

SECTION 1

The World of Islam

Guide to Reading

Main Ideas

- The religion of Islam arose in the Arabian Peninsula in the 600s.
- Muhammad's successor organized the Arabs and set in motion a great expansion.
- An extensive trade network brought prosperity to the Islamic world.

Key Terms

Islam, *Hijrah*, caliph, sultan, astrolabe, mosque

People to Identify

Muhammad, Abu Bakr, Ibn Sina

Places to Locate

Arabian Peninsula, Makkah, Madinah, Damascus, Baghdad

Preview Questions

1. What are the major beliefs and principles of Islam?
2. What major developments occurred under the Umayyads and Abbasids?

Reading Strategy

Summarizing Information Use a chart like the one below to identify the achievements of Islamic civilization.

Achievements of Islam

Preview of Events



Voices from the Past

In his *Autobiography*, the eleventh-century Islamic scholar Ibn Sina, known in the West as Avicenna, described his early training:

“By the time I was [10] I had mastered the Quran and a great deal of literature. There followed training in philosophy . . . then I took to reading texts by myself . . . mastering logic, geometry and astronomy. I now occupied myself with mastering the various texts and commentaries on natural science and metaphysics, until all the gates of knowledge were open to me. Next I desired to study medicine, and proceeded to read all the books that have been written on this subject. At the same time I continued to study and dispute on law, being now sixteen years of age.”

—*Autobiography, Ibn Sina*

Ibn Sina was one of the Islamic world's greatest scholars.



An Arabic manuscript

The Arabs

Like the Israelites and the Assyrians, the Arabs were a Semitic-speaking people who lived in the **Arabian Peninsula**, a desert land sorely lacking in rivers and lakes. The Arabs were nomads who, because of their hostile surroundings, moved constantly to find water and food for their animals. Survival in such a harsh environment was not easy, and the Arabs organized into tribes to help one another.

The Arabs lived as farmers and sheepherders on the oases and rain-fed areas of the Arabian Peninsula. After the camel was domesticated in the first millennium B.C., the Arabs populated more of the desert and expanded the caravan trade. Towns developed along the routes as the Arabs became major carriers of goods between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, where the Silk Road ended.



The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem was built by Muslims in the seventh century. Muslims believe that Muhammad ascended into Paradise from this site.

Arabs trace their ancestors to Abraham and his son Ishmael, who were believed to have built at **Makkah** (Mecca) the Kaaba (KAH•buh), a house of worship whose cornerstone was a sacred stone called the Black Stone. The Arabs recognized a supreme god named Allah (*Allah* is Arabic for “God”), but they also believed in other tribal gods.

✓ Reading Check Explaining What factors contributed to the development of towns on the Arabian Peninsula?

The Life of Muhammad

Born in Makkah to a merchant family, **Muhammad** grew up to become a caravan manager and married a rich widow named Khadija, who was also his employer. Troubled by problems in society, Muhammad often visited the nearby hills to pray and meditate.

During one of his visits, Muslims believe, Muhammad received revelations from God. According to Islamic teachings, the messages were given by the angel Gabriel.

Muhammad came to believe that Allah had already revealed himself in part through Moses and Jesus—and thus through the Hebrew and Christian traditions. He believed, however, that the final revelations of Allah were now being given to him.

Out of these revelations, which were eventually written down, came the **Quran**, the holy book of the

religion of **Islam**. (The word *Islam* means “peace through submission to the will of Allah.”) The Quran contains the ethical guidelines and laws by which the followers of Allah are to live. Those who practice the religion of Islam are called **Muslims**. Islam has only one God, Allah, and Muhammad is God’s prophet.

After receiving the revelations, Muhammad set out to convince the people of Makkah of the truth of his revelations. After three years of preaching, he had only 30 followers.

Muhammad became discouraged by persecution of his followers, as well as by the failure of the Makkans to accept his message. He and some of his closest supporters left Makkah and moved north to

Yathrib, later renamed **Madinah** (Medina; “city of the prophet”). The journey of Muhammad and his followers to Madinah is known as the **Hijrah** (HIH•jruh). The year the journey occurred, 622, became year 1 in the official calendar of Islam.

Muhammad soon began to win support from people in Madinah, as well as from Bedouin tribes in the surrounding countryside. From these groups, he formed the first community of practicing Muslims.

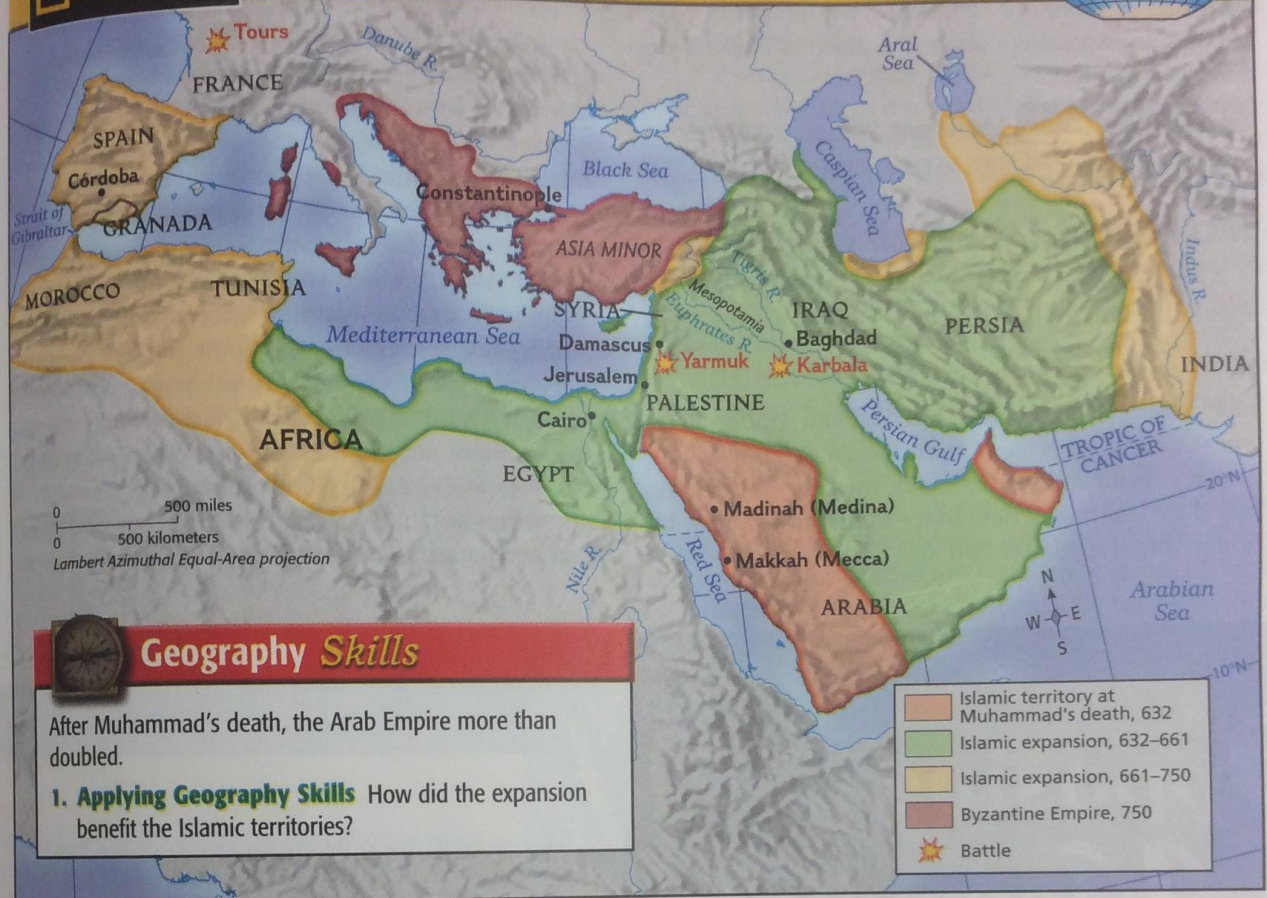
Muhammad became both a religious and a political leader. He assembled a military force to defend himself and his followers and began to attract large numbers of supporters.

In 630, Muhammad returned to Makkah with a force of ten thousand men. The city quickly surrendered, and most of the townspeople converted to the new faith. During a visit to the Kaaba, Muhammad declared it a sacred shrine of Islam. Two years after his triumphal return to Makkah, Muhammad died, just as Islam was beginning to spread throughout the Arabian Peninsula. All Muslims are encouraged to make a pilgrimage to Makkah, known as the hajj (HAJ), if possible.

✓ Reading Check Identifying What was the significance of the message given to Muhammad by Gabriel?

The Teachings of Muhammad

Like Judaism and Christianity, Islam is monotheistic. Allah is the all-powerful being who created the universe and everything in it. Islam emphasizes salvation and offers the hope of an afterlife.



Geography Skills

After Muhammad's death, the Arab Empire more than doubled.

1. Applying Geography Skills How did the expansion benefit the Islamic territories?

Unlike Christianity, Islam does not believe that its first preacher was divine. Muhammad is considered a prophet, similar to Moses, but he was also a man like other men. Muslims believe that because human beings rejected Allah's earlier messengers, Allah sent his final revelation through Muhammad.

Islam is a direct and simple faith, stressing the need to obey the will of Allah. This means practicing acts of worship known as the Five Pillars of Islam: belief, prayer, charity, fasting, and pilgrimage. Muslims believe there is no deity but the One God, and Muhammad is his messenger (belief). They perform prescribed prayers five times a day (prayer) and give part of their wealth to the poor (charity). During the month of Ramadan, Muslims refrain from food and drink from dawn to sunset (fasting). Finally, believers are expected to make a pilgrimage to Makkah at least once in their lifetime (pilgrimage). The faithful who follow the law are guaranteed a place in an eternal paradise.

Reading Check Comparing How is Islam similar to Judaism and Christianity?

Creation of an Arab Empire

Muhammad had been accepted as both the political and religious leader of the Islamic community. The death of Muhammad left his followers with a problem: Muhammad had never named a successor. Shortly after Muhammad's death, some of his closest followers chose **Abu Bakr** (uh•BOO BA•kuhr), a wealthy merchant and Muhammad's father-in-law, to be their leader. He was named **caliph** (KAY•luhf), or successor to Muhammad.

Under Abu Bakr's leadership, the Islamic movement began to grow. As the Romans had slowly conquered Italy, so also the Muslims expanded over Arabia, and beyond.

At Yarmuk in 636, the Arabs, unified under Abu Bakr, defeated the Byzantine army in the midst of a dust storm that enabled the Arabs to take their enemy by surprise. Four years later, they took control of the Byzantine province of Syria. By 642, Egypt and other areas of northern Africa had been added to the new Arab Empire. To the east, the Arabs had conquered the entire Persian Empire by 650.

The Arabs, led by a series of brilliant generals, had put together a large, dedicated army. The courage of the Arab soldiers was enhanced by the belief that Muslim warriors were assured a place in Paradise if they died in battle.

✓ Reading Check Identifying Who was the first caliph to unify the Arabs and begin an expansionist movement?

Successors of the Arab Empire

After Abu Bakr died, problems arose over who should become the next caliph. There were no clear successors to Abu Bakr.

The Umayyads In 661, Mu'awiyah (moo•UH•wee•uh), the governor of Syria, became caliph. Mu'awiyah moved quickly to make the office of caliph, called the caliphate, hereditary in his own family. In doing this, he established the Umayyad (oo•MY•

uhd) dynasty. He then moved the capital of the Arab Empire from Madinah to **Damascus**, in Syria.

At the beginning of the eighth century, Arab armies conquered and converted the Berbers, a pastoral people living along the Mediterranean coast of North Africa. Around 710, combined Berber and Arab forces crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and occupied southern Spain. By 725, most of Spain had become a Muslim state with its center at Córdoba. In 732, however, Arab forces were defeated at the Battle of Tours in Gaul (now France), halting Arab expansion in Europe.

In 717, another Muslim force had launched an attack on Constantinople with the hope of defeating the Byzantine Empire. The Byzantines destroyed the Muslim fleet. The Arab advance ended, but not before the southern and eastern Mediterranean parts of the old Roman Empire had been conquered. Arab power also extended to the east in Mesopotamia and Persia and northward into central Asia.

Opposing Viewpoints

How Did the Arab Empire Succeed?

During the early eighth century, the Muslims vastly extended their empire. Their swift conquest of Southwest Asia has intrigued many historians. Was their success due to religious fervor or military strength, or were there other reasons for their military victories that are not so obvious?

“They were aided by the weakness of the two contemporary empires, the Sassanian (Persian) and the Byzantine, which had largely exhausted themselves by their wars on one another. . . . Nor were these Arabs simply zealots fired by the ideal of a Holy War. They were by long tradition tough fighters, accustomed to raiding out of hunger and want; many or perhaps even most of them were not ardent followers of Mohammed. Yet there can be little question that what got the Arabs started, and kept them going, was mainly the personality and the teaching of the Prophet.”

—Herbert J. Muller, 1958
The Loom of History

“Perhaps . . . another kind of explanation can be given for the acceptance of Arab rule by the population of the conquered countries. To most of them it did not much matter whether they were ruled by Iranians, Greeks or Arabs. Government impinged for the most part on the life of cities and . . . city-dwellers might not care much who ruled them,

The Abbasid Dynasty In 750, Abu al-Abbas, a descendant of Muhammad's uncle, overthrew the Umayyad dynasty and set up the **Abbasid** (uh•BA•suhd) **dynasty**, which lasted until 1258.

In 762, the Abbasids built a new capital city at **Baghdad**, on the Tigris River, far to the east of the Umayyad capital at Damascus. The new capital was well placed. It was located on the caravan route from the Mediterranean Sea to central Asia.

The Abbasid dynasty experienced a period of splendid rule during the ninth century. Best known of the caliphs of the time was Harun al-Rashid (ha•ROON ahl•rah•SHEED), whose reign is often described as the golden age of the Abbasid caliphate. Harun al-Rashid was known for his charity, and he also lavished support on artists and writers.

This was also a period of growing prosperity. The Arabs had conquered many of the richest provinces of the Roman Empire, and they now controlled the trade

routes to the East. Baghdad became the center of an enormous trade empire that extended into Asia, Africa, and Europe, greatly adding to the riches of the Islamic world.

Eventually, rulers of the provinces of the Abbasid Empire began to break away from the central authority and establish independent dynasties. A new dynasty under the Fatimids was established in Egypt with its capital at Cairo, in 973.

The Seljuk Turks The Fatimid dynasty soon became the center of Islamic civilization. The Fatimids played a major role in the trade passing from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea and beyond. They created a strong army by hiring non-native soldiers to fight for them. One such group was the Seljuk (SEHL•JOOK) Turks.

The Seljuk Turks were a nomadic people from central Asia. They had converted to Islam and prospered as soldiers for the Abbasid caliphate. As the Abbasids grew weaker, the Seljuk Turks grew stronger, moving gradually into Iran and Armenia. By the eleventh century, they had taken over the eastern provinces of the Abbasid Empire.

In 1055, a Turkish leader captured Baghdad and took command of the empire. His title was **sultan**—or “holder of power.” The Abbasid caliph was still the chief religious authority, but, after they captured Baghdad, the Seljuk Turks held the real military and political power of the state.

The Mongols The Mongols were a pastoral people who swept out of the Gobi in the early thirteenth century to seize control over much of the world.

Beginning with the advances led by Genghis Khan in North China, Mongol armies spread across central Asia. In 1258, under the leadership of Hülegü (hoo•LAY•GOO), brother of the more famous Kublai (KOO•BLUH) Khan, the Mongols seized Persia and Mesopotamia. The Abbasid caliphate at Baghdad ended. Hülegü had a strong hatred of Islam. After his forces captured Baghdad in 1258, he decided to destroy the city.

Over time, the Mongol rulers converted to Islam and intermarried with local peoples. They began to rebuild the cities. By the fourteenth century, the Mongol Empire had begun to split into separate kingdoms. The old Islamic Empire established by the Arabs in the seventh and eighth centuries had come to an end. As a result of the Mongol destruction of Baghdad, the new center of Islamic civilization became Cairo, in Egypt.

Reading Check Describing How did the Mongols bring about the end of the old Islamic Empire?

provided they were secure, at peace and reasonably taxed. The people of the countryside . . . lived under their own chiefs and . . . with their own customs, and it made little difference to them who ruled the cities. For some, the replacement of Greeks and Iranians by Arabs even offered advantages.”

—Albert Hourani, 1991
A History of the Arab Peoples

You Decide

1. Review the information presented in this section carefully. Using the material from the text and information obtained from your own outside research, explain why both of these viewpoints can be considered valid.
2. Compare the information given in the second excerpt to attitudes of other conquered peoples that you have read about. Do you believe that most people easily accept outside rule? What factors lead to acceptance and what factors lead to rebellion against outside rule?

Economy and Social Structure

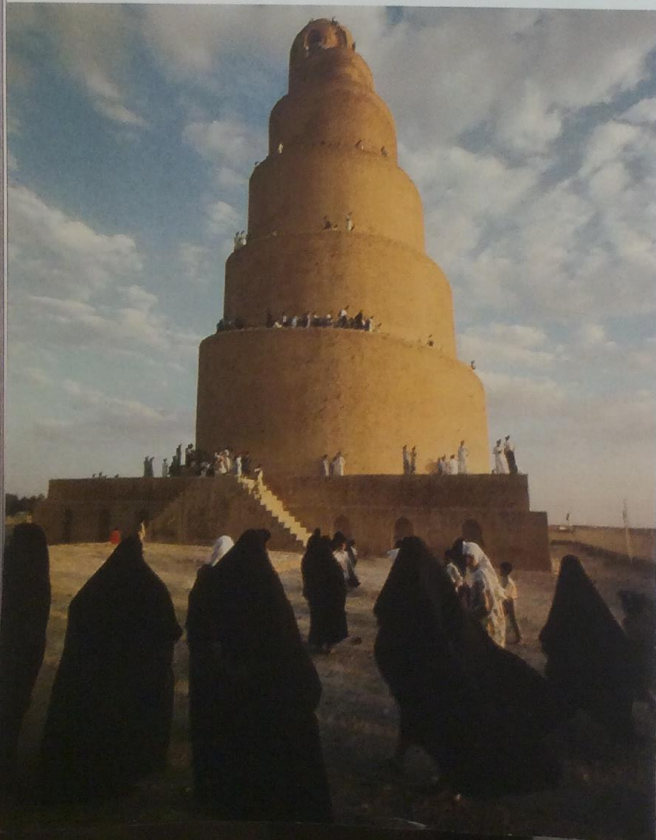
Overall, the period of the Arab Empire was prosperous. The Arabs carried on extensive trade, not only within the Islamic world but also with China, the Byzantine Empire, India, and Southeast Asia. Trade was carried both by ship and by camel caravans, which traveled from Morocco in the west to the countries beyond the Caspian Sea.

Starting around 750, trade flourished under the Abbasid dynasty. From south of the Sahara came gold and slaves; from China, silk and porcelain; from eastern Africa, gold and ivory; and from the lands of Southeast Asia and India, sandalwood and spices. Within the empire, Egypt contributed grain; Iraq provided linens, dates, and precious stones; and western India supplied textiles.

With flourishing trade came prosperous cities. While the Abbasids were in power, Baghdad was probably the greatest city in the empire and one of the greatest cities in the world. After the rise of the Fatimids, the focus of trade shifted to Cairo.

To be a Muslim is not simply to worship Allah but also to live one's life according to Allah's teachings as revealed in the Quran. As Allah has decreed, so must humans live. Questions concerning politics and social life are answered by following Islamic teachings.

The minaret of the Samarra mosque



According to Islam, all people are equal in the eyes of Allah. In reality, however, this was not strictly the case in the Arab Empire. There was a fairly well defined upper class that consisted of ruling families, senior officials, nomadic elites, and the wealthiest merchants. Even ordinary merchants, however, enjoyed a degree of respect that merchants did not receive in Europe, China, or India.

The Quran granted women spiritual and social equality with men. Women had the right to the fruits of their work and to own and inherit property. Islamic teachings did account for differences between men and women in the family and social order. Both had duties and responsibilities. As in most societies of the time, however, men were dominant in Muslim society.

Reading Check Summarizing On what ideas was society in the Arab Empire built?

The Brilliance of Islamic Culture

During the first few centuries of the Arab Empire, the ancient Greek philosophers were largely unknown in Europe. The Arabs, however, were not only aware of Greek philosophy, they were translating works by Plato and Aristotle into Arabic. The process of translating works and making them available to scholars was aided by the making of paper, which was introduced from China in the eighth century.

It was through the Muslim world that Europeans recovered the works of Aristotle and other Greek philosophers. In the twelfth century, the Arabic translations were in turn translated into Latin, making them available to the West. The brilliant Islamic civilization contributed more intellectually to the West than translations, however.

Philosophy and Science When Aristotle's works arrived in Europe in the twelfth century, they were accompanied by commentaries written by outstanding Arabic philosophers. One such philosopher was Ibn-Rushd (IH•buhn-RUSHT). He lived in Córdoba and wrote a commentary on virtually all of Aristotle's surviving works.

Islamic scholars also made contributions to mathematics and the natural sciences that were passed on to the West. The Muslims adopted and passed on the numerical system of India, including the use of the zero. In Europe, it became known as the "Arabic" system.

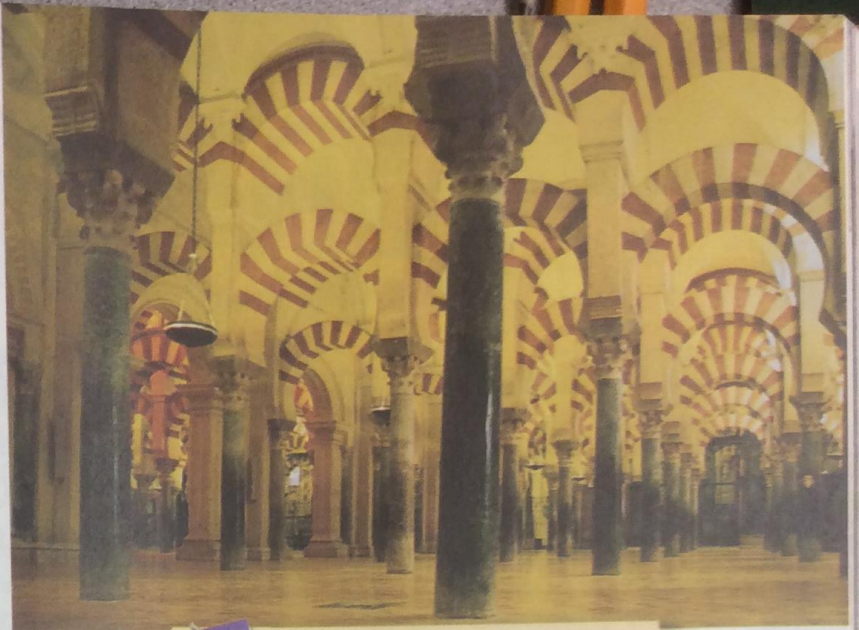
In astronomy, Muslims set up an observatory at Baghdad to study the position of the stars. They were aware that Earth was round, and they named

many stars. They also perfected the **astrolabe**, an instrument used by sailors to determine their location by observing the positions of stars and planets. The astrolabe enabled Europeans to sail to the Americas.

Muslim scholars developed medicine as a field of scientific study. Especially well known was the philosopher and scientist **Ibn Sina** (IH•buhn SEE•nuh). He wrote a medical encyclopedia that, among other things, stressed the contagious nature of certain diseases. After it was translated into Latin, Ibn Sina's work became a basic medical textbook for university students in medieval Europe.

Art and Architecture Islamic art is a blend of Arab, Turkish, and Persian traditions. The best expression of Islamic art is found in the magnificent Muslim **mosques** (houses of worship). The mosque represents the spirit of Islam.

Constructed from 848 to 852, the Great Mosque of Samarra in present-day Iraq was the world's largest mosque at the time it was built. It covers 10 acres (more than 40,000 square m). The most famous section of the Samarra mosque is its minaret. This is the tower from which the muezzin (moo•EH•zuhn), or crier, calls the faithful to prayer five times a day. The minaret of Samarra, nearly 90 feet (around 27 m) in height, is unusual because of its outside spiral staircase.



History through Architecture

The Mosque of Córdoba This mosque in Spain is famous for the symmetry of its arches. Intricate arabesque patterns highlight the interior of this mosque and others. **When did Arab armies cross into Spain?**

One of the most famous mosques is the ninth-century mosque at Córdoba in southern Spain. It is still in remarkable condition today. Its hundreds of columns, which support double-horseshoe arches, transform this building into a unique "forest of trees."

Reading Check Identifying Name two cultural achievements of the Arab Empire after 700.

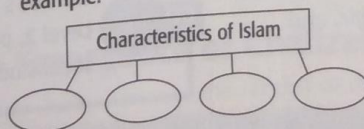
SECTION 1 ASSESSMENT

Checking for Understanding

- Define** Islam, *Hijrah*, caliph, sultan, astrolabe, mosque.
- Identify** Muhammad, Quran, Muslims, Abu Bakr, Abbasid dynasty, Mongols, Ibn Sina.
- Locate** Arabian Peninsula, Makkah, Madinah, Damascus, Baghdad.
- Describe** how the Arabs created a trade empire. Identify the items traded in the empire and where they came from.
- List** the Five Pillars of Islam.

Critical Thinking

- Explain** How did the Muslims transmit ancient literature to other cultures? Argue against the viewpoint that Islamic civilization was mainly a preserver and transmitter of culture, rather than a creator of culture.
- Summarizing Information** Create a diagram to list the main characteristics of the Islamic religion. Your diagram can list more characteristics than this example.



Analyzing Visuals

- Examine** the photograph of the Mosque of Córdoba shown above. What architectural influences from other cultures do you see reflected in this Islamic mosque? What elements are unique to Islamic architecture?

Writing About History

- Descriptive Writing** Imagine that you are a young Muslim Arab corresponding with a European friend. In one or two brief paragraphs, describe Islamic accomplishments in philosophy, mathematics, science, medicine, art, and architecture to your friend.