



Family Sunday School Lesson - Ani Z

Introduction:

Ani Zonneveld is an imam, or Muslim leader, who speaks internationally about religious tolerance and human rights. We might consider her a “shepherd” who is trying to gather all the sheep into the same flock by seeing similarities between different religions. Happy Mother’s Day!



Start the Fun!

Unlikely Friends!

Enjoy this 10-minute video about unlikely animal friendships:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9HXoHq3oEU>



Read together

Ani Zonneveld

Shepherding Justice and Love

When Ani was little, she was raised in the Muslim faith. However, she went to a British school and every morning the children had to pray to Jesus at an assembly. Ani felt guilty about praying along with her classmates because Muslims believe one should only pray to Allah, which is the word for God in the Arabic language. Ani told her mother about how she felt. Ani's mother said, "Don't worry, honey. Just replace 'Jesus' with 'Allah' in your mind, and it's fine. We all worship the same God." This was an important moment for Ani because she realized that people are more alike than they are different and that we should respect each other's faiths.

Ani studied political science and economics in college, but after she graduated she decided to follow her dream of becoming a songwriter. She has published more than 60 songs and was the first Malaysian woman to be nominated for a Grammy. But her decision to pursue a musical career didn't affect her life as much as the events of 9/11.

On September 11, 2001, a small group of terrorists attacked the United States. Almost 3,000 people were killed because of these nineteen terrorists, most of whom were from Saudi Arabia. The leaders in that country practice an extreme version of the Muslim religion called Islam. Many people in the United States became angry at Muslim people because of 9/11. Ani and most other Muslims were upset that the people in charge of the attacks had twisted their religion, which was supposed to be a religion of peace, to cause violence and had given Islam a bad name.

Ani studied the Quran, the Muslim Holy Scriptures, and the original vision of Islam. She then started two organizations that remind Muslims of the inclusive values of the Quran and work for equal rights for all Muslims, especially women and girls. Like Jesus, the prophet Muhammad had a vision of a world full of justice and love. Ani is working to spread that message around the world like we are.

Discuss

Ask: What are some cultural differences people might have?

Discussion points: They might speak different languages, eat different foods, wear different clothing, listen to different music, go to different kinds of churches, etc.

Ask: What are some things that are probably the same about people, no matter where they are from?

Discussion points: They probably love their family, like to have fun, have goals for the future, like to learn new things, etc.

Ask: What are some ways you can learn about a new friend's culture?

Discussion points: You could eat at their house, attend a holiday event with them, listen to their favorite music with them, go to church with them, etc.

Ask: When is a time when you got to experience something from a culture that is different from yours? How did you feel about the experience?

Discussion points: Perhaps you went to an international festival or experienced art or music at a museum. Hopefully you enjoyed the chance to try something new.

Pray

Thank God for the variety of people that live on planet Earth. Ask God to help all the different cultures to appreciate each other and to live in peace.

Participate

Write to a Pen Pal

Learn about someone else's culture. Tell them about yourself and ask them questions about themselves. See how many things you have in common!

To start a pen pal, check out Global Pen Friends: <https://www.globalpenfriends.com/index.php?page=index>

It looks like a safe and fun website to find pen pals from all around the world. Consider participating as a family. Registration is free. You enter your email address but the website doesn't share it with anyone--they provide you with a personal inbox on their website or you can sign up to correspond by snail mail. You can request a boy or girl of any age range.



Wrap Up

It is hard to imagine a heart open enough to love the billions of different people on Earth, but God can and does love each and every one.

Take a Moment to Breathe

Wing Breath

Find a comfortable position sitting on the floor or in a chair but without your back resting on anything. Place your hands in your lap and sit up straight and tall, with the crown of your head reaching for the sky.

Imagine that you have wings on your back that open as you breathe in and close as you breathe out. Breathe in slowly, focusing on filling your lungs as much as possible and breathing into your back. Your wings slowly open until they are stretched out as far as they will go. As you exhale slowly, your wings gently fold back in.

Continue to breathe in and out, opening and closing your wings, for six to eight cycles or until you are ready to stop. Return your breath to its natural pace