

*History*  
UNFOLDING

# ISLAM AND THE WEST IN THE AGE OF THE OTTOMANS



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**MindSparks**  
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Lesson 1</b> Mongols, Turks, and the Rise of the Ottomans .....	4
<b>Lesson 2</b> Europe Under Siege .....	8
<b>Lesson 3</b> The Ottomans and the World of Islam .....	12
<b>Lesson 4</b> Ottoman Decline .....	16
<b>Appendix</b> Image Close-ups .....	21

# Introduction

## The Ottoman Challenge

This MindSparks set is the second of a three-part series on the history of Islam. The first was *The Rise of Islam* (HS819). The last of the three sets is *The Rise of the Modern Middle East* (HS948).

The focus here is on the Ottoman Empire, which dominated the history of Islamic civilization from the 1300s until the empire's demise in World War I. We also take a brief look at the two other Islamic empires of this period, the Safavids in Persia and the Mughals in India.

Today, many Muslims see Islam as besieged by the West. Until the 1600s, it was the West that lived in fear of a dynamic and expansionist Islam. And it was Ottoman power above all that made Europeans tremble.

However, Europe's Renaissance and Reformation, its science, trade, and overseas discoveries, and its Age of Enlightenment gave it advantages that soon began to eclipse the Ottomans. While the Ottomans did try to reform and adapt, they never seemed quite able to find the right set of keys. Perhaps the lack of a large merchant and industrial middle class limited the resources on which the state could draw, forcing the sultans to constantly struggle just to keep up. By the 1800s, the Ottoman Empire was Europe's "Sick Man." Its demise as a result of World War I opened a new and much more chaotic chapter in the history of Islam and the Middle East.

This set uses 12 visual displays to focus on several key themes in the story of Islam in the age of the Ottomans. Each lesson uses three visual displays to explore one broad topic. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

### **Mongols, Turks, and the Rise of the Ottomans**

The Ottomans emerged in a chaotic time when many nomadic tribes were on the move toward and into the Islamic realms of the Middle East.

### **Europe Under Siege**

The illustrations here focus on the awesome power of the rising Ottoman state. Ottoman civilization at this point was advanced and confident, with political and military institutions second to none.

### **The Ottomans and the World of Islam**

Islam was central to every aspect of life in Ottoman civilization and in the other two Islamic civilizations in this era of Ottoman dominance.

### **Ottoman Decline**

Using a series of British political cartoons, this lesson focuses on several key factors explaining the decline of the Ottomans and their ultimately unsuccessful efforts to reverse that decline.

## 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.

*Islam and the West in the Age of the Ottomans***OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will better understand the confused setting within which the Ottoman state grew in the 1300s and 1400s.
2. Students will better understand the military advantages this early “gunpowder empire” had over its enemies.

# Mongols, Turks, and the Rise of the Ottomans

*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**

By the 1200s, Islamic civilization already included many groups besides the Arabs who birthed it in the 600s. Among those others were various Turkish nomads from the steppes of central Asia. A caravan of Turkish peoples on these same steppes is shown in Illustration 1A. It is a photo from the late 1800s, but what it shows might well have been seen many centuries earlier. Turkish peoples first came into the Islamic Middle East as slave soldiers or mercenaries to man the armies of Islam’s rulers. Others settled as whole tribes, often adopting Islam on their own. In the 1200s, fierce Mongol warriors sowed terror in the region. The Mongols were ruthless, but by 1300 they were already losing control. A new master was rising from within the Islamic realms. It was a Turkish tribe whose first known ruler was Osman I, from which the name “Ottoman” comes. Osman’s mausoleum is shown in Illustration 1B.

**Illustration 2**

The Ottomans would in time carve a mighty Islamic empire out of much of the Middle East. The Ottomans developed a powerful army, one of the first to use gunpowder and artillery. This is the scene of that army’s greatest triumph: the conquest in 1453 of Constantinople, capitol of the Byzantine Empire. Ottoman military strength depended on warriors who expected to be paid partly in booty. In this, the Ottomans were like most other powers in the region, Muslim or Christian. Cities that had resisted a siege were fair game for looting, rape, and the murder or enslavement of all inhabitants. This is exactly what happened in Constantinople in 1453.

**Illustration 3**

In the early 1300s, the Ottomans were one small Turkish dynasty in Western Anatolia. (Anatolia is where present-day Turkey is located.) In annual military campaigns, they began taking lands from both the Christians of the Byzantine Empire and the Muslims of the Middle East. The key “frontier” for the Ottomans was in the Christian lands of the Balkans, in southeastern Europe. By the 1500s, they were at the gates of Vienna, Austria. Meanwhile, they ended Mamluk rule in Egypt in 1517 and came to control much of North Africa and Arabia, including Islam’s holiest cities, Mecca and Medina. By the mid-1500s, the Ottomans were seen as the supreme defenders and protectors of all of Islam.

## Lesson 1—Mongols, Turks, and the Rise of the Ottomans

# Illustrations 1A & 1B

1A



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1B



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### **Discussing the Illustrations**

1. Illustration 1A is a late 1800s photo of a caravan on the steppes of Central Asia. From the image, can you explain what the steppes are? People of the steppes are often nomadic herders and traders. Using the photo, can you explain why these might be favored ways of life in this sort of physical environment?
2. Illustration 1A shows a caravan of Turkish people. Turkish groups from the Central Asian steppes were already in contact with Arabs and Islamic civilization in the Middle East when another group of nomads from the steppes conquered much of Islam, including Baghdad in 1258. What group was that?
3. Mongol rule did not last much longer than a century. The next great Islamic empire was to be launched by a tribe in the 1300s. Its rise began under the rule Osman I. His mausoleum and that of his successor are shown in Illustration 1B. His name was the basis of that empire. What empire was it? What do these mausoleums suggest, if anything, about the values and artistic styles of Ottoman society?

### **Follow-up Activity**

1. **Small-group activity:** The Mongols and the various Turkish tribes that moved into the Middle East were part of a steady stream of nomads of the steppes (or plains) of central Asia who moved west and, at times, invaded and then adapted to more-settled cultures in the Middle East. Learn more about such nomadic peoples in the centuries from about 800 CE to 1400 CE. Try to find out what historians think were the main causes of the migrations of such groups into the Middle East in those centuries. Create a map showing the original locations of the groups, the routes they took during major migrations, and where they settled. Use your map as the centerpiece of a bulletin-board display called "Nomads of the Steppes and the World of Islam: 800 CE to 1400 CE." Add photocopies of any illustrations you find and write paragraphs explaining each element in your display.