of his life form the core of Islam's beliefs. According to these traditions, the angel Gabriel appeared to Muhammad in his 40th year and told him to "recite," or repeat, words that came directly from God. Over the course of his life, Muhammad received many such revelations. Muslims see Muhammad as the last of a line of prophets from Abraham to Moses, to Jesus. In this Persian miniature of the 15th century, Mohammad is on the left and Moses is on the right.

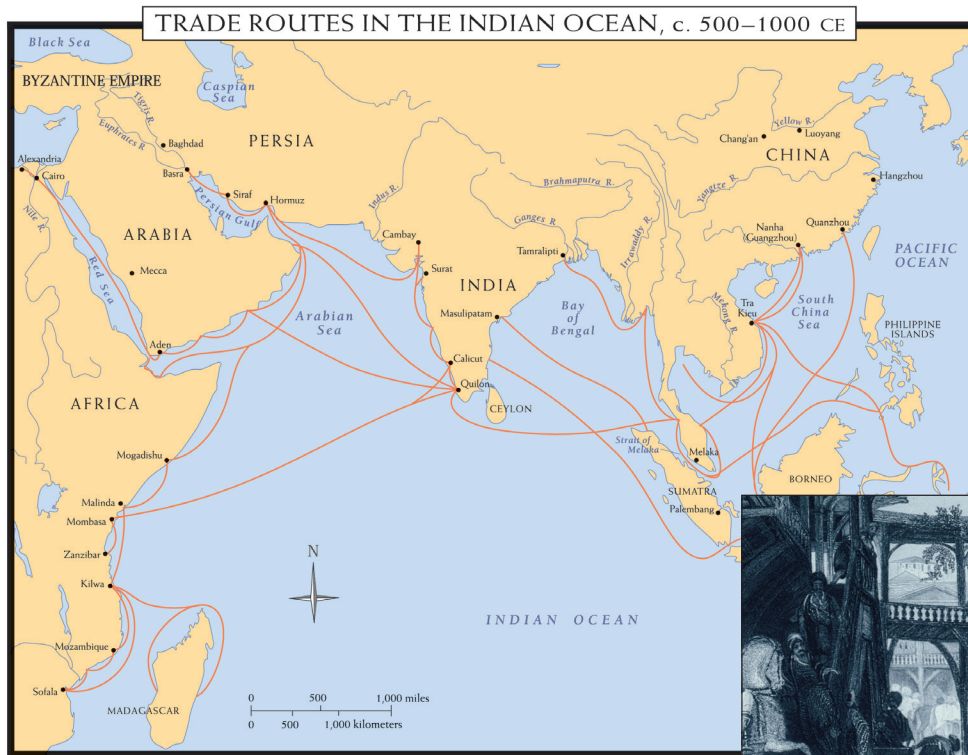
**Illustration 3**

Gabriel's revelations to Mohammed make up Islam's holy book, the Qur'an. The Qur'an is not seen as Muhammad's word, but God's—a part of God himself. It was revealed in Arabic. Hence, many Muslims do not accept translations of the Qur'an as the real Qur'an. This view meant that as Islam spread, Arabic language and culture spread with it. The Qur'an refers often to the teachings of Jews and Christians. But it is meant to replace, not simply add to, both religions. Muhammad is called the "Seal" of the prophets. That is, he is seen as the last of them, and his version of God's truth is the final version. With these firm beliefs inspiring them, the Arabs were moved to conquer a vast empire.



## Lesson 1—Islam and Its Prophet

# Illustrations 1A & 1B



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### Discussing the Illustrations

1. In the seventh century CE, the religion of Islam arose in one part of the above map. Can you name that part?
2. Arabia itself then was made up of many fairly small tribes. Some were settled on land and towns near oases; others were nomadic pastoralists. Can you explain the key differences between these groups?
3. A number of key trade routes passed by Arabia and linked several empires. Look closely at these routes. What two Mideast empires were linked with China and India by these routes?
4. Along with sea routes, goods were also transported overland. From the photo, can you explain how? What does it suggest about the purpose of towns in Arabia and elsewhere on these routes?
5. The tribes of Arabia worshiped many local gods. But ideas of monotheism were carried by caravans or brought by the Byzantines or Persians in the region. What is monotheism, and what forms of it were common in the region by the seventh century?

### Follow-up Activity

1. **Small-group activity:** Six key items in the Indian Ocean trade in the centuries before and during the rise of Islam were:

silk	slaves
pepper and	gold
other spices	precious stones
textile	

Learn more about the role each of these items played in the Indian Ocean trade patterns as indicated by this map. Use the map as the basis for a more complete map of your own. On your map, add in overland routes used in these centuries. Show key locations where each of the goods listed above was produced. In boxes to the sides of the map, write detailed explanations of the importance of these goods and their impact on the Islamic societies of the region. Add any other details about merchants, trade, and trade patterns that you feel will be helpful in making clear the role of trade in the early Islamic age.