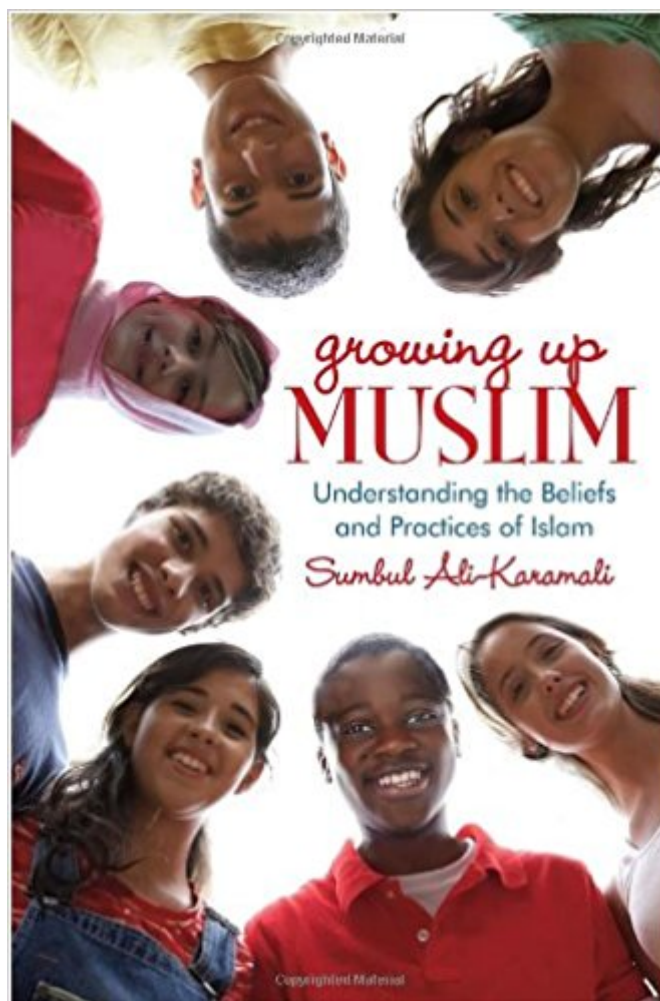


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# Growing Up Muslim: Understanding The Beliefs And Practices Of Islam



## Synopsis

Author Sumbul Ali-Karamali offers her personal account, discussing the many and varied questions she fielded from curious friends and schoolmates while growing up in Southern Californiaâfrom diet, to dress, to prayer and holidays and everything in between. She also provides an academically reliable introduction to Islam, addressing its inception, development and current demographics. Through this engaging work, readers will gain a better understanding of the everyday aspects of Muslim American life, to dispel many of the misconceptions that still remain and open a dialogue for tolerance and acceptance.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 224 pages

Publisher: Delacorte Books for Young Readers (August 14, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0385740956

ISBN-13: 978-0385740951

Product Dimensions: 7 x 0.8 x 8.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 starsÂÂ See all reviewsÂ (19 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #677,388 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #16 inÂ Books > Teens > Religion & Spirituality > Islam #25 inÂ Books > Teens > Education & Reference > Social Science > Anthropology

## Customer Reviews

Intended for an audience of Middle School age students, this book is a treasure chest of information about Islam. The reader learns of its origins, its evolution over time and place, its tenets and its prescriptions on diet, clothing and above all, on behavior. Islamic holidays are described and explained. The purpose of fasting at Ramadan is explained. What the Qur'an says about the status of women, about warfare and about personal moral conduct are detailed. An overarching theme is that like all major world religions, Islam is not one thing, not one body of practices, not one set of understandings, but a religion that has taken different forms in different places and times in history and continues to do so today. Within this diversity however, she describes a consistent emphasis in the Qur'an on Islam as a religion of peace, one that equates the rights of men and women and sharply rejects terrorism. With this comes her stress that Islam is too often misunderstood and misrepresented in the Western world. All of this is done in a manner that leaves the author as someone

the reader can easily identify with: one growing up in Southern California, eating hot dogs at Dodger Stadium and hoping they were truly Kosher (because halal hot dogs were not available) and hence did not contain pork; one who in high school had to run a mile for the Presidential Physical Fitness Test while fasting for Ramadan and who could not participate in the school prom. She does all this with grace and good humor. These experiences will resonate with her readers, who while they are not likely to have had these particular experiences, know well the tribulations of the teen years. There is nothing doctrinaire about this author. She describes the decisions she has to make along the way, as to how exactly the strictures of Islam apply in many specific life situations she encounters. She does what she thinks reflects the most valid application of Islam as she understands it and knows she cannot do more. As I read the book I repeatedly found myself wishing that there could be a series of books, one each on each major religion, each written by an author as well informed, as understanding of what religions, at their best seek to achieve, and as willing to recognize that no religion is without problems, as is the case here. A devout Muslim, she practices her religion as best she can without claiming it as the one true faith or suggesting any hierarchy of legitimacy among the world's three major monotheisms. She knows that people of all faiths, or no faith can at times only see through a glass darkly.

My fifth grader read this first and enjoyed it so much that I read it too. I thought it was written in a very clear and interesting way, very appropriate for middle schoolers, although the concepts and vocabulary did get more complicated and difficult as the book went on. The early chapters, which were a little more informal and included more about the author's own experiences, were most interesting to my daughter; she had some trouble with the later chapters, but I think a seventh or eighth grader would handle them with no problem. Although I'm an adult and have visited Muslim countries, I learned quite a bit from the book. Having grown up Jewish, I saw a lot of parallels, and also found the differences interesting. (For instance, apparently Islam is like Christianity in believing that what's in your heart is more important than what you do; in Judaism, we believe actions are more important than intentions.) I wish there was a book just like this for every major religion, but with so much ignorance and prejudice toward Muslim Americans today, this really fills a need.

Sumbul Ali-Karmali, with *Growing Up Muslim*, has provided young readers with an easy to read, concise explanation of all things Muslim, from what Muslims eat and wear to the history of this peaceful religion. I had hoped, when I chose the book, that it would cover more of how Muslim children deal with and encounter things in school, and the book touches on that, but not in the detail

I wanted. But it has a lot of answers to questions young readers might have about this religion that has been reviled by so many because people who are quick to equate all of Islam with a small group of radical terrorists. Islam itself is a peaceful religion and is based on the idea of doing good deeds. And it is an extension of Judaism and Christianity, not a completely different religion. In fact, the Allah that Muslims worship is the same God of Judeo-Christian tradition. The word Allah is the Arabic word for God, and even Christians in Arabic-speaking countries call God *Allah*. So the world is not so huge after all, and this book proves it to kids who need to know this.

This was a great book. It provided great insight into the Islamic faith. The book had a very nice balance of personal stories and experiences of the author, facts on Islam and the Quran, and the differing opinions by Muslims all around the world on various practices and everyday life. I would recommend this book to basically anyone who is looking to widen their knowledge of Islam!

*Growing Up Muslim: Understanding the Beliefs and Practices of Islam* is a concise volume that contains powerful content. Through humor and easily relatable language, Ms. Ali-Karamali describes her experience growing up in California as a devout Muslim while also providing information on a wide range of topics involving the cultural and religious aspects of Islam. I was personally fascinated by discussions about Ramadan, food (including a recipe for African American Muslim Bean Pie and Lassi), relationships between men and women, distribution of Muslim populations throughout the world (distinctions between Sunni, Shi'a and Sufi), and the basis of Islam as explained through religious texts. This is a must-read volume for anyone wishing to build religious literacy and for young adult minds who should be open to understanding the Muslim experience. While written for a middle school aged audience, people of all ages can benefit and learn from reading this wonderful book.

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