**World Literature Text Book pp. 76-81**

from the Qur’an

In the eyes of Muslims, the Qur’an (sometimes referred to as the Koran) is viewed as the most important scripture in the world, but not the only one. Muslims believe that Allah sent a series of heavenly books, or scriptures, to the world. These include the Torah, the Psalms and the New Testament. The last of these heavenly books is the Qur’an, which Muslims believe to be the final revelation of Allah.

The Prophet Muhammad

In the latter third of his life, revelations started coming to the prophet Muhammad as he meditated in a cave outside his hometown of Mecca, now in Saudi Arabia. Suddenly, the angel Gabriel came to him and commanded him to recite something. When Muhammad asked the angel what it was that he wanted him to recite, Gabriel said in Arabic, “Recite in the name of the Lord Who creates.” This command was followed by the first of the revelations, and as a result it is the first line of the Qur’an. In fact, the name of the book may be taken from this line, because the word *Qur’an* means “recitation” in Arabic.

It is held that, from the age of forty, Muhammad continued to receive such revelations until his death approximately twenty years later. He repeated them to his followers, who either memorized them or wrote them down on bits of parchment, pieces of leather, or clay tablets. In the years after Muhammad’s death, his followers organized the fragments into a book and named it the Qur’an. Copies of the Qur’an were sent to all major cities in the Islamic world, with orders that other unofficial versions should be destroyed, and the Qur’an was made the official scripture of the Islamic religion.

The Organization of the Qur’an

The revelations of Muhammad are arranged in chapters called *Surahs* . There are 114 Surahs in the Qur’an, varying in length from three or four verses to well over 200. Each Surah’s title is generally an unusual word or phrase appearing early in the Surah.

The earliest copies of the Qur’an were written in an imperfect Arabic script that included no vowels and used the same symbols for many different consonants. When Arabic script was reformed in the eighth century, the Qur’an was recopied in this script, and it has remained virtually unchanged to this day.

Revelations From God

Although Muhammad uttered the words of the Qur’an, he is not considered its author; rather, he is viewed as the transmitter of Allah’s message to humanity. Muslims believe that the Qur’an, word for word and syllable for syllable, is the exact message of Allah. Because this belief means that the words used in the Qur’an are Allah’s words, and any translation loses some of its religious value, most Muslims feel that the Qur’an should be read in Arabic and that translations are only approximations of the real text. The vast majority of today’s Muslims do not know Arabic and can only read the translations. However, all scholars of Islam use the original Arabic text for their studies.

**Islam and the Five Pillars of Wisdom**

The word *Islam* means “submission to the will of God” (who is called *Allah* in Arabic). Members of the Islamic faith are known as Muslims, and the Muslim creed states: “There is no god but Allah; Muhammad is his prophet.” Muslims are expected to perform the following five acts of worship, known as the Five Pillars of Wisdom:

1. express one’s faith by reciting the creed
2. pray five times each day (facing Mecca, the birthplace of the prophet Muhammad)
3. give alms, or charity, to the poor
4. fast from sunrise to sundown during the holy month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar
5. make, in one’s lifetime, at least one pilgrimage to Mecca; this trip is called a *hajj* or *hadj* in Arabic

**Preview**

**Connecting to the Literature**

Perhaps the world would be a kinder place if compassion and mercy filled more hearts. In the Qur’an, every Surah opens by calling on “God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.”

**Literary Analysis**

**Imagery**

**Imagery** is language used to create word pictures by appealing to one or more of the five senses—sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch. An **image** is a single instance of imagery: “hot dry wind,” for example, or “cold wet rain.” Imagery makes descriptions more vivid and abstract ideas more concrete.

As you read the selections from the Qur’an, track the images on a chart like the one shown.



**Connecting Literary Elements**

One form of imagery highlights contrasts and differences. **Antithesis** is the use of strongly contrasting language, images, or ideas. Antithesis can be expressed in various ways:

* two long contrasting pieces meant to be read together and balanced against each other
* shorter contrasts in words, phrases, clauses, or sentences that express their contrasting ideas in similar grammatical structures (parallelism): “By the light of day, and by the dark of night. . . .”

Notice how often the Qur’an employs antithesis to reinforce images and make them more memorable.

**Reading Strategy**

**Setting a Purpose for Reading**

When you **set a purpose for reading,** you decide beforehand why you are reading and what to focus on as you read. For example, if you read the Qur’an to learn more about Islamic culture, you may focus on its guidelines for human behavior. Identify your purpose before you begin to read and then read to achieve that goal.

**Vocabulary Builder**

* compassionate *adj.* feeling or showing sympathy or pity
* incurred *v.* brought about through one’s own actions
* affliction *n.* something that causes pain or distress
* recompense *n.* payment of what is owed; reward
* abhor *v.* feel disgust for; hate
* chide *v.* scold
* renown *n.* fame

* fervor *n.* strong or heated feeling; zeal

 



## Background

The fundamental message of all the Surahs of the Qur’an is that there is but one God who has created the world and everything in it. This God is all-powerful and all-knowing; just, loving, and merciful; the protector and sustainer of all life; and the final judge at death. As a result, the Qur’an says, it is the duty of all people to praise him, glorify him, and submit to him.

## The Exordium

IN THE NAME OF GOD

THE COMPASSIONATE

THE MERCIFUL

 *Praise be to God, Lord of the Universe,*

 *The****Compassionate****, the Merciful,*

 *Sovereign of the Day of Judgment!*

 *You alone we worship, and to You alone we turn for help.*

 *Guide us to the straight path,*

 *The path of those whom You have favored,*

 *Not of those who have****incurred****Your wrath,*

 *Nor of those who have gone astray.*

## Night

*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*

By the night, when she lets fall her darkness, and by the radiant day! By Him that created the male and the female, your endeavors have varied ends!



For him that gives in charity and guards himself against evil and believes in goodness, We shall smooth the path of salvation; but for him that neither gives nor takes and disbelieves in goodness, We shall smooth the path of **affliction** . When he breathes his last, his riches will not avail him.

It is for Us to give guidance. Ours is the life to come, Ours the life of this world. I warn you, then, of the blazing Fire, in which none shall burn save the hardened sinner, who denies the Truth and pays no heed. But the good man who keeps himself pure by almsgiving shall keep away from it: and so shall he that does good works for the sake of the Most High only, seeking no**recompense** . Such men shall be content.

## Daylight

*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*

 By the light of day, and by the dark of night, your Lord

 has not forsaken you**1**nor does He **abhor** you.

 The life to come holds a richer prize for you than this

 present life. You shall be gratified with what your Lord will give you.

 Did He not find you an orphan and give you shelter?

 Did He not find you in error and guide you?

 Did He not find you poor and enrich you?

 Therefore do not wrong the orphan, nor **chide** away the

 beggar. But proclaim the goodness of your Lord.



## Comfort

*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*

 Have we not lifted up your heart and relieved you**2**of the

 burden which weighed down your back?

 Have We not given you high **renown** ?

 With every hardship there is ease. With every hardship there is ease.

 When your prayers are ended resume your toil, and seek your Lord with all **fervor** .

## Critical Reading

**1. Respond:**Which of these selections from the Qur’an did you find most interesting? Why?

**2. (a) Recall:**Whom does the Exordium address?**(b) Infer:**Who seems to be speaking?**(c) Interpret:**Why does the speaker wish to be guided?

**3. (a) Recall:**What kind of behavior does “Night” equate with goodness?**(b)Infer:**What drives someone to be a good person?

**4. (a) Recall:**According to “Daylight,” what has the Lord *not* done?**(b)Compare and Contrast:**In what ways should human behavior reflect the Lord’s behavior?

**5. (a) Recall:**What does “Comfort” say comes with every hardship?**(b)Evaluate:**In what ways does this Surah offer comfort?

**6. Apply:**“Night” describes the behavior of a good man. In what ways is this description applicable to good people today?

 

**Apply Skills**

**from the Qur’an**

**Quick Review**

**Imagery** is the use of language that appeals to one or more of the five sensessight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch. A single instance of imagery is called an **image.**

**Antithesis** is the use of strongly contrasting language, images, or ideas.

To **set a purpose for reading,** decide why you are reading and focus on the details that help you achieve that goal as you read.

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### Literary Analysis

**Imagery**

**1.**To which senses does the **imagery** in “Night” appeal? Cite examples of images to support your answer.

**2.**In “Daylight,” what does the image of the orphan given shelter help express about God?

**3. (a)**What abstract idea does the imagery in “Comfort” help you perceive?**(b)**Which concrete aspects of the image help you perceive the abstract idea?

### Connecting Literary Elements

**4.**Identify five examples of **antithesis** that help make the ideas and imagery in these selections clearer.

**5. (a)**Which two Surahs have titles that suggest an antithesis between them?**(b)**Does their content actually contrast? Explain by summarizing the main points of each one.

### Reading Strategy

**Setting a Purpose for Reading**

**6.**Imagine that your **purpose for reading** is to learn about the Islamic view of Allah, or God. Reread the selections, and jot down five main characteristics of Allah. Record your examples in a chart like the one shown.



**7. (a)**If your purpose for reading is to learn about Islamic views of the afterlife, which of these Surahs contains information on which you might focus?**(b)**What does that information tell you about the afterlife?

**8.**Reread the selections with the purpose of learning more about Islamic values. What do you think are the three most important values of Islam?

### Extend Understanding

**9. Social Studies Connection:** Based on these Surahs, what social practices would you expect to find in Islamic nations? Explain.