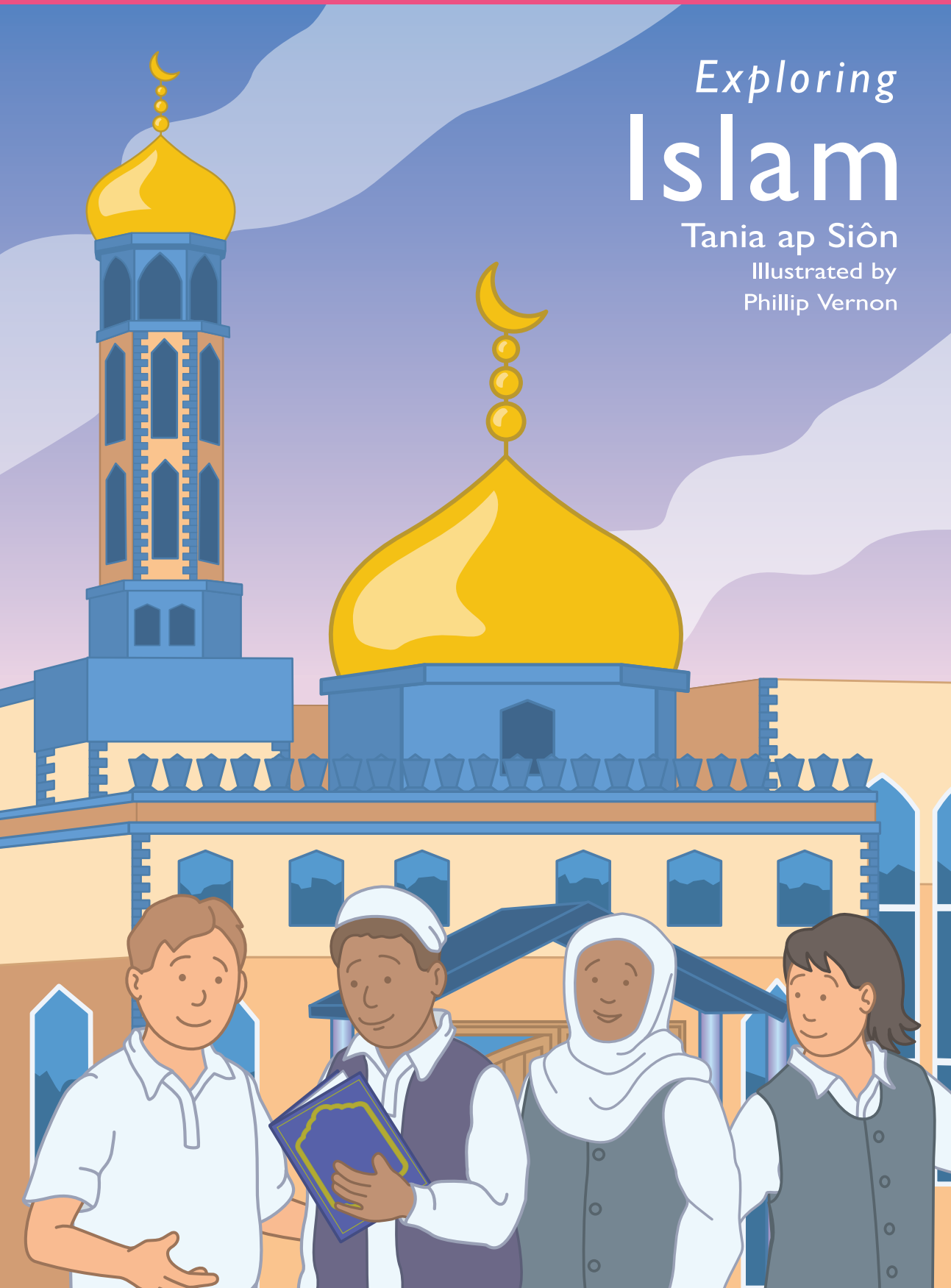


World Faiths Today Series

Exploring
Islam

Tania ap Siôn

Illustrated by
Phillip Vernon



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Bear Lands Publishing

In the World Faiths Today Series Rees and Sara learn about the major world faiths in their own country. The seven stories in the series are:

- Exploring Islam
- Exploring Judaism
- Exploring the Parish Church
- Exploring the Orthodox Church
- Exploring Hinduism
- Exploring Buddhism
- Exploring Sikhism



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Exploring Islam

Who are your friends? Do you know everything about them? Do they know everything about you?

Well, this is a story about friends who do not know everything about one another. But they are starting to learn some things their friends do and why they do them. Read their story and you might learn something new too!





I Visiting a mosque

Rees and Sara made friends with Rashid and Fatima soon after they started at their school a year ago. At first, Rees and Sara knew only two things about Rashid and Fatima. Their father worked at the local hospital and they were Muslims.

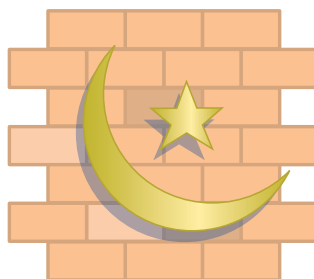
On some days after school, Rashid and Fatima would rush off to more lessons in the mosque.

‘All Muslims belong to one enormous family,’ Rashid told his friends. ‘A mosque is a place where parts of our family meet up.’

Muslims go to their mosque to worship Allah together, or to learn more about how to be good Muslims together, or simply to get together with Muslim friends. Rashid and Fatima enjoy going there.

On Wednesday afternoon the school bell buzzed for the last time that day. Rees and Sara were very excited. Rashid and Fatima had invited them to their mosque school.

‘You can call it a madrassah, if you want to be very correct,’ said Fatima.



Rees and Sara recognised the mosque at once because it had a tall tower and a beautiful dome with a crescent moon on the top.

‘Just as the moon and stars show us the right path to take at night, Allah shows us the right way to live,’ said Fatima.

Rashid pushed open the heavy front door and stepped inside.

‘Come into the mosque and we will show you how Allah does this!’ he called back to his friends.



Rashid and Fatima slipped off their shoes. They placed them on a rack already half-filled with shoes of all shapes and sizes. Rees and Sara quickly copied them.

‘Your feet are dirty, Rees,’ said Sara.

‘Never mind,’ Rashid laughed. ‘We are all going to wash ourselves now anyway.’

‘We call this wudu,’ said Fatima, saying the word slowly and carefully.

The boys and the girls went to separate wash rooms. They washed their arms, feet, faces, and heads. Fatima passed a head scarf to Sara and Rashid gave a cap to Rees.

‘We are clean and we have covered our heads. Now we are ready to see and do some very special things,’ said Rashid.



Special thing number one was in the school room. Here children were learning how to read a book written in the Arabic language.

‘This book is Allah’s most important gift to us,’ whispered Rashid. ‘In it, Allah tells us how to behave properly. Allah always knows what is best for us and Allah knows what will make us happy. That is why we want to learn how to read the book.’

Fatima nodded and added, ‘The book is called the Qur’an which means something you read aloud instead of quietly to yourself. That is why it is rather noisy in here.’

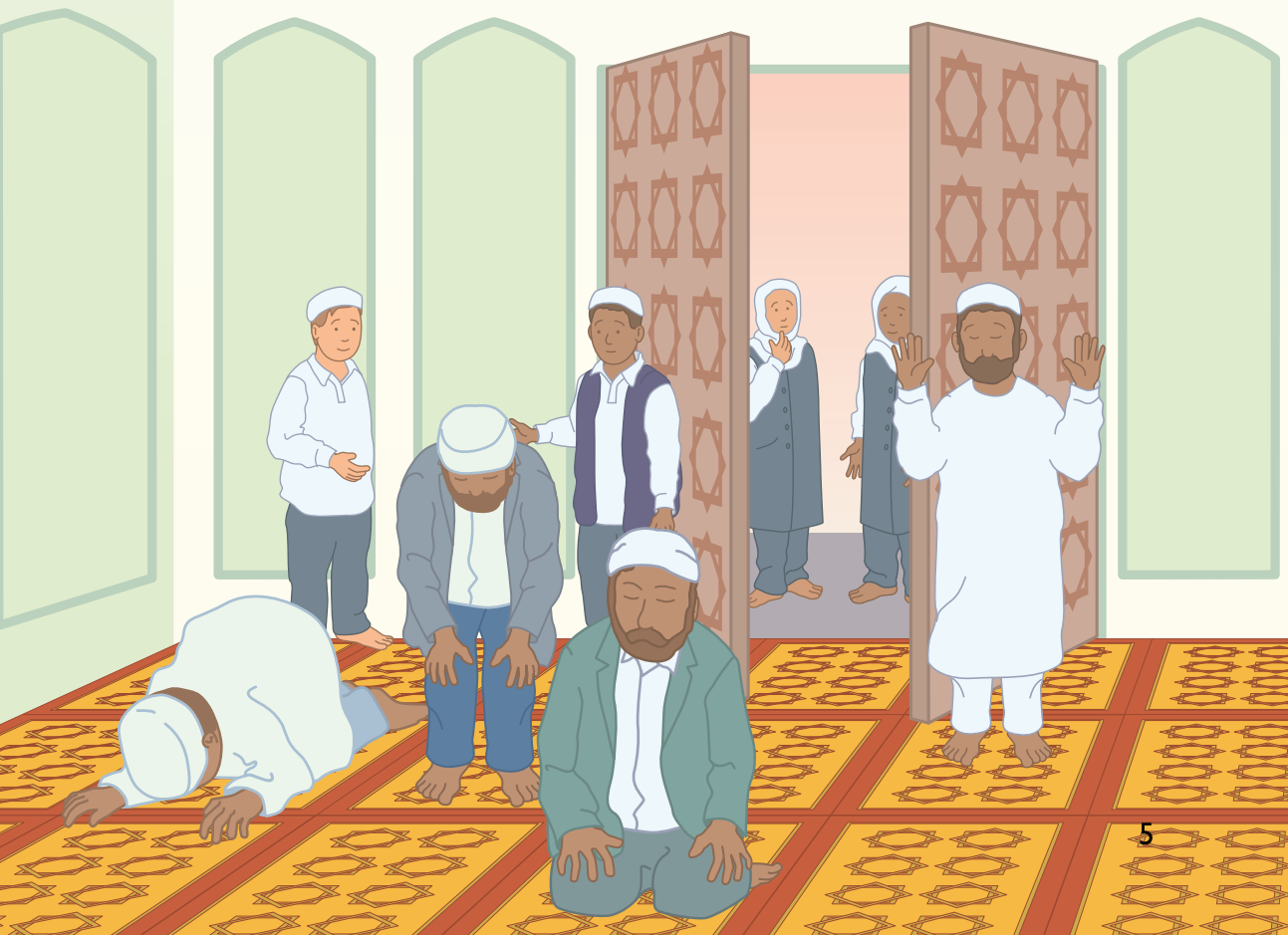
Rees and Sara were impressed. Their friends must think the Qur’an is a very special book if they go to that much trouble learning to read it.



Special thing number two was in the large prayer hall. Here rows of men and boys were praying in Arabic and doing the same actions. They were standing, bowing, kneeling, and putting their foreheads on the floor.

‘They are praying,’ said Fatima. ‘They are praising Allah. It is called Salah. In the Qur’an Allah asks us to pray five times a day on clean ground. We must face the holy city of Makkah in Saudi Arabia.’

These two special things taught Rees and Sara a lot about their friends. Rashid and Fatima believe that Allah shows them the right way to live in a book called the Qur’an. But it is not easy living the right way all the time so Rashid and Fatima believe that Allah has given them prayer to help them.





2 Celebrating Eid-ul-Fitr

Rees and Sara spent the morning making a card for their friends, Rashid and Fatima. Rashid and Fatima were celebrating the Muslim festival of Eid-ul-Fitr. Aled drew a huge mosque with lots of domes and towers. Sara wrote 'Happy festival!' in English and Arabic, doing her best to put all the lines and dots in the right places. It took ages but they were pleased with the result.

By the time they arrived at Rashid and Fatima's home, the family had returned from the special Eid service in the mosque. Rees and Sara watched as everyone swapped cards and presents. There were grandparents, parents, sons, daughters, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, grandchildren, and cousins. They were looking smart in their best clothes. They were smiling and enjoying being together.

Rees and Sara proudly handed their card to Rashid and Fatima.

'This is really good,' said Rashid, inspecting it closely. 'The card even opens the right way. Come and share our Eid lunch with us!'



This was the first lunch Rashid and Fatima's family had eaten together for one whole month.

'That is twenty-nine days!' announced Fatima. 'For twenty-nine days many Muslims have not had anything to eat or drink between sunrise and sunset. It is called fasting. Muslims call this fast Sawm. It happens in our month of Ramadan. Today we are celebrating and thanking Allah for everything we have learned during the fast. That is what Eid-ul-Fitr is all about.'

Rees and Sara were puzzled. How could not eating and drinking teach anyone anything? What is the point of being hungry and thirsty if you do not have to be? Rashid frowned and thought hard before he tried to explain.



‘Allah tells us to fast in our book, the Qur’an. We always try to do what Allah says because Allah knows what is best for us,’ said Rashid.

Rashid frowned again and thought harder. He thought about millions of Muslims all around the world fasting together. He thought about how difficult fasting was. He thought about feeling hungry, thirsty, and tired.

‘Allah asks us to fast to remind us that we are lucky to have food and water. Not everyone is so lucky. Every year during Ramadan, all Muslims learn how it feels to be hungry and thirsty. This makes us want to do more to help other people. That is why we give money to the poor during Ramadan,’ said Rashid.



Not everyone had been fasting. Rashid and Fatima's aunt was expecting a baby, so she did not fast. Neither did their grandmother who had been ill, nor their little cousins who were too young. Rashid and Fatima did not have to start fasting for another few years, but they had tried fasting for a few days to see what it was like.

'During the fast we try not to do or say anything harmful to others or ourselves,' said Fatima. 'So we try not to be angry, argue, or tell lies.'

Rees and Sara looked at each other and went red. They remembered arguing about which picture to draw on their Eid card. They nearly had not made the card because of that argument.

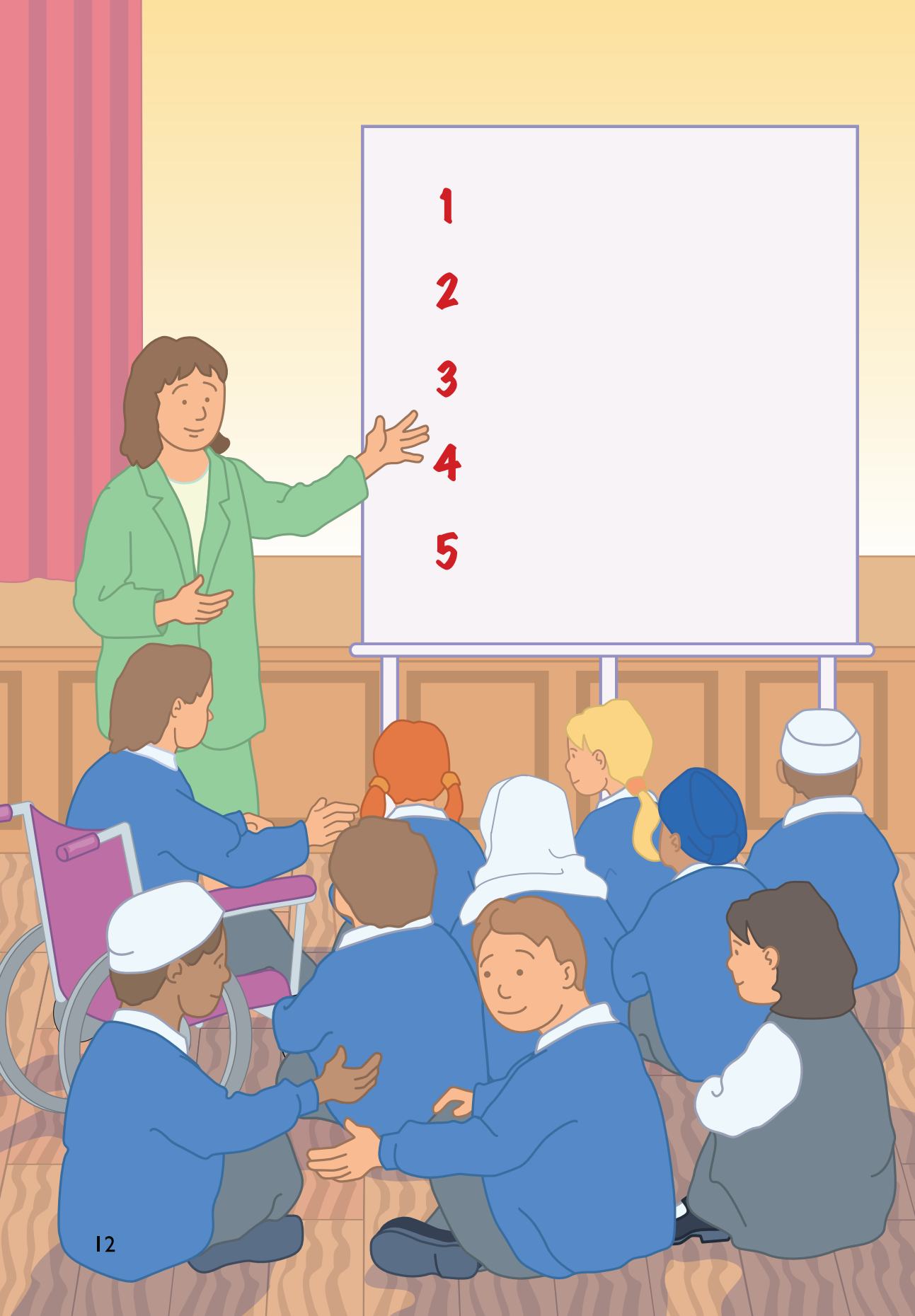


Rashid and Fatima's grandfather told them a story about the Night of Power. When he spoke, everyone listened. Everyone respected grandfather. The Night of Power falls on the twenty-seventh of Ramadan. On that night, in the year 610 CE, Allah gave the first part of the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad who was in a cave. Grandfather showed them a picture of the cave on Mount Hira. They saw the city of Makkah on the plain below.

'This is why I try to read all of the Qur'an during Ramadan,' said grandfather.

Rees and Sara now understood why their friends were celebrating Eid-ul-Fitr. Rashid and Fatima believe that Allah asks them to fast in the Qur'an. They believe that it teaches them how to be better Muslims. So Rashid and Fatima were thanking Allah for all they had learnt during Ramadan.





3 Understanding the Qur'an and Muhammad

Rees and Sara walked into the school hall with the other children and sat cross-legged on the floor. There were a few excited whispers as the whole school waited for their new headteacher to appear.

The new headteacher introduced herself as Mrs Jones. She said that she wanted the school to be like a big, happy family. To be a big, happy family every child had to try to keep the school rules. She reminded the children of their five school rules.

Rule 1 – Be kind and polite to everyone.

Rule 2 – Try your very best in everything you do.

Rule 3 – Look after your own things and other people's things.

Rule 4 – Keep everything tidy and safe.

Rule 5 – Listen to your teachers.

Mrs Jones said that teachers were there to help them understand and keep these rules. So it was important to listen to teachers and do what they say.

After school, Rees and Sara walked home with their friends, Rashid and Fatima. They all agreed that they liked their new headteacher and they would try hard to keep the school rules.



‘We have rules we must follow as Muslims too,’ said Fatima. ‘Allah has given them to us in our holy book, the Qur’an. Allah wants all Muslims to live together as a big, happy family. It is like Mrs Jones wants in the school.’

‘Our most important rule is to practise the Five Pillars,’ said Rashid. He told Rees and Sara what the Five Pillars were.

Pillar 1 – Believe in one God called Allah.

Pillar 2 – Pray to Allah five times a day.

Pillar 3 – Help people who cannot help themselves.

Pillar 4 – Fast during the month of Ramadan.

Pillar 5 – Go on a special journey to the city of Makkah at least once in your life.



At Rashid and Fatima's house, Rees and Sara asked if they could see a copy of their Qur'an. It was kept on a high shelf. Fatima reached up and gently removed the piece of material protecting it.

'Every word in this book comes from Allah,' said Fatima. 'That means we have to treat it in a special way. I always wash myself before I touch it and my head is always covered.'

She opened a stand and placed the book on it.

'This is a chair or a throne for the Qur'an to sit on. The Qur'an must be kept clean and away from the floor,' explained Fatima

Rees and Sara gazed at the Qur'an in amazement. You look after something that carefully only if it means a lot to you.



‘Do you believe that all Allah’s rules are in this book?’ asked Rees.

‘Yes,’ said Rashid, ‘but it is not as simple as that. Some of the rules are difficult to understand so we need someone to explain them to us. The Prophet Muhammad has done this.’

Rashid fetched a book about Muhammad and showed it to his friends.

‘Muhammad was born in Saudi Arabia in the year 570 CE. He was given the important job of being one of Allah’s messengers.

Allah taught the Qur’an to Muhammad and Muhammad taught the Qur’an to those around him. Muhammad understood what the Qur’an was about. He lived like a perfect Muslim,’ said Rashid.



‘This book contains stories about Muhammad’s life. These stories help us to understand Allah’s rules in the Qur’an,’ said Fatima, pointing to the book about Muhammad.

‘Are there any pictures of Muhammad here?’ asked Sara, flicking through the pages of the book. ‘I would like to know what he looked like.’

Fatima shook her head.

‘No,’ she replied. ‘We are not allowed to make any pictures or models of people or animals. We might like them so much we forget about Allah.’

On that afternoon, Rees and Sara had learnt more about their friends. Rashid and Fatima try to follow Allah’s rules in the Qur’an. These rules help Muslims to live together as a big, happy family. When Rashid and Fatima do not understand these rules, they can read stories about Muhammad to help them.





4 Caring for others and the world

A huge shark appeared from behind the rocks and swam slowly above the children's heads. Rees and Sara gasped. They felt that they really were at the bottom of the sea. It was like being in another world.

Rees and Sara were visiting an aquarium with their friends, Rashid and Fatima. They had spent the afternoon peering into tanks of water. There were so many different creatures and plants to see from around the world. Some lived in warm water and others lived in cold water. Some lived deep in the oceans and others lived nearer the surface. But wherever they lived, they needed one another to stay alive.

The children heard a young man talk about the damage people do to the world's streams, rivers, seas, and oceans. Much of this damage is caused by pollution.

The children enjoyed their trip. They admired the beauty and power of the world around them, but they also felt sad. They remembered that it can be easily destroyed if people do not think or care about it.



It was a very warm day so the four friends decided to sit under a large oak tree in the park. They shared a bottle of orange juice and some fruit. They were still talking about the aquarium.

‘It is the duty of Muslims to look after the natural world,’ said Rashid. He looked around the park. ‘Sitting here reminds me of a Muslim story my mother used to read to me. It is a story about looking after animals.’

Rees, Sara, and Fatima made themselves comfortable and Rashid began his story.

Muhammad was walking in a garden in Madinah. It was a very hot day. Both humans and animals were feeling the heat. He saw a man trying to keep cool under a tree.



Muhammad heard a camel nearby making a dreadful sound. He went over to it and gently stroked it. The camel was crying. The camel was far too thin. It worked hard, but it was not given enough food and water.

The man sitting under the tree was the camel's owner. Muhammad told him that Allah had made his camel and he was being cruel to it. It was his duty to look after the camel. If the camel had enough food and water, it would work better. The owner felt ashamed and very sorry. After this, the man always looked after his camel properly. And Muhammad was right! He did get a lot more work from the camel.



‘Muslims also have a duty to look after one another,’ said Fatima. ‘In a perfect world, everyone would have enough to eat and drink and enough money to buy clothes. It is written in the Qur’an that Muslims should help those in need. So, we give money, which is divided among those who need it. We call this Zakah.’

Rashid and Fatima’s family also gave money and food to the poor at other times as well. They gave at special times like the birth of a baby and during festivals. They tried to give whenever they could.

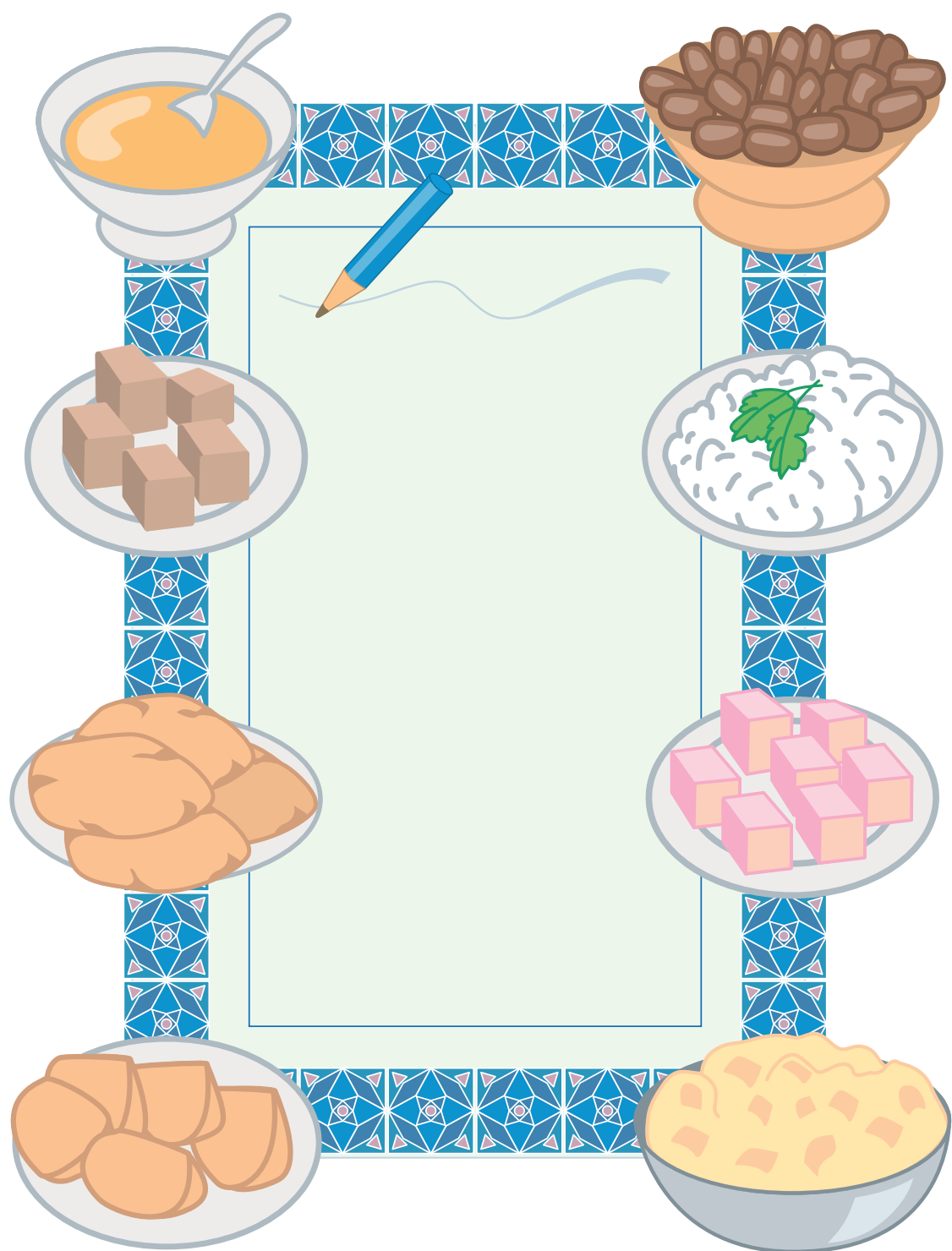
On their way home the children visited the public library. Fatima wanted to show Rees and Sara some interesting websites on the library computer.



The librarian helped them to search for Muslim aid agencies. Fatima explained that Muslims donated money to these agencies. The agencies then made sure people around the world received the help they needed. The agencies helped to provide clean water, education, and health care. They also helped in emergencies caused by war or natural disasters, like an earthquake or famine.

Rees and Sara now knew more about their friends. Rashid and Fatima believe that Allah made the world and everything in it. They believe that Allah planned it perfectly and everything is here for a reason. Muslims are expected to look after Allah's creation. Rashid and Fatima also believe that Allah wants them to look after one another and Allah tells them how they can do this in the Qur'an.





5 Learning about halal and haram

Rees and Sara had been waiting all week for Saturday morning. They had arranged to go shopping with their friends, Rashid and Fatima. Usually they did not enjoy shopping very much, but this trip was going to be different. Rashid and Fatima had promised to take them to a special place, popular with local Muslims.

‘Our mother has given us a list and some money. She wants us to buy the family’s food for the weekend,’ said Fatima, feeling very important.

As soon as Rees and Sara stepped inside the shop, their senses were bombarded with new smells, sights, and sounds. They discovered all sorts of food from a number of different countries. If they did not recognise something, Rashid and Fatima explained what it was.

‘Many Muslims in this area have family roots in India. This shop sells a lot of food traditionally eaten there,’ said Rashid as they inspected some seeds, pods, and spices. ‘Muslims have family roots in many different countries, though, including this country. They will eat other kinds of food.’

HALAL FOOD COMPANY



‘Do you know what makes this shop special?’ asked Fatima.
She pulled a packet off the nearest shelf and read the label aloud.



Rees and Sara checked some other packets, tins, and jars. They all had a halal label.

‘Muslims can eat only food which is halal and this means allowed,’ continued Fatima. ‘All other food is called haram, which means forbidden. This shop is special because it sells only halal food.’



‘How do you know which foods are allowed and which foods are forbidden?’ asked Rees, with interest.

‘Allah has given our food rules in the Qur’an,’ answered Rashid. ‘If we eat meat from an animal, it has to be killed in the Muslim way. We have to be careful because animal products are hidden in many foods. We cannot eat bacon, ham, or pork at all.’

Rees and Sara thought that a halal food shop made a lot of sense. Imagine how long shopping would take if you had to read the ingredients on every label!



‘Halal and haram are not just about food,’ said Rashid. ‘Everything we do is either allowed by Allah, or forbidden by Allah. It is either good for us, or not good for us. Look at our clothes!’

Rees and Sara saw that Fatima and Rashid wore clothes covering most of their bodies.

‘The Qur’an says that we must dress modestly,’ said Fatima.

‘Muslims in different parts of the world understand this in different ways. Many Muslim women dress like me, but some cover themselves up completely. Sometimes Muslim women do not wear headscarves at all, unless they are praying or reading the Qur’an.’



In the shop, Rees and Sara had learnt something new and very important. Not all Muslims live in exactly the same way. Exactly how Muslims live depends on where their families come from. It also depends on how they understand the rules in the Qur'an.

But many Muslims from around the world believe that they belong to the same family. This is because they all share one belief – There is only one God called Allah who shows them the right way to live in the Qur'an.

As Rees and Sara walked home, they agreed that they wanted to share some of their own special things with Rashid and Fatima. What these special things are is another story.



Rees and Sara have two Muslim school friends called Rashid and Fatima. Sometimes after school, Rashid and Fatima go for special lessons at their local mosque. One Wednesday afternoon, Rees and Sara are invited to join them.

As Rees and Sara step through the mosque door, their adventure begins.

What is so important about a book written in Arabic and a man called Muhammad? As Rees and Sara learn more about their friends, they start to understand.

