



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

Center for Middle Eastern Studies

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Lesson Plan for Center for Middle Eastern Studies, University of Arizona, Tucson

Social Studies: World and U.S. History; World Geography; Global Current Events

Grades: 9-12

Time: 1-3 days; 90 min. block period



***Al Tawhid* (Oneness with God/Divine Unity of All Things): Islam, the Natural World, and the Rise of the Muslim Environmental Movement**

Description:

Global warming poses an existential threat to all living things and the planet. This lesson explores the relationship between Islam and the environment. It teaches students that the Quran's concept of *al tawhid* has laid the intellectual foundation for the rise of the Muslim environmental movement. This lesson is significant in that this topic has received little to no attention in the high school curriculum. By focusing a spotlight on this topic, students will learn about the reasons that Muslim environmentalist consider the Quran as the “ultimate green guide” for teaching human beings about the importance of protecting, conserving, and building a sustainable environment during their lifetimes and for generations in the future.

Lesson Objectives:

¹ This honey bee was designed by Thoufeek Zakriya from Kerala, India, <http://thoufeezak.com>. The Arabic calligraphy cites two Quaranic verses Al-Nahal/The Bee, 16: 68-9. This image decorates the cover of Anna M. Gade, *Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2019).

- To understand the Qur'an's concept of *al tawhid* as it relates to the environment.
- To identify verses in the Qur'an that instruct human beings to protect and conserve the environment to build a sustainable future.
- To learn about some of the ways in which global warming will impact the Islamic world.
- To learn about the activism of Muslim environmental groups to combat global warming within the Islamic world and on a global scale.

The Big Question that guides the Lesson: What is the relationship between Islam and the environment that has contributed to the rise of Muslim environmental movement?

Materials:

- Chromebooks for research
- Pencils/pens
- Lined paper
- Poster paper
- Markers/paints/crayons
- Rulers

Preparation:

This lesson can be taught as part of a history, geography, or current global events unit on the Islamic world. The teacher and students should have some basic background in the areas of religion, history and geography of the Islamic world prior teaching this lesson. The development of this lesson was informed by the sources that are listed throughout and at the end of this lesson.

I. Introduction:

- A. Look for a photo of the earth from outer space. Make sure the slide shows at least the Arabian Peninsula where Islam originated in the 7th century. Project this image on a screen to the class. (I have included an example below.)
 1. Point out that the slide captures the essence of *al tawhid* (oneness with God/divine unity of all things). Ask students to guess what they think this concept means. Write their ideas on the board.



B. Questions to frame this section of the lesson:

- 1.) What does the Qur'an say about the origin of the natural world?

- 2.) What does the Qur'an say about the role of human beings in relationship to this environment?
- 3.) In what ways has the Quran contributed to the recent rise of the Muslim environmental movement?

II. To answer questions #1 and #2, tell the students that we'll look at the Qur'an, Islam's holy book, the primary source that records the words of the prophet Muhammad who founded Islam.

- Point out that the Qur'an has over 750 verses that relate to the environment, and that many of these verses are named after plants, animals and natural events. For example, some of these chapters are titled "The Cow," "The Bee," and "The Sun."
 - The Qur'an describes the origins of the universe and it provides instructions on the ways in which human beings should relate to their environment.
 - Some Muslims consider the Qur'an as "the ultimate green guide."² As one Islamic scholar finds, the pioneer of the Muslim environmental movement was the Prophet Mohammed whose words were recorded in the Qur'an.³
 - Students need to keep in mind that Allah has 99 names. Allah is not a body, a substance, nor an individual. Allah cannot be fully comprehended by the senses and cannot be visually depicted in as an image. Instead, Allah is represented by geographical, abstract artistic representations to capture Allah's essence. Allah has no a priori causes for Allah's existence; rather, Allah is the cause of all causes for existence and non-existence. Allah is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, all-pervasive, infinite, and indivisible. In short, Allah is total "Being."
- A. Class Discussion: To explore the points above, generate a class discussion by critically examining and analyzing the meanings of the Quranic verses below. Tell the students that the verses are organized as *suras* (chapters) and *ayahs* (verses). For example, for (Al-Fatiha/The Opening) 1:2, 1 is the sura, and 2 is the verse. The English translations of verses selected below are from the website Islamicity <https://www.islamicity.org/>. In this translation, Allah is referred to as "He" even though Allah has no gender. These verses are organized to correspond to the principles of the Qur'an's concept of al-Tawhid on page 7.
1. (Al Baqara/The Cow) 2:117 "The Originator is He of the heavens and the earth; and when He wills a thing to be, He but says unto it, "Be"—and it is."
 2. (An'am/The Cattle) 6:102 "Such is God, your Sustainer: there is no deity save Him, the Creator of everything: worship, then, Him alone—for it is He who has everything in His care."

² Zaufishan, "The Echo Muslim: 10 Qur'an Verses on the Environment and Do-Able Action Plans," <https://greenfitree.wordpress.com/2013/06/17/10-quran-verses-on-the-environment-and-do-able-action-plans/>.

³ Valentina-Mariana Manoiu, Recep Arslan, Azzeddine Madani, and Ertan Duzgunes, "Environmental Education in the Holy Quran," Presented at Lucrarile Seminarului Geografic "Dimitrie Cantemir," at Iasi, Romania, October 2016, Vol.: NR. 42, 2016, 157. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309428496_ENVIRONMENTAL_EDUCATION_IN_THE_HOLY_QURAN.

3. (Al-Hijr/The Rocky Tract) 15:19-21 “And the earth—We have spread it out wide, and placed on it mountains firm, and caused [life] of every kind to grow on it in a balanced manner, and provided thereon means of livelihood for you [O men] as well as or all [living beings] whose sustenance does not depend on you. For, no single thing exists that does not have its source with Us; and nought do We bestow from on high unless it be in accordance with a measure well-defined.”
- (Al-Qamar/The Moon) 54:49-50 “BEHOLD, everything have We created in due measure and proportion; and Our ordaining [a thing and its coming into being] is but one [act], like a twinkling of an eye.”
- (Al-Mulk/Dominion) 67:3 “[Hallowed be] He who has created seven heavens in full harmony with one another: no fault will thou see in the creation of the Most Gracious. And turn thy vision [upon it] once more: canst thou see any flaw?”
4. (An-Nisa/The Women) 4:126 “For, unto God belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth; and, indeed, God encompasses everything.”
- (Al-An’am/The Cattle) 6:73 “And He it is who has created the heavens and the earth in accordance with [an inner] truth and whenever He says, “Be,” His word comes true; and His will be the dominion on the Day when the trumpet [of resurrection] is blown. He knows all that is beyond the reach of a created being’s perception, as well as that can be witnessed by a creature’s sense of mind for He alone is truly wise, all-aware.”
- (Ar-Ra’d/The Thunder) 13:2 “It is God who has raised the heavens without any supports that you could see, and is established on the throne of His almightiness; and He [it is who] has made the sun and the moon subservient [to His laws], each running its course for a term set [by Him]. He governs all that exists.”
5. (I-Imran/The Family of Imran) 3:190 “Verily, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the succession of night and day, there are indeed messages for all who are endowed with insight.”
- (Al-Nahl/The Bee) 16:10-11 “It is He who sends down water from the skies; you drink thereof, and thereof [drink] the plants upon which you pasture your beasts; [and] by virtue thereof He causes crops to grow for you, and olive trees, and date palms, and grapes, and all [other] kinds of fruit: in this, behold, there is a message indeed for people who think!”
- (Ah-Nahl/The Bee) 16:68-9 “And [consider how] thy Sustainer has inspired the bee: “Prepare for thyself dwellings in mountains and in trees, and in what [men] may build [for thee by way of hives]; and then eat of all manner of fruit, and follow humbly the paths ordained for thee by thy Sustainer. [And lo!] there issues from within these [bees] a fluid of many hues, wherein there is health for man. In all this, behold, there is a message indeed for people who think!”

(Al-Zariyat/The Winds that Scatter) 51:20-1 “AND ON EARTH there are signs [of God’s existence, visible] to all who are endowed with inner certainty, just as [there are signs thereof] within your own selves.”

6. (Al-Anam/The Cattle) 2:60 “Eat and drink the sustenance provided by God, and do not act wickedly on earth by spreading corruption.”

(Al-Anam/The Cattle) 6:141 “And do not waste [God’s bounties]: verily, He does not love the wastful!”

(Hud/The Prophet Hud) 11:61 “He is the one who created you from the earth and settled you upon it so that you might cultivate it and construct towns.”

(Hud/The Prophet Hud) 28:77 (Al-Qasas/The Narration) “Seek instead, by means of what God has granted thee, [the good of] the life to come, without forgetting, withal, thine own [rightful] share in this world; and do good [unto others] as God has done good until thee; and seek not to spread corruption on earth: for, verily, God does not love the spreaders of corruption!”

(Al-Ahzab/The Confederates) 33:72 “Verily, We did offer the trust [of reason and volition] to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains: but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man took it up for, verily, he has always been prone to be wicked, most foolish.”

7. (A-Hajj/The Pilgrimage) 22:1 “O men! Be conscious of your Sustainer: for, verily the violent convulsion of the Last Hour will be an awesome thing!”

6:165 (An’am/The Cattle) “For, He it is who has made you inherit the earth, and has raised some of you by degrees above others, so that He might try you by means of what He has bestowed upon you. Verily, they Sustainer is swift in retribution: yet, behold, He is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace.”

30:40 (Ar-Rum/The Romans) “...So...let them taste part of (the consequences of) what they have done that perhaps they will return (to righteousness).”

30:41 (Ar-Rum/The Romans) “Corruption has appeared in both land and sea...because of what people’s own hands have brought so that they may taste something of what they have done so that hopefully they will turn back.”

- B. Application of Knowledge: Have the students match the Quranic verses above to the principles of *al tawhid* (Allah is Oneness/Divine Unity) and the environment below. Discuss the matches.

1. Allah is the creator of all things.
2. All creation is sacred because it was created by Allah; but no aspect of this creation can be worshiped for this would be idolatry; thus, only Allah, the divine Oneness with all things, is to be worshipped.
3. Allah created all things to be beautiful, balanced, harmonious, purposeful, diverse, interconnected, and interdependent.

4. All creation is a reflection of Allah and Allah's oneness with all things.
5. Human beings are to observe and to contemplate this creation by looking for the divine signs (*ayat*) in nature, which are seen, in order to understand the gloriousness, the knowledge, and the wisdom of Allah, who is unseen.
6. Human beings are the trustees (*amana*) and stewards (*khilafas*) who are morally responsible for taking care of this creation, which is a gift from Allah. This creation is bountiful and available for the productive use of human beings whose moderate use of this environment is to benefit all things. The role of human beings is to protect, conserve and sustain this creation for the benefit and the prosperity of generations to come.
7. Human beings will be held morally accountable (*qayamat*) during their lifetimes by the environment and by Allah on the Day of Judgment for their treatment of this creation. They will be rewarded for their stewardship, gratitude, faith, and respect for this creation or they will suffer the consequences for their exploitation, corruption, greed, and abuse of this gift.

III. Research Skills: Mention how the Qur'an emphasizes the sacredness of all living things, the planet and the cosmos. For example, plants and animals, water, wind (air), the earth, the moon and stars are mentioned throughout the Qur'an. To explore this aspect, have students look up these terms on the website *Islamicity*, <https://www.islamicity.org/>.

- A. To navigate this site, tell students to tap the three green lines on the left side of the page and hit "Qur'an Search." At the top center of the page, tap the right hand side of the scope box and at the bottom of the page scroll to enter "Topic Search." Press "Done" to enter "Topic Search" at the top center of the page in the scroll box. For example, type "water" to see results. Another way is to enter "Topic Index" in the scope box and tap the first letter of the words listed above that are located below the box. For example, tap "w" to find verses about water in the Qur'an.
- B. Have students write down at least one of the verses that pertains to of the words above or have them write down a verse that relates to a topic that is more specific. For example, "thunder" is a specific topic that is related to "water."
- C. Have the students share at least one of their verses with the class. Discuss what they think this verse means.
- D. See below for examples of verses and interpretations by Islamic scholars about these elements:
 - 1.) On Water: See 25:54 (Al-Furqan/The Criterion)
 - a. "And He it is who out of the [very] water has created man...."
 - b. Islamic scholars have interpreted this Quaranic verse as water giving birth to life.
 - 2.) On Wind (Air): See 15:22 (Al-Hijr/The Rocky Tract)

- a.) “And We let loose the winds to fertilize [plants] and We send down water from the skies and let you drink thereof: and it is not you who dispose of its source....”
 - b.) Islamic scholars have interpreted this verse to mean that the wind (air) is provided by the grace of God to help all living things, including human beings, to survive.
- 3.) On Animals: See 6:30 (Al-An’am/The Cattle)
- a.) “...although there is no beast that walks on earth and no bird that flies on its two wings which is no [God’s] creature like yourselves: no single thing have We neglected in Our decree. And once again: Unto their Sustainer shall they [all] be gathered.”
 - b.) Islamic scholars interpret this verse to mean that while all creation is one with Allah, animals also have their own communities (*ummas*) as a species and each community has a unique and divine relationship with Allah as do human beings. Human beings are morally responsible for taking care of animals and treating them with kindness.
- 4.) On earth and plants: See 39:21 (Az-Zumar/The Groups)
- a.) “ART THOU NOT aware that it is God who sends down water from the skies, and then causes it to travel through the earth in the shape of springs? And then He brings forth thereby herbage of various hues; and then it withers, and thou canst see it turn yellow; and in the end He causes it to crumble to dust. Verily, in [all] this there is indeed a reminder to those who are endowed with insight!”
 - b.) Islamic scholars interpret this verse as meaning that human beings need to pay attention to the fragility of nature and its impermanence and that to survive human beings need cultivate the earth and to use water moderately for growing crops so that they can be harvested.

IV. Readings and Discussion: To answer question #3, engage students in a class discussion about the topic of global warming.

- A. Consider the following questions to frame this section of the lesson:
 - 1. What are some of the major causes of global warming?
 - 2. How will global warming impact the Islamic world?
 - 3. Does the Islamic world contribute to this problem? If so, then how?
- B. Tell the students that they will investigate the answers to these questions by critically reading and analyzing the articles below. To carry out this part of the assignment, break students into 4 groups; assign each group member the same article from one of readings; and have them answer the following questions that correspond to their articles.

- 1.) **Group 1:** Read **John Wihbey, “Green Muslims,’ Eco-Islam and Evolving Climate Change Consciousness,”** Yale Climate Connections, Ap. 4, 2012.
<https://www.yaleclimateconnections.org/2012/04/green-muslims-eco-islam-and-evolving-climate-change-consciousness/>.
 - a.) According to Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, how did the Qur’an and the Hadith contribute to the rise of an environmental movement in the Islamic world during the 1970s and 1980s?
 - b.) Why is green an important color for Muslims? And how is this word used among eco-conscious Muslims who are fighting global warming?
 - c.) Why should Muslims worry about the impact of global warming on the Islamic world?
 - d.) Why do you think skepticism exists about global warming in the Anglo-American world but not in the Islamic world?
- 2.) **Group 2:** Read **Austin Bodetti, “Islam and Environmentalism,”** Lobe Log, May 10, 2019. <https://lobelog.com/islam-and-environmentalism/>.
 - a.) Identify factors that have played a major role in shaping the attitudes, the opinions, and the behaviors of Muslims and the policies of Muslim countries toward the environment?
 - b.) Who or what has had the most influence in shaping this relationship?
 - c.) What is Islamic environmental law?
 - d.) Identify the Muslim countries that have expressed support for the Muslim environmental movement.
- 3.) **Groups 3:** Read **Monika Zbidi, “Islamic Environmentalism: The Call to Eco-Jihad,”** Qantara.de, Environment and Ecology, 2019, <http://environment-ecology.com/religion-and-ecology/738-the-call-to-eco-jihad.html>.
 - a.) Why is Ramadan an important event for promoting the environmental movement?
 - b.) How have Muslims promoted the environmental movement during the Hajj?
 - c.) What is the Green Khutba Campaign?
 - d.) Identify and briefly describe six Islamic doctrines that promote environmental ethnics.
- 4.) **Group 4:** Read **Eleanor Greene, “Muslim Activists Build Bridges,” *Green American Issue Economic Action Against Hate*, Washington, D.C., n.d.**
<https://www.greenamerica.org/economic-action-against-hate/muslim-activists-build-bridges>.
 - a.) What was the Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change?
 - b.) What is the Global Muslim Climate Network (GMCN)?

- c.) Identify where the Muslim environmental movement has spread across the Muslim world and what environmental changes have taken place as a result?
- d.) What is the Green Faith organization?

C. Check for understanding:

1. Refer back to the questions posed to frame this section of the lesson, answering these questions more in-depth based on the readings.
2. Ask students to brainstorm some of the ways in which they could launch a global environmental movement.

V. Expansion Activities:

A. Art Project: Have students design a *Tawhid* t-shirt, poster, or logo that supports the environmental movement.

1. Refer to the “Islamic bee” logo at the beginning of this lesson as an example to spark students’ creativity.
2. Show spelling of tawhid in Arabic for students so they can incorporate it in the making of their logo.
3. Show examples of Islamic geometric art that students can use to decorate their logo.
4. Display students’ work.

B. Written Assignment:

1. Have students write a 1-3 page essay that investigates a Muslim country to find out what kinds of challenges this country is facing as a result of global warming.
2. Have the students describe the steps that this country has taken to protect its environment.
3. Have the students propose additional steps to protect this country’s environment from climate change.

VI. Conclusion:

1. To summarize the major points of this lesson, answer the big question that guides this lesson.
2. Ask students if they agree that the Qur’an can be considered as a green guide to stop global warming.
3. Ask students what steps they have taken to stop global warming.
4. Stress the critical importance of global cross-border activism to stop this global threat.

Sources:

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- Ibn Masud, "Tafsir Surah al Rahman: The Ecosystem of Space, the Earth and Why Mankind is Imbalanced," Sunnah Muakada, posted on November 1, 2015, <https://sunnahmuakada.wordpress.com/tag/tafsir-surah-al-rahman-the-ecosystem-of-space/>.
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