

Name _____ Date _____

Rites of Passage

Read the following sections describing rites of passage in Islam. After reading all three descriptions, choose one, and write a 2-paragraph (CCP) or 3-paragraph (Honors) essay comparing and contrasting the ways that Muslims handle the rite and the way that your tradition handles it.

Birth & Childhood

The first words that a Muslim baby hears is the *shahadah*, the first pillar of Islam: "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah."

Although circumcision is not mentioned in the Koran, it usually takes place – along with a celebration – shortly after birth. In some Muslim countries, it occurs either around the age of ten or when the boy can recite the Koran by memory.

It is customary to name the newborn seven days after birth. Devout Muslims observe a ceremony called the *Aqiqah*. A child's head is shaved, and he or she is given a Muslim name. Most commonly, the child is named after a revered figure. Many boys are named Muhammad and others are given the names of the caliphs. Girls are often named Khadijah or Fatimah.

The Koran is central to the education of a Muslim. At an early age, Muslims begin reciting from scripture and memorizing common prayers. The most popular phrase translates to "in the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful." These words are used as daily prayers, when entering structures and before meals. Each chapter of the Koran begins with this phrase.

Marriage

As in most religious communities, marriage and family are an essential part of Islam. Moreover, marriage is viewed as the union of both families as well as the individuals. Traditionally, marriages were arranged by families, although many contemporary Muslims choose their own mates.

Though the marriage ceremony is simple, the celebrations are elaborate and joyous. Families extend themselves to provide the proper environment, often including the local Muslim community and extending through the night. It is still common, however, for men and women to celebrate separately.

Death

Passages from the Koran are recited in the final hours of a Muslim's life. For Muslims, death is regarded as a release from the suffering of life until the Last Judgment. Thus, recitations from the Koran comfort and inspire the dying.

Following a death, the corpse is prepared for burial by a ritual washing and being wrapped in a white sheet. The funeral service consists of some prayers, and the Muslim burial takes place quickly and without extravagance. A coffin is not required, and a procession carries the deceased to the grave. As expected, it is essential that the head of the deceased point in the direction of Mecca. Often, the grave has no marker or headstone.