



COMBATING ISLAMOPHOBIA

Education Package Commemorating
The June 6th Attack on Our London Family

GRADES 9-12





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ABOUT YCCI | A Message from the Co-founder

Up until **June 6th, 2021**, my biggest challenge in life was navigating highschool while living in a pandemic. As a 14 year old, I thought it couldn't get much worse than that, until that night. My dear friend and classmate of 8 years was run down in the streets as she walked home with her family. She was killed because she was a Muslim. Can you imagine how difficult it was to process this horrific event? Can you imagine the fear, shock and despair that engulfed me, my friends and my community? This fear just kept on growing. Many of us stopped going on walks, feeling safe in our community or even feeling like we belonged. There came a point where I had to make a decision. Do I continue to wallow in my pain or do I find a way forward? I was tired of feeling helpless. I was tired of worrying about who was next. I was tired of believing that there was nothing I could do. I started **YCCI (Youth Coalition Combating Islamophobia)** for all those who felt like me. The truth is there is something we can do. There is something everyone can do. It is my hope that if we work together, we can bring about positive change. It is my hope that we can dismantle islamophobia and end all forms of hate. It is my hope that every educator will guide students to challenge their biases and understand that lesser forms of Islamophobia are connected to more extreme forms: they originate from the same ignorance, intolerance and systems of disenfranchisement.

Perhaps the man who killed Yumnah and her family was that kid in highschool that made fun of a girls hijab and no one ever challenged it. Perhaps everyone ignored the signs of hatred that manifested in his interactions with and views of Muslims. Violence progresses when left unchecked. It is the role and responsibility of education to challenge ignorance and hate. As educators, you have the ability to encourage and guide these important conversations. We are grateful to you for your continued support and we believe that with your help we can create safe schools for all.

Sincerely,
Maryam Al-Sabawi
St. Andre Bessette Secondary School
Grade 10 student.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The **YCCI Combating Islamophobia: Education Package Commemorating the June 6th Attack on Our London Family** was made possible with the generous contributions and support of several educators, researchers, and YCCI youth.

We would like to thank all those involved in creating the content for this education package. The material included in this package is based on research, the lived experiences of Muslims across Canada, and a shared passion to combat Islamophobia through education. A special mention goes out to the youth group that was directly involved in the process of creating learning material for the lessons included in this package. The youth group consists of the following high school and university students in London: Esa Islam, Maryam Al-Sabawi, Safiyah Lawendy, Hamza Omer, and Safaa Ali. This group was responsible for determining priorities for the learning outcomes for each grade, and researching the areas of Islamophobia, unconscious biases, and microaggressions in the context of anti-Muslim sentiments. The group also provided insight to the specific activities developed for each grade level, which promote active learning of the desired outcomes.

The project also relied on the invaluable guidance of an advisory group of teacher mentors to our youth; namely Hanni Shahatto, Sarrah Lawendy, and Asad Choudhary. Special thank yous are also due to Dr. Asma Ahmed and Rania Lawendy who shared their insights while reviewing the curriculum. The feedback and final consultation for this resource provided by the Institute for Religious and Socio-Political Studies (I-RSS) research director, Nakita Valerio, has also been invaluable. Nikita was part of the research and development team through I-RSS for the MAC Islam Awareness online courses for educators, developed in cooperation with the Ministry of Education in Ontario.

Lastly, none of this would be possible without the ongoing commitment, dedication, and support of the senior mentorship team at YCCI - listed in alphabetical order by last name – Asad Choudhary, Eaman Fahmy, Yasmin Husain, Hina Islam, Yasmeeen Khattab, Sarrah Lawendy, Deenah Qubaia, Hanni Shahatto, and Selma Tobah.



LETTER TO EDUCATORS

Dear Educators,

Thank you for your wonderful service to the children in your school. Your dedication towards providing a safe and caring inclusive environment for your students is an important part of the service you provide to the children of this community each and every day. At a time where diversity is a beautiful reality of our country, racism and hate serves as an enemy to what we all stand for.

The Islamophobic events that took place a year ago on June 6th, 2021 in our city of London, left a deep wound in the community. Like all faith groups in the rich tapestry that makes up Canada, Muslims are diverse in language, culture, ideologies, and socio-economic status. However, when preyed upon through the eyes of bigotry, xenophobia, racism, and Islamophobia, often those who identify with the faith are homogenously mistreated, and marginalized.

This package is designed to equip your secondary students with an understanding of the June 6th terrorist attack on the Afzaal family in London, Ontario. This package asks students to examine and interrupt their own unconscious biases and form real allyship with those on the receiving end of anti-Muslim hate. This package provides tools for students to combat Islamophobia as it occurs in their schools. It includes a **70-minute** lesson plan for **grades 9-12** that demonstrates the following learning outcomes:

- Students will understand the origin and impacts of the **June 6th attack**
- Students will critically evaluate their own unconscious biases about Muslims and Islam
- Students will be able to identify and combat Islamophobic aggressions at school

We hope you find this package as a useful tool to commemorate **June 6th** and help put a stop to Islamophobia in schools.



SCHOOL-WIDE INITIATIVES

Display Board

To honour Yumnah Afzaal’s passion and incredible achievement in visual art, schools will make a display board available throughout June titled “In Memory of Yumnah Afzaal”. Students will be encouraged to submit their artwork, creative displays, and messages on the board. Work on the submissions can also be facilitated by art teachers, English teachers, student clubs, etc.

Hope Rocks

Students can paint rocks with a message of hope, or a picture of hope geared towards the Muslim community. These rocks can be placed anywhere around the city or the school.

Lesson Plan

Attached in this package is the teacher’s guide to the Grade 9-12 Classroom Lesson Plan. The lesson is designed to fit in one instructional period, with an estimated duration of 70 minutes. There is an accompanying slideshow that is essential for the successful delivery of the lesson. That said, this lesson is best delivered in a classroom equipped with a computer and projector.

March

Our London Family had only 15 minutes (1.4 km) left of their regular evening walk remaining on **June 6th, 2021** when they were attacked. Schools across London and the surrounding area will be honouring *Our London Family* by symbolically completing their walk for them, at a time during the instructional day that works for individual schools. Schools may choose to complete the walk around the inside perimeter of their school, in their gymnasium, or another location that is deemed appropriate by the school administration.

Ribbons

Our London Family ribbons will be available in all schools, on **June 6th**. The ribbon is purple and green; purple represents Yumnah Afzaal’s favourite colour and green symbolizes the fight against Islamophobia. Yumnah was a grade 9 student at Oakridge Secondary School.

Video

An important video produced by YCCI, titled *How Did This Happen?*, has been included at the beginning of the lesson plan in this package. This video contains an explanation of what happened on **June 6th, 2021**, what Islamophobia looks and feels like, and a call to action. Given some of the depictions therein, it is best to offer students a content warning about some of the disturbing imagery or incidents that will be mentioned in the video.



GRADE 9-12 CLASSROOM LESSON PLAN

Learning Outcomes

- Students will understand the origin and impacts of the June 6th attack
- Students will critically evaluate their own unconscious biases about Muslims and Islam
- Students will be able to identify and combat Islamophobic aggressions at school

Essential Questions

- What happened on June 6th, 2021?
- What is Islamophobia, and how does it negatively affect people?
- What is bias, and what are my own unconscious biases?
- How can we combat Islamophobia and create a more inclusive community?

Materials

- [YCCI slideshow presentation](#)
- Sticky notes and chart paper
- Devices (Chromebooks, iPads)
- Class set of handout on page 16: *How to Combat Islamophobia in Schools*

Vocabulary:

bias [bahy-uhs] (*noun*) a particular tendency, trend, inclination, feeling, or opinion, especially one that is preconceived or unreasoned

Islam [iss-lahm] (*noun*) the religious faith and way of life of Muslims

Islamophobia [iss-lahm-uh-foe-bee-ah] (*noun*) a system of power and exploitation that marginalizes Muslims at the institutional, media and personal levels, creating an irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against Islam or people who practice Islam.

microaggression [mahy-kroh-uh-gresh-uhn] a subtle but offensive comment or action directed at a member of a marginalized group that is often unintentionally offensive or unconsciously reinforces a stereotype

Muslim [mus-lim] (*noun*) a person who follows Islam

othering [uhth-er-ing] (*verb*) treating people from another group as essentially different from and generally inferior to the group one belongs to



LESSON PLAN | Total Duration: 70 minutes

Part 1: MINDS ON

The June 6th Attack (20 minutes)

1. Click [Grade 9-12 Presentation](#) to access the slideshow. This slideshow is also available on [ycci.ca](#) → WHAT WE DO tab → EDUCATION PACKAGE.
2. Play the 10-minute video titled [To Yumnah, With Love](#) for the class (slide 4). The video contains:
 - What happened on June 6th, 2021
 - What Islamophobia looks and feels like
 - A call to action
3. Think, Pair, Share (slide 5): Ask the class if they have heard of/witnessed other examples of Islamophobia, and whether anything was done about it.
4. Go through the following Canadian Islamophobia statistics with the class (slides 6-8). The purpose of going through the statistics is to help students understand that the stories are not anecdotal and that they are systemic:
 - 46% of Canadians have an unfavourable view of Islam – more than for any other religious tradition
[Angus Reid Institute, "Religious Trends: Led by Quebec, Number of Canadians Holding Favourable Views of Various Religions Increases," 4 April 2017, <http://angusreid.org/religious-trends-2017/>]
 - 52% of Canadians feel that Muslims can only be trusted "a little" or "not at all"
[Ron Csillag, "Survey Finds Deep Mistrust for Muslims in Canada," 26 March 2012, Washington Post, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-faith/survey-finds-deep-mistrust-for-muslims-in-canada/2012/03/26/gIQAjDCMcS_story.html?utm_term=.86d3e80b7e56]
 - 42% of Canadians think discrimination against Muslims is "mainly their fault"
[Ron Csillag, "Survey Finds Deep Mistrust for Muslims in Canada," 26 March 2012, Washington Post, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-faith/survey-finds-deep-mistrust-for-muslims-in-canada/2012/03/26/gIQAjDCMcS_story.html?utm_term=.86d3e80b7e56]
 - 47% of Canadians support banning headscarves in public (compared with 30% of Americans)
[John Geddes, "On One Issue, Canadians Are A Lot Less Tolerant Than Americans," 9 February 2017, Maclean's, <http://www.macleans.ca/politics/ottawa/on-one-issue-canadians-are-a-lot-less-tolerant-than-americans/>]



- 51% support government surveillance of mosques (as compared to 46% of Americans)
[John Geddes, "On One Issue, Canadians Are A Lot Less Tolerant Than Americans," 9 February 2017, Maclean's, <http://www.macleans.ca/politics/ottawa/on-one-issue-canadians-are-a-lot-less-tolerant-than-americans/>]

These negative views may lead to Islamophobic violence and are detrimental to the mental health of Canadian Muslims. According to the 2021 *Islamophobia, Muslim Safety, and Violence Survey* in the US and Canada:

- 53% of Muslim respondents expressed that over the past 12 months, they have experienced verbal Islamophobic incidents (this is during a lock-down pandemic)
- 9% of Muslim respondents said they had experienced a violent attack based on their Muslim identity
- 57% of Muslim respondents expressed a little or no sense of belonging and inclusion when asked how they felt as a Muslim in Western society
- 79% Muslim respondents feel insecure and afraid for their family and kids
- 86% of Muslim respondents feel anxious in public space

Activity Consolidation:

Islamophobia is increasing and it is harming, killing, and traumatizing Canadian Muslims (slide 9).

Part 2: ACTION ON Understanding Bias (20 minutes)

1. Photo Analysis: Before doing this exercise, define what stereotypes are and note that they foster implicit biases (slide 11).
2. Present each of the following pictures and ask: "What stereotypes might come to someone's mind when looking at this picture?" (slide 12-13).
 - a. Provide all students with sticky notes to write their names* and answers, fold the notes, and submit into a bin.



b. The teacher then chooses from the bin and reads some out loud or writes them on the board. Writing it on the sticky note allows students to be honest and allows Muslim students to feel safe.

*Educator note: Consider asking students to write their name at the top of their sticky notes. This allows educators to follow up with students regarding comments written, if needed.



Picture 1 possible responses:
enemy, foreign, terror

Picture 2 possible responses:
forced, oppressed, weak

Picture 3 possible responses:
backwards, no Canadian values

3. Reveal the reality of each of the previous pictures (slides 14-17).

Picture 1 reality:



- Dr. Adnan Rajeh, MD
- 2nd Generation Canadian living in London, ON
- Father is from Syria and mother is Irish-Canadian
- Medical doctor and Oncology Fellow at Western University
- Published Research Associate on ADHD
- Published Poet
- Passionate about humanitarian causes around the world
- Founder and Director of the Muslim Wellness Center in London
- Youth mentor in London
- Avid soccer fan
- Former religious studies teacher of Yumnah Afzaal



Picture 2 reality:

- Bilqis Abdul-Qadir (right)
- Grew up in Massachusetts
- Professional Basketball Player that was the first NCAA Division 1 player to wear hijab
- Mentioned in a tweet by LeBron James showing her support
- Invited to the White House by Barack Obama
- Founder of “Muslim Girls Hoop Too”
- Star of the documentary *Life Without Basketball* (2018)
- Former physical education teacher of Yumnah Afzaal



Picture 3 reality:

- Prayer at last year’s vigil for Our London Family on Oxford Street
- The Prime Minister of Canada, Premier of Ontario, and other prominent Canadians addressed tens of thousands of Londoners in attendance and millions watching worldwide
- At the funeral prayer (pictured left), Our London Family’s caskets were draped in the Canadian flag, considered a high honour

4. To complete this activity, have students then brainstorm new terms around the images, considering that they have been told the back stories (slides 18-19).
 - a. Write those on the board as they are offered next to the original suggestions. This creates a visual shift in perception and promotes integration of the skill/idea that students can change their minds when presented with new information.
 - i. Talk with students about how important this process can be for internally checking their own biases. Note to them that the first thought about someone else which enters their minds is what they have been socially conditioned to think (their implicit bias). This thought is not necessarily *true* but just what their brains have normalized over years of being taught the same narratives and generalizations about specific groups of people. What matters is how they follow up and interrupt that first thought with something new and more accurate to the diversity and complexity they will encounter in regular life. This also helps students understand that, in the beginning,



they may not eliminate those biases from popping up but they can interrupt themselves as they would anyone else vocalizing harmful stereotypes about others. That awareness and personal accountability is the first step toward wider social change.

5. Read and analyze the following as a class (slide 20-21): Where does implicit bias come from?

- Islam and the world's 1.8 billion Muslims have been mischaracterized in the media for decades, negatively affecting how they are perceived
- Tell students to take a look at the following collection of Islamophobic news headlines from the UK, which are similar to those found in the USA and Canada with many of the same stereotypes and stories
 - Headline Analysis: Ask students how they think 20 years of this kind of reporting could impact public opinion.
 - Students should know that when people believe the stereotypes presented in the media, they are not necessarily horrible people; rather, they may be missing the critical awareness needed to question these narratives, as well as the information and life experiences needed to counter them. These false beliefs are a result of stereotypes that keep being perpetuated consciously and subconsciously.
 - Students need to learn that you can unlearn stereotypes, just like you learn them.



- These extreme forms of hate, such as the June 6th attack, don't happen overnight. There is a steady progression of dehumanization that allows one to get to that point of othering another group.
- Unfortunately the June 6th attack was not an isolated event. These extreme forms of hate are interconnected. The June 6th attacker was in possession of hate-related material and may have consumed white-supremacist content on the dark web.
[\[https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/suspect-in-killing-of-muslim-family-in-london-ont-may-have-accessed-neo-nazi-site-on-dark-web-documents-1.5819475\]](https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/suspect-in-killing-of-muslim-family-in-london-ont-may-have-accessed-neo-nazi-site-on-dark-web-documents-1.5819475)
- It has also been reported that the June 6th attacker was inspired by an alt-right white supremacist who killed 51 Muslims and injured 40 at two mosques in New Zealand
[\[https://globalnews.ca/news/8361038/london-attack-suspect-inspired-new-zealand-mosque-shooter/\]](https://globalnews.ca/news/8361038/london-attack-suspect-inspired-new-zealand-mosque-shooter/)
 - The attacker in New Zealand was known to have expressed racist ideas from a young age and frequented hateful discussion boards.
 - His unchecked biases festered into this grisly act, and the June 6th attack is one of many influenced by it
- Canadians have work to do; in the past five years, more Muslims have been killed in targeted hate attacks in Canada than any other G7 country because of Islamophobia
[Ena Chadha, "OHRC statement on the National Summit on Islamophobia", 21 July 2021, https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/news_centre/ohrc-statement-national-summit-islamophobia]

Activity Consolidation:

Everyone has biases, and when hateful biases are left unchecked, they can spread and become dangerous (slide 25).

Part 3: Closure (CONSOLIDATION)

Combating Islamophobia (30 minutes)

1. Divide the class into groups of three. Using a device (i.e. Chromebook, iPad), each group will rewatch one of the following three stories presented in the video. On chart paper, they are to create two columns. The first column is 'What are the stereotypes in this story?'; the second column is 'What should be known instead?' Assign each group to either [Story #1](#) (skip to 2:37), [Story #2](#) (skip to 3:38), or [Story #3](#) (skip to 4:37) (slide 27).
2. Ask the groups to present their chart papers to the class.



3. Conclude that the outcome of our interactions with others can be different if our perceptions change at an individual level (slide 28).
4. Present the following “What If?” statements regarding the June 6th attack (slide 29):
 - What if it was known that Salman (deceased father) was always smiling, was extremely friendly to everyone, and loved to garden?
 - What if it was known that Madiha (deceased mother) was a kind and gentle person and about to complete her PhD at Western University?
 - What if it was known that Yumnah (deceased daughter) was a talented artist that wanted to make a positive difference in this world?
 - What if it was known that Fayez (orphaned son) loved his family more than anything in this world?
5. Decompression Time: Students choose one of the following activities below to conclude the lesson (slide 30):

Choice #1 - Quick Post: Make a social media post with the hashtag [#stopislamophobia](#) about what they have learned and how they feel.

Choice #2 - Quick Write: Journal about what they have learned and how they feel.

Choice #3 - Quick Draw: Produce artwork that represents what they have learned and how they feel.

*Cultural Safety Reminder: Teachers should be aware that some students may experience emotional reactions when learning about issues that have affected their own lives, their family, and/or their community. Before addressing such topics in the classroom, teachers need to consider how to prepare and debrief students, and they need to ensure that resources are available to support students both inside and outside the classroom.

6. Print and hand out a class set of *How to Combat Islamophobia at School* on the next page for students to keep and to aid them in the above Decompression Time activity (slides 31-33).

Activity Consolidation:

Whether internally or externally, Islamophobia can and should be combated wherever it presents itself (slide 34).



How to Combat Islamophobia at School

(adapted from MAC's islamawareness.ca and riversofhope.ca)

1. Be aware of your biases and mindful of your social position

- Your biases about people can be corrected
- Question and be critical of why you feel a certain way about a group
- Recognize the influence you have on others

2. See the humanity in others

- Try to understand someone else's perspective
 - How would you feel if this happened to you?
- Engage in dialogue
 - Focus on commonalities
- Educate yourself and others
 - Learn about Muslims and their diverse cultures
 - Ask questions - don't make assumptions or judgments

3. Take meaningful action

- Stand up to Islamophobia
 - Don't be a passive bystander or enabler
 - Directly tell perpetrators to stop
 - Interrupt the situation by distracting the perpetrator/talking to the victim
 - Ask for support from other people in the area
 - Don't laugh at Islamophobic jokes
 - Report hate to your teachers/administration
 - Support victims
 - Ask if they are okay or need help
 - Offer to walk/sit with them
 - Guide them to resources
- Participate in the inclusion of Muslims
 - Advocate for the proper accommodation of Muslims at your school
 - Diet, prayer, modesty, holidays, etc.



CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

MAC Islamic Awareness Project with the Ontario Ministry of Education

The Muslim Association of Canada (MAC) in collaboration with the ministry of Education in Ontario created digital resources for Islamophobia awareness and prevention in Ontario's education system - resources that can further deepen the understanding of educators learning about these issues and seeking to bring them into their equitable classrooms.

The Muslim Association of Canada is an education driven organization and a voice for many in the Muslim community. MAC has also previously developed and presented workshops on Islamophobia for different organizations and on multiple platforms.

The MAC Islam Awareness digital resources are composed of mini courses, workshops, videos and infographics that are built to engage with students, parents and educators through an anti-racism and diversity lens. The educational digital resources are developed to raise awareness on racism and discrimination in all its forms, and particularly on Islamophobia. MAC is confident that the outcomes of this educational project will create a safer space and experience for students and educators.

The resource includes:

- Digital resources for professional development workshops for teachers on Islamophobia awareness.
- Informative video series and infographics for educators and students.
- E-learning courses and resources for educators and students on Islamophobia. the three courses are composed of modules and short videos that address:
 - Islamic beliefs, practices and values to increase awareness about Muslims
 - Discovering root causes for Islamophobia and how to stop it

You can access these resources at no charge by visiting www.islamawareness.ca



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

Adapted from Toronto District School Board's *Islamic Heritage Month Resource Guidebook for Educators*.

1. What does “Allah” mean?

Allah is the Arabic name for God. Even Christian Arabs call God, Allah. Literally meaning “The God”, the Arabic name Allah is used by Muslims around the world, irrespective of languages spoken. Other faiths and traditions address God using names such as Dieu, Jehovah, Ya'hweh, and Elohim.

2. Who was Muhammad?

A descendent of Prophet Abraham, Muhammad was born in Makkah (modern day, Saudi Arabia) in the year 570 C.E. At the age of 40, he was chosen by God to be His last Prophet and Messenger to convey the message of Islam to humanity over a period of 23 years. According to the Islamic worldview, God sent Messengers and Prophets to guide humanity over time, beginning with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus - to name a few.

3. What is the Qur'an?

The word Qur'an literally means “the reading” or “the recitation”, and refers to the exact words revealed by God through the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad. Muslims believe the Qur'an to be the final revelation from God to humanity, following revelations given to previous Messengers, including the Gospel of Prophet Jesus, the Psalms of Prophet David, the Torah of Prophet Moses, and the Scrolls of Prophet Abraham.

4. What do Muslims believe?

Muslims believe in the absolute Oneness and Uniqueness of God; in His Angels; in His Prophets, who were human beings chosen by God; in His Books, in which revelations were brought to humankind; the Day of Judgement and accountability for one's actions; and, in the Divine decree.



5. What is hijab?

The *hijab* is a headscarf worn in public by some Muslim women who have reached adulthood as defined by the onset of puberty. The hijab is a piece of cloth that covers the hair, ears and neck, exposing only the face. Hijab is an expression of faith. Women who choose to cover their heads are not exclusive to Islam; some Christian, Jewish, Sikh, Hindu, and Rastafarian women also wear a form of head covering as part of their religious or cultural practices. Hijab, like any other act of worship, is a choice that Muslim woman make.

6. What is the ritual prayer, and what does it involve?

Prayer is one of the five pillars of Islam. Muslims pray five times a day, throughout their lives, as this is our direct connection with God. The prayer consists of a particular sequence of actions that make up a “unit” of prayer. During prayer, Muslims quietly recite verses from the Qur'an and say certain Arabic supplications in a particular order. Muslims also make personal supplications/prayers anytime one feels the need.

7. What is Ramadan?

Fasting is an act of worship common across many faiths and traditions. In Islam, fasting can be optional or an obligation upon Muslims, depending on the time of year. The obligatory fast takes place daily during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Muslims fast during daylight hours, refraining from eating, drinking, and marital relations from dawn to sunset. Fasting during this month is an opportunity for Muslims to focus on their spiritual state, exerting themselves to develop discipline in oneself and increased inner and outer consciousness of God. One of the ways these are achieved is through self-purification; that is, improving qualities of good character, increasing in acts of worship and getting involved in charitable acts and giving. The experience also allows one to become more sympathetic to those in need and to develop empathy for those who may not have the luxury of knowing where their next meal is coming from or if they can even access clean drinking water.