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A Mark of All Faiths: Teaching Empathy through Islamic Children's Literature

It is no accident that every major faith has some variation of the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. The notion of empathy transcends religious boundaries, as well as time and space. One of the most important aspects of children's literature is its propensity to transmit culture from one generation to the next. Indeed, from conduct and courtesy books to contemporary behavior books, literature for young people has been used to relay cultural norms and social expectations. Many of these books teach *how* to behave towards others just as children's books that teach about faith teach young readers about *how* to behave within a faith and towards others. The Islamic faith is no different as empathy is an important aspect of the faith.

In order to explore how empathy is taught to young Muslims, I examine texts that have been created for young readers that offer historic examples of behavior. These texts feature stories of prophets and holy people of the three monotheistic faiths, Muslim leaders and scholars, stories from the Qur'an, and examples from the Hadith—collections of sayings, practices, and behaviors of the Prophet Muhammad. Examining these texts through the lens of storytelling as a means of creating empathy, as discussed by Fawzia Gilani-Williams and Stephen Bigger, I explore how such works teach Muslim children how to be empathetic. In understanding how various faiths teach empathy, we can begin to see our common humanity rather than our differences.