

# Being a Canadian Muslim Woman in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE KIT



**Canadian Council of  
Muslim Women**  
Le conseil canadien des  
femmes musulmanes



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Status of Women  
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# Introduction

| Being a Canadian Muslim Woman in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century



# introduction

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This educational resource kit is part of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women's (CCMW) project, *Being a Canadian Muslim Woman in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*.

*The objectives of the project are twofold:*

1. increase the understanding on the part of the education system of the issues and challenges facing young Muslim women (age 14-18)
2. develop resources that can be used by educators who work with young Muslim women

We have anecdotal evidence about the stress and conflicts facing young Muslim women, such as racism/discrimination, clash of family and broader societal values, and the tensions in developing an identity that includes their multiple characteristics. Many of these young women are children of recent immigrants and are grappling with adaptation issues such as the integration of culture and religion in their lives. In schools, educators and other students often do not understand the issues that young Muslim women are dealing with. Two recent incidents demonstrate the need for action to overcome this lack of understanding: the killing of a young Muslim woman in Mississauga by her father and brother, and the alleged sexual abuse of a female Muslim student at a Toronto high school, which only came to light because of other problems at the school.

As schools play a vital role in young people's lives, CCMW believes it is in school settings that issues can be addressed.

This kit has a total of 8 modules and covers a broad range of issues, including, for example, violence against women and children, stereotyping of Muslim women, the politics of representation, and racism/discrimination. Each module also has specific learning objectives. These are listed in the curriculum overview along with suggestions of courses in which the module can be used. Each module can stand alone, and therefore users of the kit can pick and choose the modules relevant for their specific purpose.

While the kit is primarily aimed at educators and meant for use by teachers in the classroom, there are other potential uses of the information presented in the kit. For example, it can be used to sensitize social service providers and other front line workers to the issues and challenges faced by young Muslim women.

## Educators as Facilitators

There inevitably will be diverse opinions among students regarding many of the issues raised in the *Being a Canadian Muslim Woman in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* curriculum. Educators must be conscious of how their position of power and authority as educators can influence their students' understanding of and engagement with the curriculum. It is important for educators to not let their personal opinions, beliefs and values determine how the information and issues are presented and taken up with students. Instead, educators should present the material in ways that allow for classroom discussions to unfold organically among students. The main role of educators using the *Being a Canadian Muslim Woman in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* project curriculum is to serve as a facilitator.

Facilitating discussions on issues which are extremely personal and political will mean that educators will be faced with having to manage conflicting ideas and opinions among students. In fostering open and honest exchange of ideas among students it is important for educators to create and maintain a safe, non-combative atmosphere that allows for differences of perspective in the spirit of increasing understanding of the issues and challenges facing young Muslim women. It is not the place of educators to offer definitive conclusions to the issues raised based on their own opinion, beliefs, and values. Educators should anticipate that there will be disagreement among students about what constitutes Muslim identity and the representation of Muslim identities. The curriculum provides a wide diversity of information, images and questions that will allow for students and educators to engage in a rich discussion on the varied ways in which Muslim women define themselves with respect to their faith and other aspects of their identity. It should be noted that the examples of Muslim women included in *Being a Canadian Muslim Woman in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* curriculum were selected not for how others view their identity as Muslim women, but based on their own self-identification as Muslim women. So while there may be challenges from students who question whether or not the women profiled are representative of Muslim women, it is important for educators not to debate this point but rather point out that these women are being showcased because they self-identify as Muslim women.

CCMW would like to thank Dr. Jasmin Zine and Dr. Zabedia Nazim for developing this kit, and acknowledges the contribution of members of the CCMW Advisory Committee who guided us throughout the kit-development process. They include: Rehnna Begg, Salima Bhimani, Salima Eidoo, Zahra Grant, Rizwana Jafri, Nina Karachi, Farrah Khan and Barbara Siddiqui.

Jasmin Zine and Zabedia Nazim would like to acknowledge the contributions of Humera Javed, Krista Riley, Asma Bala and Itrath Syed to this curriculum tool kit. We are grateful for their assistance and creativity in developing the activities and resources. We would also like to thank the project advisory committee for their feedback and comments.

## CCMW National Board

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# being a canadian muslim woman in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – overview of the educational resource kit

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*This resource kit was developed by Dr. Jasmin Zine and Dr. Zabedia Nazim with the support and help of Humera Javed, Krista Riley, Asma Bala and Itrath Syed.*

This overview contains information about the tool kit's eight modules.

For each module, the material below provides a description of the module, and, as appropriate, the module's educational level (teacher education, intermediate, secondary), connections to board curriculum, and learning objectives.

## module 1: educational framework: an anti-racism/ anti-islamophobia perspective

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This introduction applies a critical lens to existing multicultural discussions about diversity and difference. It does so by situating these discussions in an anti-racism/ anti-Islamophobia educational framework that provides the pedagogical foundation for the other modules in this resource kit.

- **Level:** Teacher Education

## module 2: reading muslim women: annotated bibliography and teacher guides for developing critical literacy

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This module lists and describes preferred fiction and non-fiction books that focus on the lives of Muslim girls and women, appropriate for the intermediate/secondary level.

The lists provide a useful resource for selecting literature that challenges stereotypes and provides more complex and nuanced depictions of Muslim women.

The women represented come from a range of backgrounds, ages, time periods, and relationships to Islam. None of these works should be taken as representative of Muslim women as a whole, but all offer interesting starting points for discussion and learning.

- **Level:** Intermediate / Secondary / Teacher Education
- **Curriculum Connections:** English, World Religions, Canadian and World Studies, Challenge and Change in Society

## module 3: *me and the mosque* documentary

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This module provides a set of debriefing questions for the documentary *Me and the Mosque*, to develop critical media literacy skills and challenge stereotypes. A description and synopsis of the documentary are also provided, along with information about how to order the DVD from the National Film Board.

- **Level:** Intermediate / Secondary / Teacher Education
- **Curriculum Connections:** World Religion, Media Arts, Civics, Interdisciplinary Studies, Challenge and Change in Society
- **Learning Objectives:**
  - Develop an understanding of Muslim women’s struggles for gender equity within mosque communities.
  - Understand the varied roles of Muslim women in their communities.
  - Understand debates within the sphere of religion, culture and society.
  - Develop critical media literacy and challenge stereotypes.

## module 4: muslim women as social transformers (*PowerPoint*)

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This module presents visual images, information, and vignettes representing the historical and contemporary roles of Muslim women as political leaders and contributors to social and religious developments and gender equality. The examples present Muslim women as resisters and transformers, as opposed to their common depiction as oppressed victims.

- **Level:** Intermediate / Secondary / Teacher Education
- **Curriculum Connections:** World Religions, Canadian and World Studies, World History: The West and the World, Interdisciplinary Studies
- **Learning Objectives:**
  - Gain knowledge and understanding of Muslim women’s transformative social, cultural and political roles from a historical and transnational perspective.
  - Gain new knowledge of Muslim women as active social agents, and challenge stereotypes.

## module 5: young, talented and muslim: examining the diversity of canadian muslim women (*PowerPoint*)

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This module provides profiles of noteworthy and talented young Muslim Canadian women from different ethno-racial and sectarian backgrounds. Examples include filmmakers, journalists, models, business women, media personalities, and women engaged in arts such as spoken-word poetry, comedy and music. This unit includes pictures and hyperlinks to media clips with interviews and samples of their work.

- **Level:** Intermediate / Secondary / Teacher Education
- **Curriculum Connections:** Canada: History, Identity and Culture, Canadian Politics and Citizenship, Canadian and World Studies, World Religions, Media Arts, Interdisciplinary Studies, Challenge and Change in Society
- **Learning Objectives:**
  - Gain knowledge and understanding of Canadian Muslim women as active participants in society through their roles in the arts, media and business.
  - Gain new knowledge of Muslim women as active social agents, and challenge stereotypes.

## module 6: violence against women and children: media literacy case studies (3 parts)

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This module consists of 3 submodules, examining issues of violence against women and children and the media coverage of various incidents and controversies.

- **Level:** Secondary / Teacher Education
- **Curriculum Connections:** Media Arts, Canadian Politics and Citizenship, Canada: History, Identity and Culture, Interdisciplinary Studies, Challenge and Change in Society
- **Learning Objectives:**
  - Develop critical media literacy skills in order to challenge the representation of Muslim women that occurs through the construction of negative stereotypes.
  - Gain knowledge and understanding of violence against women and girls in Canada.
  - Develop a critical understanding of the concept of “safety” as a social construction.
  - Develop a critical understanding of the politics of race, gender, culture and religious difference in the case studies as examples of violence against women.
  - Consider the roles and responsibilities of teachers and administrators in addressing school-based violence.

### MODULE 6A: THE CASE OF AQSA PARVEZ (*PowerPoint*)

This submodule aims to develop critical media literacy skills, by:

- examining the death of 16-year-old Pakistani-Canadian teenager Aqsa Parvez, and analyzing how the politics of race, gender, religion, culture and class come into play
- addressing the question of cultural and patriarchal violence and “honour killing,” from an anti-racist feminist framework
- examining the kinds of stereotypes and assumptions that underlie the media and public discussion of the case

## MODULE 6B: THE SEXUAL ASSAULT CASE AT C. W. JEFFERYS COLLEGIATE (*PowerPoint*)

This submodule also aims to develop critical media literacy skills, by:

- examining the case of alleged sexual assault of a female Muslim student at C.W. Jeffries School
- looking at the media coverage of the case and highlighting the stereotypes of Muslim women in the media
- discussing orientalism and the exoticizing of Muslim women

This unit also highlights the implications for the role of teachers and school administrators in such cases, and discusses issues relating to safe schools.

## MODULE 6C: EDUCATOR'S GUIDE TO MODULE 6B

This educator's guide provides supplementary information for educators for the presentation in Module 6b. The guide also suggests possible discussion topics and issues that can be explored further.

## module 7: body politics (*4 parts*)

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This module consists of four submodules, examining some of the many issues related to different forms of veiling that some Muslim girls and women wear. The unit examines the actual meaning of the word hijab and the purposes of the hijab (headscarf) and other forms of veiling. The unit's main focus is on the varying attitudes toward veiling within Muslim communities, and on stereotyping, controversies, and media images and coverage related to veiling.

- **Level:** Intermediate / Secondary / Teacher Education
- **Curriculum Connections:** Canadian Politics and Citizenship, Canada: History, Identity and Culture, World Religions, Civics, Canadian and World Studies, Media Arts, Interdisciplinary Studies, Challenge and Change in Society
- **Learning Objectives:**
  - Gain knowledge and understanding of the hijab as a religious, cultural and political symbol.
  - Address the politics of representation with respect to gender and the body.

- Unpack the imagery of the hijab in popular culture, fashion, media and advertising.
- Understand the national and international debates on banning the hijab and niqab as a religious and human rights issue.
- Understand Bill 94 in Quebec in relation to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

### **MODULE 7A: HIJAB 101** *(PowerPoint)*

Due to the widespread miseducation around the issue of the hijab and the discrimination that occurs as a result, this submodule outlines the basic "101" information about the hijab and other forms of veiling from a religious, cultural and social perspective, including the diversity of opinions about the practice of veiling within Islam. This unit also addresses broader questions about body image and pressures on young women from all walks of life to conform to various standards of dress and beauty.

### **MODULE 7B: MULTIPLE MEANINGS AND IMAGES OF THE HIJAB** *(PowerPoint)*

This submodule shows how the hijab has multiple meanings that can change over time and in different contexts. It shows examples of the hijab in historical contexts as a focus and symbol of colonial attraction, of post-colonial and revolutionary protest, and of religious and national banishment. It presents visual images and related information to address why certain images continue to circulate. The unit also examines the marketing of these images in advertising and pop culture.

## MODULE 7C: BELONGING AND BANISHMENT – QUEBEC’S BILL 94 (*PowerPoint*)

This submodule provides a case study of Quebec’s Bill 94. It also discusses specific related events and issues, such as the banning of the hijab on Quebec soccer fields, and similar bans in other parts of the world. The presentation also relates some of the issues to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

**Note:** As of October 20, 2010, Bill 94 had not yet been passed into law.

## MODULE 7D: EDUCATOR’S GUIDE TO MODULE 7C

This educator’s guide provides additional material that presenters can draw on for the presentation in Module 6b. The guide also suggests possible discussion topics and issues that can be explored further.

## module 8: glossary of terms and concepts

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This module provides a glossary of Muslim terminology and of concepts related to anti-racism and anti-Islamophobia education.