

Islam and Modesty - Supplementary Notes for Teachers

Slide 2 of 16 – Think. Pair. Share.

(A) Knowledge and understanding

- Understand what is meant by the term ‘modesty’.

(B) Ideas and insights

- Students should look up the definition of modesty in a dictionary. Can students identify any synonyms for modesty? Islam teaches Muslims to be modest in their dress and in their behaviour. What do Students understand by the terms ‘modest behaviour’ and ‘modest dress’? Engage Students in a group discussion to facilitate an understanding of modesty and what it might mean for Muslims.

Slide 3 of 16 – Aims and Objectives

(A) Knowledge and understanding

- Understand the aims and objectives of this topic, as listed on the slide.

(B) Ideas and insights

- Modesty is a central tenet of the Islamic faith and both men and women are encouraged to inculcate this virtue through establishing certain codes of behaviour and dress.
- As we will learn during this topic, The Veil worn by Muslims can take several different forms. Invite Students to share what they may already know about the Muslim Veil. Have they heard/read the terms ‘Hijaab’, ‘Burqa’ and Niqaab? What other religions do they know about which also practice some form of Veiling? (Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Sikhism).

Slide 4 of 16 – Key Vocabulary

(A) Knowledge and understanding

- Explain the definitions of Holy Qur’an, Burqa, Niqaab and Hijaab, as set out on the slide.

(B) Ideas and insights

- The 3 types of coverings listed on the slide are the most common coverings worn by Muslim women. There are several other types. Use the link below to supplement the definitions on this slide and to show Students some of the other types of coverings (or ‘Veils’) worn by Muslim women:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/24118241>

Slides 5-8 of 16 – Understanding the origins, history and background of the Veil in different religions and cultures

(A) Knowledge and understanding (**Slide 5**)

- The Veil has been worn by women for centuries. Middle Assyrian Laws or the Code of the Assyrians, was an ancient legal code developed between 1450 and 1250 BCE in the Middle Assyrian Empire. It states that “A wife-of-a-man, or (widows), or (Assyrian) women who go out into the main thoroughfare (shall not have) their heads (bare)”.
- Veiling was a marker of aristocratic rank.
- Pictures on Slide: Right - Fresco of woman wearing a head covering and holding a tray, from the Villa San Marco, Stabiae, 1st century AD.
- Picture on Slide: Middle – A Christian woman in Jerusalem.
- Picture on Slide: Left- Coptic Christian woman wearing a veil (1918).

(A) Knowledge and understanding (**Slide 6**)

- A modern-day misconception is that the Veil is worn only by Muslim women. In truth, the Veil has long been a part of a vast number of religions and cultures.
- The following are background points for Teachers and can be utilised in discussions if required.
- We read in the Holy Bible: Every man praying or prophesying, having *his* head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with *her* head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. (1 Cor. 11:4,5)
- Hippolytus, a leader in the church at Rome around the year 200, compiled a record of the various customs and practices in that church from the generations that preceded him. His Apostolic Tradition contains this statement: “And let all the women have their heads covered with an opaque cloth, not with a veil of thin linen, for this is not a true covering”.
- Classical Greek and Hellenistic statues sometimes depict Greek women with both their head and face covered by a Veil.
- A veil called ‘flammeum’ was the most prominent feature of the costume worn by the bride at Roman weddings.
- Until around 1175, Anglo-Saxon and then Anglo-Norman women, with the exception of young unmarried girls, wore Veils that entirely covered their hair, and often their necks up to their chins, like a wimple.

(A) Knowledge and understanding (**Slide 7**)

- Today, many Jewish, Hindu, Christian and Sikh women and men, among others, also practice some form of head covering or Veil, often worn during the wedding ceremony.
- The following are background points for Teachers and can be utilised in discussions if required.

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- In Hinduism we see the female Goddess Sita has her head covered by her ‘Saree’ (definition: a garment consisting of a length of cotton or silk draped around the body) or other cloth. Sati, the first wife of Hindu God Shiva is also said to have practiced Veiling: Brahma said, “Then, O sage, afflicted by the cupid and delighted in the heart of hearts, I lifted her Veil and stared into the face of Sati. I looked at the face of Sati many a time...” (Shiva Purana, Rudra Samhita 2, Satikhanda section II, Chapter 19, verses 26-27)
- We see in Christianity that women cover their hair at certain times also. Lace face-veils are often worn by female relatives at funerals in some Catholic countries. The Veil is seen as the sign of a Nun’s consecration. “You put the veil on and you know you belong to (God),” “You are not your own.” (Mother Maria Micheal OSB St. Walburg in Eichstätt, Germany).
- In Sikhism, as part of protocol when entering the Gurdwara (Sikh place of Worship) one is expected to remove one’s shoes and cover one’s head as signs of respect. In the Punjab region of India, head covering is sometimes also done among Sikhs and Hindus as a mark of respect to superiors or elders. The Sikh turban is worn to remind one of the connection with God.

(B) Ideas and insights (Slides 5-7)

- Refer to the Tasks on **Slide 8** which aim to reinforce understanding of slides 5-7. Invite Students to think about women they know/have seen on Television who cover their heads. Students should appreciate that the Hijaab is not intended to restrict Muslim women in any way, either physically or practically. In Islam, the Hijaab is seen as a means of empowering Muslim women, who are encouraged to take an active role in all aspects of society. Examples of famous Hijaab wearing Muslim women include Nobel Peace Prize Winner Malala Yousafzai and British Bake-Off Winner Nadya Hussain.

Slide 9 of 16 – What does the Holy Qur’an say about chastity?

(A) Knowledge and understanding

- In the Holy Qur’an, Allah has repeatedly admonished both men and women to guard their chastity. The verse on this slide is one such example.
- Read and discuss the Verse on this slide. It shows that Islam makes no distinction between men and women in terms of modesty and chastity. Where the Holy Qur’an mentions ‘believing men’ it also mentions ‘believing women’, thereby ensuring true equality.
- In this verse, Allah has grouped the distinctive features of those men and women whom He is prepared to forgive and reward. They are submissive, truthful, steadfast, humble, sacrificing and fasting believers who actively guard their chastity and continuously remember Allah. Here actively guarding chastity would imply being proactive and diligent in following Islamic teachings about chastity and modesty like separation of genders, men restraining their eyes and women covering their physical attractiveness, etc (we will learn more about this on the next slide).

(B) Ideas and insights

- Ask Students to list the 10 qualities of a believer mentioned in the verse.
- Extension: List 10 qualities you look for in a good friend. Why are these important to you?

Slide 10 of 16 – Does Islam make any distinction in the practice of modesty between men and women?

(A) Knowledge and understanding

- The responsibility to observe modesty is equally relevant to men as it is to women: When the Holy Qur'an defines the Veil, it is men who are addressed first: "Say to the believing men that they restrain their eyes and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Surely, Allah is well aware of what they do." (The Holy Qur'an Chapter 24 Verse 31).
- A women's duty to observe modesty is addressed in Verse 32 of Chapter 24: "And say to the believing women that they restrain their eyes and guard their private parts, and that they display not their beauty and embellishments except that which is apparent thereof, and that they draw their head-covers over their bosoms..." (The Holy Qur'an Chapter 24 Verse 32).
- The Holy Qur'an explains that a woman does not need to Veil from all women, and the following males: Her father, brother, husband, grandfather, male child, grandchild, maternal/paternal uncle, son in law. (The Holy Qur'an Chapter 24 Verse 32).
- Apart from her husband, the above are males to whom it will be unlawful to marry.

(B) Ideas and insights

- Prepare a mind map listing the reasons why you think Muslim women wear the Hijaab.
- Discuss in Pairs: Do you think people should be able to wear what they choose?

Slide 11 of 16 – How do Muslim men display modesty?

(A) Knowledge and understanding

- It is obligatory on Muslim men to safeguard their piety and modesty. They have been commanded to observe *ghadd-e-basr* – lowering of gaze. We read in Hadith (saying of the Holy Prophet Muhammad ^{pbuh}): 'Ubadah Bin As-Samitra narrates that the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{pbuh} said, 'Assure me of six things concerning you, and I will assure your entry into Paradise:
 1. When you speak, say the truth.
 2. When you make a promise, fulfil it.
 3. When you are given a trust, convey it when demanded. (There should be no excuses.)
 4. Safeguard your private parts.
 5. Keep your eyes cast down.
 6. Hold your hands from cruelty.'

(Book of Hadith: Musnadu Ahmadabni Hanbal, vol. 5, p. 323)

(B) Ideas and insights

- Many religions teach control of the self. There are many methods, such as fasting and offering prayer at designated times.
- How do Students show self-control/ motivation in difficult tasks? How do they manage anger, handling grief, or other situations? Discuss the impact of mindset, routine, exercise, diet or social circles that may help facilitate control of the self. Invite students to share their thoughts and prepare a combined mind map with suggestions from the group.

Slide 12 of 16 – Do all Muslim women have to wear the same style of head covering?

(A) Knowledge and understanding

- As we have seen, the Holy Qur’an admonishes women to cover their heads and to pull their coverings over their bosoms. Whilst the purpose of the Veil always remains the same (ie, it affords women modesty, respect and dignity and protects them from harm and the evils of society by covering their beauty), the style and degree of Veil varies. Some cultural traditions can influence the style of veil women prefer to adapt.
- In Chapter 33, verse 60 of the Holy Qur’an Allah says:
- *‘O Prophet! tell your wives and your daughters, and the women of the believers, that they should pull down upon them of their outer cloaks from their heads over their faces. That is more likely that they may thus be recognised and not molested. And Allah is Most Forgiving, Merciful.’*
- Considering this instruction some women choose to cover their faces whereas others prefer to cover their heads only leaving their faces uncovered and bare of makeup – both of which are valid interpretations according to various schools of Islamic jurisprudence. Some women choose to adopt a compromise between the two by covering their faces when they apply make-up.
- The *Hijaab* generally refers to a head-covering which covers the head and the neck, leaving the face uncovered. These head coverings come in many shapes and styles but the primary objective they all have is to cover the hair completely.
- The *Niqaab* is generally understood as clothing that covers the face as well as the head, with the eyes showing, or with a netting over the eyes.
- The *burqa* is a veil which covers the head, face and body of a woman from head to toe, allowing her to see from a gauze like material over the eye area. This style of veiling is seen in the Middle East more so than in the West and is the way in which some Muslim women choose to cover themselves.

(B) Ideas and insights

- The Islamic concept of the Veil is also a means to safeguard and protect Muslim women from societal ills. What other examples of ‘protective’ clothing/casing/covering can Students think of? Invite Students to discuss in pairs and share their thoughts with the wider group.

- Suggested responses could include the following: Some professionals such as doctors, chemical plant workers and mechanics are required to wear special Personal Protective Equipment (or ‘PPE’) to protect themselves from harm. Similarly, some fruits and nuts are encased to protect them and oysters are protected by shells.

Slide 13 of 16 - Task – Is the veil oppressive?

(A) Knowledge and understanding

- The Islamic Veil is often portrayed in the western media as a symbol of oppression and subjugation of Muslim women.
- Observance of the Veil is part of a Muslim woman's faith. In Islam, the purpose of the Veil is not to limit women but to promote the idea that all individuals should be appreciated for their intelligence, personality and endeavours, rather than for their physical beauty
- It is often alleged that the Islamic code of modesty takes away women’s rights. However, Islam teaches that observing modesty actually establishes the true dignity, independence and freedom of women. It not only gives women physical security but is also a key means of giving them spiritual security and purity of heart.

(B) Ideas and insights

- Let’s hear from Muslim women: Watch Rizwana explain what the Hijaab means to her by clicking on the video link in the slide. Rizwana belongs to the Ahmadiyya Muslim denomination of Islam (for further information about the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community see :<https://ahmadiyyauk.org/about-the-ahmadiyya-muslim-community/about-love-for-all-hatred-for-none/>)
- Invite students to share their thoughts about the video they have watched – consider how a person might feel if something special or significant to them is being criticised or taken away from them – can Students think of examples in their own lives when this may have happened to them?

Slide 14 of 16 – The true purpose of the veil for Muslim women

(A) Knowledge and understanding

- In Islam, practising modesty isn’t only about clothes, it’s a principle that encompasses behaviour, moral conduct, attitude and intentions.
- Islam stresses the relationship between body and mind. In covering the body, one shields the heart from impurities. As we have seen, Muslim men are instructed to restrain or avert their eyes from women, and women are expected to wear loose outer garments and to cover their heads and bosoms.
- Muslims believe that observing modesty represents one’s devotion to Allah. The ultimate goal of Veiling is righteousness of the heart.

(B) Ideas and insights

KS3/4 – Islam and Modesty

- Do you think that as a society, we tend to judge people on how they look/dress?
- Do you think how we dress impacts on our own thoughts/behaviours? Invite Students to discuss in groups and share their thoughts with the class.

Slide 15 of 16 – TASK – How does a ban on wearing a Hijaab affect a Muslim woman’s human rights?

(A) Knowledge and understanding

- As of 2023, there are 16 states that have banned the Burqa and Niqaab, both Muslim-majority countries and non-Muslim countries, including Tunisia, Austria, Denmark, France, Belgium, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Chad, the Republic of the Congo, Gabon, the Netherlands, China, Morocco, Sri Lanka and Switzerland.

(B) Ideas and insights

- From the perspective of a Hijaab wearing Muslim woman, Students should write a passionate open letter, using the thought prompts on the slide, to put forward a case against the banning the Hijaab.
- Invite Students to share their letters by reading them aloud to the wider group.

Slide 16 of 16 – Topic Recap – Test Your Knowledge Quiz

Further Information on this topic can be found in the following resources:

- ❖ <https://lajna.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/understanding-the-islamic-veil.pdf>
- ❖ Background information and video for teachers on the concept of Hijaab and modesty in Islam: <https://rationalreligion.co.uk/why-wear-the-hijab-3-reasons-to-start-now/>
- ❖ The following piece provides a good overview of the different types of head coverings worn by women across different faiths, cultures and times: https://csames.illinois.edu/system/files/2020-12/Cross-Culture_Head_Coverings.pdf#:~:text=The%20practice%20of%20head%20covering,a%20sari%20during%20religious%20services.

Notes - After saying/writing the name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{pbuh}, as a sign of respect, Muslims say or write ‘peace and blessings of Allah be upon him’. The words ‘pbuh’ are used throughout this presentation to represent this phrase.