

Ramadan Is Coming!

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Overview

Obay's family has come to New Zealand from Saudi Arabia. The article describes his family's daily life, then focuses on the activities that occur at Ramadan. Obay and his brothers attend regular school, and their mother maintains their Arabic learning at home. The article will allow Muslim students to see themselves reflected in the text and their lives in New Zealand.

The text has a large number of Arabic names and words that will be unfamiliar to most students, but these are well supported by the context and through in-text explanations. Teachers can use the article as they explore themes of the importance of education and the ways that cultural practices reflect values.

Texts related by theme

"The Ayyam-i-ha Party" SJ 3.3.04 | "A Palace in Time" SJ 4.2.04 | "Don't Sit on the Roof of Our House" SJ 2.1.04

Text characteristics from the year 4 reading standard

some abstract ideas that are clearly supported by concrete examples in the text or easily linked to the students' prior knowledge

other visual language features that support the ideas and information, for example, text boxes or maps

Muslims all try to be on their best behaviour during Ramadan. They also fast. This means they do not eat or drink between sunrise and sunset – not even water. Muslims fast to remind themselves of how it feels for people who are poor and without food. Fasting also teaches self-control and cleans the body and mind.

"Not everyone has to fast," Obay says. "If you are sick or old, or you are a woman having a baby, then you don't have to fast."

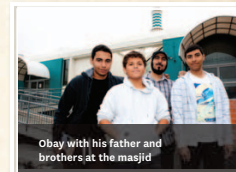
Obay had to learn to fast. At first, he went without food for short amounts of time. As he grew older, he was able to fast for longer. Now he can fast for a full day.

Last year, his friends Ben, Tuaru, and James joined him. "They wanted to do it with me – but they only lasted until lunchtime!"



Obay says that during Ramadan, his school friends all support him.

During Ramadan, Obay's family gets up before dawn. They have an early meal that has to last them all day. Then they pray and go off to school and university as they normally would.



Obay with his father and brothers at the masjid

Around sunset, Obay goes to the masjid (mosque) with his father and brothers. They eat some light food, such as dates, yoghurt, or juice. Then they pray before sitting down to an evening meal. Many Muslim men eat this meal at the masjid. Others, including the men in Obay's family, go home to eat. If they were in Saudi Arabia, many of Obay's relatives would join them for this evening meal. It is a very sociable time for everyone.



some places where information and ideas are implicit and where students need to make inferences based on information that is easy to find because it is nearby in the text and there is little or no competing information

some compound and complex sentences, which may consist of two or three clauses

some words and phrases that are ambiguous or unfamiliar to the students, the meaning of which is supported by the context or clarified by photographs, illustrations, diagrams, and/or written explanations

Reading standard: by the end of year 4

Possible curriculum contexts

SOCIAL SCIENCES (Social studies)

Level 2: Understand how cultural practices reflect and express people's customs, traditions, and values.

ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 2 – Structure: Show some understanding of text structures.

ENGLISH (Writing)

Level 2 – Structure: Organise texts, using a range of structures.

Possible reading purposes

- To learn about the daily life of a Muslim boy in New Zealand
- To understand some of the similarities and differences in the lives of Muslim and non-Muslim families
- To explore values that are expressed through cultural practices.

See [Instructional focus – Reading](#) for illustrations of some of these reading purposes.

Possible writing purposes

- To describe or explain other cultural or religious practices
- To compare and contrast my daily life with another person's.

See [Instructional focus – Writing](#) for illustrations of some of these writing purposes.

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- Possible unfamiliar words and phrases, including “Saudi Arabia”, “morning prayer”, “Muslim”, “followers”, “Islamic religion”, “university”, “no worries”, “fall behind”, “Qur’an”, “holy”, “memorise”, “halal”, “Ramadan”, “fast”, “self-control”, “masjid”, “sociable”, “imams”, “Eid al-Fitr”, “breaking the fast”, “duty”, “henna”
- The Arabic names “Obay”, “Reem”, “Hasan”, “Muath”, “Maan”
- The Arabic words associated with prayer and Ramadan
- The similes: “it was like magic”, “like a Kiwi”.

Possible supporting strategies

Pre-teach the names of the people in the article. (You may need to seek help from people in your community to ensure correct pronunciation.)

Decide which words and terms you will need to introduce before reading and how you will do this.

Make a vocabulary list with the students, encouraging them to add words and explanations before, during, and after reading. *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Understanding that people may belong to cultures and/or religions that have different customs and traditions
- Understanding the place of language in maintaining one's culture and knowledge
- Knowledge of Muslim traditions
- Familiarity with traditions, customs, or religious practices
- Understanding that not all cultures use the same calendar.

Possible supporting strategies

Use the information in the text to clarify your own understandings. Seek further information if necessary. If there are Muslim families in the school community, invite them to visit the class to share their experiences: they may be able to talk about life in New Zealand compared with their home countries. Be aware that Muslim families may have been in New Zealand for more than one generation and identify as “Kiwi”.

Activate prior knowledge of whatever traditions and customs students will be familiar with, including the traditions of marae life, Christmas, Easter, and so on. Model the way you draw on what you already know to help you understand new information and build knowledge.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- An article with general information about Islam and Ramadan and specific information about the boy's routines and experiences
- The use of mostly present tense, with some past tense
- Explanations of unfamiliar words and terms, often in parentheses
- The use of photographs
- The use of time and sequence markers to show the chronological order of events: “while they are in New Zealand”, “After that”, “When Obay is coming to stay”, “As the time for the festival approaches”
- Language to express frequency: “Every night”, “Each day”, “often”
- Use of dialogue
- The chart that lists the five daily prayers.

Possible supporting strategies

Review the ways we can describe our routines and cultural or religious celebrations orally and in writing. Support the students to identify features such as explanations; definitions; time, sequence, and frequency markers; and present verb forms.

Support students to identify the use of present verb forms to explain how something always happens.

Use a graphic organiser to support students to identify the time and sequence relationships. Provide an empty schedule for Ramadan. Model reading a section of text and using the time and sequence markers to fill in the schedule. Have the students work in pairs to complete sections together. Review it as a class and agree on a class version. As you do this, highlight, discuss, and record the relevant language.

Provide opportunities for students to:

- identify the adverbial phrases and subordinate clauses that signal time and sequence
- read and listen to many examples
- have scaffolded opportunities to practise using the language in their speaking and writing
- begin using the language independently in their speaking and writing.

Instructional focus – Reading

Social Sciences (Level 2: Understand how cultural practices reflect and express people’s customs, traditions, and values.)

English (Level 2 – Structure: Show some understanding of text structures.)

Text excerpts from “Ramadan Is Coming!”

Students (what they might do)

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Fajr is the morning prayer. Obay takes about five minutes to pray and do the special actions for Fajr. Then he joins his older brothers, Muath and Maan, for breakfast.

Fajr is one of five prayers Obay’s family perform each day. Obay’s family is Muslim, as are many millions of people around the world. Muslims are followers of the Islamic religion.

*The students **make connections** between the text and their prior knowledge of prayer, breakfast routines, and different religions. They use their connections to draw **inferences** from the text, for example, they compare their morning routines with Obay’s to **infer** that his life is either similar to or different from theirs. They **ask questions** to understand what it means to be Muslim. Students may refer to the chart on page 17 to identify the five daily prayers.*

Prepare for reading by finding out what the students already know about worship and religious practice, and specifically about Muslims and/or the Islamic religion.

ASK QUESTIONS to elicit the students’ connections with the text.

- What do you know about Muslim people or the Islamic religion?
- What do you want to know (or think you will learn) from this article?
- What do you know about the different ways people pray?
- If you are not Muslim, do Obay’s actions remind you of anything? What would be similar in your life? What would be different?

If necessary, clarify the difference between the terms “Muslim” and “Islamic”.

DIRECT the students to learn the five daily prayers (page 17). If possible, provide examples of Arabic texts including children’s books. You may be able to source these from your the school community, the library, or the Internet. Explain that the Arabic alphabet is very different from the English alphabet.

ASK QUESTIONS to support the students as they read.

- Why might the boys “fall behind with their Arabic”?
- Why might it be hard for the brothers to learn English?
- Have you ever memorised something? What was it, and how did you memorise it?
- What questions do you have about this part of the article?
- How could you find the answers?

MODEL visualising.

- If I went to live in Saudi Arabia, I’d find it very challenging to learn Arabic. I imagine I would feel very shy if I wasn’t sure what people were saying. I’d get lost if I couldn’t read street signs.
- Have you had experience of moving to a place with a different language? If not, what do you imagine it would be like? How does imaging (visualising) help you understand how Obay and his family might feel?

ASK QUESTIONS to support the students to infer meaning.

- Have you noticed that the dates for Easter change every year? How is Easter time decided? (Easter Sunday is the Sunday following the Paschal Full Moon date. That date is determined from historical tables.)
- How long does Ramadan last? How did you work that out? (New moon to next new moon – about twenty-eight days.)
- How can you find out about the Islamic calendar?
- What can you infer about calendars and the way dates for events are decided?

DIRECT the students to work in pairs to reread this extract.

- How does Ramadan compare with other special times you know?
- Why do you think Muslim’s show thanks by giving to poor people?
- Why would rice and dates be given? What do you know about the foods eaten in Arab countries?
- What foods could be used in New Zealand?

Ask volunteers to share some of the points raised in their discussions.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- Telling us about how you came here from ... helped us to understand how hard it must be to learn another language.

Reem doesn’t want her sons to fall behind with their Arabic while they are in New Zealand. Every night, Obay, Muath, and Maan read Arabic stories. Reem also gives them spelling to learn. After that, they read from the Qur’an, the Muslim holy book. Each day, Obay and his brothers memorise parts of the Qur’an.

*The students **make connections** between the text and their own experiences of learning at home. They compare their own experiences of bedtime stories, homework, and other learning with the way Reem helps the boys. They **ask and answer questions** about how they might react in Obay’s situation. They draw on vocabulary knowledge and personal experience to **infer** the meaning of “memorise”.*

The date of Ramadan changes each year. (The same way that the date of Easter changes.) “Ramadan starts when we can see the new moon in the ninth month of our Islamic calendar,” Obay explains. “It ends when the next new moon appears.”

*The students **infer** that some cultures or countries use a different calendar from New Zealand. They **ask questions** about calendars. They **make connections** between the text and their prior knowledge of the phases of the moon to calculate the length of Ramadan.*

Muslims celebrate the end of Ramadan with Eid al-Fitr, the festival of breaking the fast. As the time for the festival approaches, Muslims show thanks for what they have by giving to the poor. “This is a very important duty,” says Obay. “We give food, such as rice or dates, money, or clothing.”

*The students **make connections** between the text and festivals to **infer** the importance of celebration. If students are not Muslim, they **visualise** how it would feel to break a month-long fast. They **make connections** with the actions of Muslims at special times and **ask questions** about the values that these actions reveal, and they **evaluate** the ideas presented in the text.*

METACOGNITION

- How did you use your own experiences of coming to New Zealand to help you understand this text?
- What does “Fasting also teaches self-control” mean? How did you work that out?

 **Reading standard: by the end of year 4**

 **The Literacy Learning Progressions**

 **Assessment Resource Banks**

Instructional focus – Writing

Social Sciences (Level 2: Understand how cultural practices reflect and express people’s customs, traditions, and values.)

English (Level 2 – Structure: Organise texts, using a range of structures.)

Text excerpts from “Ramadan Is Coming!”

“I had to listen all the time,” says Obay.

“I worried about them,” Reem says. “How were they going to be able to learn? But after six months, it was like magic.”

Obay speaks like a Kiwi now: “No worries!”

Examples of text characteristics

DIALOGUE

Dialogue enables a writer to show characters and their thoughts quickly. It can also help readers to understand why characters act the way they do. A character can give an explanation through dialogue that helps the reader make connections with the character.

MAKING INFERENCES

Writers expect their readers to use what they know to work out the meanings of similes and colloquial expressions.

EXPLANATIONS

An unfamiliar word or concept can sometimes be explained quickly. Putting the explanation and the word in parentheses (brackets) lets the reader know that this piece of text tells what “halal” means.

TEXT STRUCTURE: SEQUENCE

Certain words and phrases can be used to signal sequence or the passing of time: “Last year”, “During Ramadan”, “before dawn”, “Then”, “Around sunset”, “Later”, “By the end of Ramadan”, “During Eid al-Fitr”, “when it is over”.

DETAILS

Details help the reader to understand and visualise. They can also prompt the reader to make inferences.

When Obay is coming to stay, Louis’s mum buys meat from a halal butcher. (Muslims can only eat meat that has been prepared in a special way, known as halal.)

Last year, his friends Ben, Tuaru, and James joined him. “They wanted to do it with me – but they only lasted until lunchtime!”

During Ramadan, ...
Around sunset, ...

They eat some light food, such as dates, yoghurt, or juice. Then they pray before sitting down to an evening meal. Many Muslim men eat this meal at the masjid. Others, including the men in Obay’s family, often go home to eat.

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

EXPLAIN that dialogue is a good way for an author to connect with the audience.

- When readers “hear” a person, you won’t have to explain so much. It will also help your readers to make connections with the person.
- How could you gather and use the words of people in your writing?
- Try the dialogue out with a partner. Does it sound right? Does it help the reader to understand what happened?

TELL the students that readers need to infer meaning from the text.

- Writers don’t tell their readers everything. They give clues and expect the reader to infer meaning. What does the writer expect the reader to know?
- What does she expect us to understand by the similes?
- How does adding “No worries!” help us to make an inference about Obay?

DIRECT the students to look for places in their own writing where they can imply meaning, for example, by using an expression the readers will understand.

MODEL the difference between writing a full explanation and inserting a brief explanation. Write this sentence on the board: “Louis’s mum buys meat from a halal butcher because she knows that Muslims can only eat meat that has been prepared in a special way. This is known as halal.”

- Which version is easier to understand?
- How do brackets help readers know what to expect? Look for more examples where the author has used brackets to give a quick explanation.
- Now review your writing, looking for places where you’ve had to explain a word or idea. Could you make the explanation briefer and simpler?

Show the students some examples of how a sequence of events can be shown in. Examples could include a timeline, a linear comic strip, or a story with headings that indicate a sequence.

- How does each author show what happened next?
- Why is it important the sequence is made clear?
- Notice how the excerpt from “Ramadan Is Coming?” uses a variety of words and phrases to show the order of events. She doesn’t just use “Then” and “Next” all the time. As you edit your writing, check that readers will be able to follow the events. Check too that you’ve used interesting words to show the sequence.

ASK QUESTIONS to prompt the students’ thinking about the way details can be added to their writing.

- How can you use examples as details to help your readers understand what you mean?
- What kinds of details will interest and inform your readers?
- How can you use details to help your readers make connections and comparisons?
- Look at your writing to see if you need to add details. What words or groups of words will help your readers understand, visualise, connect, or make inferences?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- Adding the mother’s voice helped me understand how worried she was. This is good use of dialogue.

METACOGNITION

- What are you assuming your readers will already know ...?
- What is it you want your readers to feel or imagine as they read ...? How can you help your readers feel that way?
- What editing strategies have you used to improve your writing? How did they help you?

 Writing standard: by the end of year 4

 The Literacy Learning Progressions