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# What Teachers Need to Know

## A. Islam

### Muhammad: The “Last Prophet”

Like Judaism and Christianity, Islam is a monotheistic religion. Indeed, Islam accepts and builds on the revelation that forms the basis of those two earlier religions. Islamic scripture, the Qur'an, accepts the prophets of the Jewish and Christian faiths, and especially stresses Abraham, Moses, Noah, and Jesus. The Qur'an refers to Jesus as the Messiah and says that he was a great prophet, but not God or the son of God. The Qur'an says that all people who believe in God and

the Final Judgment and who do good works will have nothing to fear in the after-life. Muslims accept the revelations of the Old Testament, or Hebrew Bible, as well as the New Testament, but add to these the revelations of the prophet Muhammad. Those who practice Islam are called Muslims, and they worship *Allah* (the Arabic word for God).

Muhammad was born in the Arabian city of Mecca (often spelled Makkah) in 570 CE and made his living as a merchant. A religious man, he often went to a cave to meditate. Muslims believe that in 610 CE, Allah, through the voice of the angel Gabriel, began to speak to Muhammad. For a time, Muhammad did not tell anyone other than his family and friends, but after a while, he was moved to preach. His message was simple: there was only one god, Allah (local religious belief was polytheistic, meaning that they believed in many gods), and the rich should share their wealth with the poor. As a result, many poor people began to listen to him. This angered and frightened the rich in Mecca, who thought they would lose their wealth. They began to persecute Muhammad's followers, so the growing community moved to Medina, where they could live freely and establish a society based on Islamic teachings. This journey took place in 622 CE and is known as the *Hijra* [HIJH-rah]. It marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar.

In Medina, where Muhammad settled, his message of social justice and equality gained more followers. In time, Muhammad took on both a political role, as a leader of the city, and a military one. When Medina and Mecca went to war, Muhammad commanded the troops from Medina, and they defeated the Meccan troops in a series of battles. By 630 CE, Mecca agreed to submit to Muhammad's rule, and Muhammad marched triumphantly into the city. At the center of Mecca was a large shrine called the Ka`bah where Arabs built shrines to many gods. Muhammad destroyed the idols (statues and other symbols of gods that the tribes around Mecca believed in) at the Ka`bah. Since that time, the Ka`bah has become the holiest place in Islam, a place where every Muslim hopes to make a pilgrimage at least once. Muhammad sent missionaries throughout Arabia to convert the tribes to Islam, and from there the religion has spread around the world.