Dragons and the Poet Rumi

The aim of this unit is to encourage young pupils to understand that there is huge cultural diversity within Islam and that Islam can be understood not merely as a religion but as a global civilisation that has developed and evolved over time. The most common approach to the teaching of Islam in Religious Education is to approach it as a world religion. This has usually resulted in a focus on beliefs and practices of Muslims coupled with the assumption that there is a definable essence in Islam that all Muslims share.

For instance, the images and examples of Muslim life that are used when we teach about Islam are often focused on the Middle East. We often teach about certain principles or practices as though they are true for all Muslims (for instance not drinking alcohol) or that they have been practices for all Muslims across the entire history of Islam. An example of this is the idea that Muslims only use patterns in art because the portrayal of figures is forbidden in the Qur'an.

This unit encourages pupils to look at Islam through the eyes of the poet Rumi, it explores how he acted and believed as a Muslim and in doing so provides opportunities of pupils to look at practices and beliefs in Islam from the perspective of a single life. The unit focuses on one particular story written by Rumi as an illustration of Rumi's beliefs and of the way that aspects of Muslim cultures have been interpreted.

- Who was Rumi?
- Keep your Dragons in the snow!
- Dragons and art
- Whirling Dervishes

For Key Stage 2

As you will see, a further lesson for pupils in the KS2 age range is included at the end of this pack. This is an opportunity to explore more political matters with older pupils. Rumi is hugely popular in the Western world, but some argue that in the process of being translated into modern English, the deep Islamic ore of his poetry has been erased, replaced with general points about love and life. This analysis gives older pupils chance to examine the way Islam is perceived when looked at through a Western, non-Islamic lens.

1. Who was Rumi?

Rumi was one of the world's greatest poets, today he is the best-selling poet in America even though he was born in 1207 near Afghanistan. His work is famous throughout the world, but his work is especially loved in Turkey, India and Iran. He spent years leaning from the Quran and studying Islam. He was a very scholarly man and very religious. When he was 39 he met Sham-e Tabriz, known as Shams, a wandering basket weaver and religious teacher and his life changed for ever. Shams taught Rumi several things about being religious:

- That you could have direct and personal knowledge of God
- You can experience God personally in your life.

There are many stories about how Shams and Rumi met. One story says that Rumi was reading a large stack of books when Shams walked by and asked what he was doing. Rumi thought Shams was an ignorant man and he replied, 'nothing you can understand!'. At that precise moment the books caught fire. Rumi asks Shams what just happened and Shams says 'this is what you cannot understand'. Shams was telling

Rumi that some of the most important things in life cannot be learnt from books and rules, we have to feel and experience them to truly understand their meaning. Shams and Rumi were close friends, they spent all their time together and would endlessly discuss love and the meaning of truth. One day Shams mysteriously disappeared and Rumi's sadness, love and feelings of loss turned Rumi into a poet. He wrote many thousands of poems and he sometimes recited his poems aloud and whirled and danced as he spoke them out loud. He poured out his heart and soul into his poetry and into his mystical whirling dances.

Rumi and Love

Rumi was a Muslim, he prayed five times a day, he celebrated the festivals and he studied the Quran. He was also Sufi, this means that he was focused on trying to gain spiritual closeness with God through introspection and thinking about God. Sufism is not a separate Muslim sect but a school of practices and approach to Islam that is practiced by Muslims from different traditions. Rumi was part of a tradition of Muslims who believed that love was the guiding principle of everything we do and think in our lives. In his poetry Rumi wrote about all kinds of love, spiritual love, love for our friends, romantic love and love for God. All these types of love are connected so that love becomes the most important feature of our lives.

Four poems about love by Rumi:

A lifetime without Love is of no account.
Love is the Water of life.
Drink it down with heart and soul
Divan-i- Shams 11909

Goodbyes are only for those who love with their eyes.
Because for those who love with heart and soul there is no such thing as separation.

Pay close attention
to the voices
of your inner child.
For he is the dreamer
the visionary,
and the hopeful.

There is little one can
Say about love. It has to
be lived, and it's always
in motion.

LESSON 1:

Who was Rumi?

NB: a PPT is provided for you to display images

Introduction

a) Show a painting of Rumi, you will find some online. Talk about what you see.

b) Say that you have three pieces of information about Rumi. Take these from an envelope and read to the class: 'I am a poet', 'I study the Qur'an' and 'I was born in 1207'.

c) Talk about what a poet does- they create poems. Do pupils have any favourite poems?

d) Look at an image of the Qur'an or bring a real Qur'an to class. Talk about how for Muslims this is a holy book containing God's words. Rumi read and learned about this book and wanted to understand all about God.

e) Show an image of a modern copy of Rumi's poetry, such as sold on an online bookshop. Rumi is a very popular poet today and there are many editions of his work in print. Tell the class that Rumi's poetry is the most popular poetry in America. Why do pupils think this is?

f) Can pupils work out how many years ago Rumi was born?

Meeting Shams

a) Tell the story below. After you have read the story of Rumi meeting his friend Shams for the first time, groups will take a section of the story and create a picture.

Rumi was reading a book. A large stack of books was piled next to him. Shams walked by and asked what he was doing. Rumi thought Shams would not understand the long words in the book. He replied, 'nothing you can understand!'.

At that moment, the books caught fire!

Rumi asked Shams what just happened. Shams replied, 'this is what you cannot understand'. What did Shams mean? He was trying to tell Rumi that some of the most important things in life cannot be learnt from books and rules. Sometimes we have to experience something to truly understand what it means.

b) Give out a section of the story to each group. There are 6 sections. If you have more than 6 groups double up some sections, such as the books catching fire. Give groups an A5 piece of card (1/2 A4 size). They must create a picture to represent their section of the story and can use words as well if they want.

Rumi is reading, Shams walks by	Rumi says shams cannot understand the books	The books catch fire
Rumi does not know why the books caught fire	Sometimes it is best to understand by feeling	You can't understand everything through books

c) Once the sections are complete, lay them out. put them in order. Look at each picture.

d) Read the next section of the story. Pupils will create a final card to explain how Rumi felt:

Shams and Rumi became the best of friends. They spent all their time together. They talked about love, God and the meaning of life. Shams helped Rumi to understand that it was possible to know God. Rumi understood much more about how he could have a connection to God. He learnt more from his friend than from his books.

One day Shams mysteriously disappeared. Rumi was so sad and lost without his friend that he became a poet. He wrote thousands of poems about how he felt. Sometimes he read his poems aloud to other people. At other times he whirled and danced as he spoke his poetry out loud. He poured his heart and soul into his poetry and into his mystical whirling dances.

e) Talk about how Rumi felt when Shams went away. Give groups one more piece of card. They draw a picture to show his feelings, adding words if they wish. Add this to the end of the story images.

f) Open a large book, an old-looking book would be good. Ask children to write or draw on a small piece of paper something Rumi felt or wondered about. Place all these pieces of paper in the open pages. Close the book and talk about how Rumi's writing was a way to express his feelings and questions.

Rumi and Love

a) Remind children of your learning about Rumi; look at the story cards they drew. What made Rumi sad?

b) In the previous lesson children placed words and feelings in a large, old book (activity (f) above). In advance, take the words and feelings, stick on a large piece of coloured card in the shape of a heart, some overlap is fine. Fold this heart collage inside the book. Invite the class to open the book. Talk about their words on the large heart.

c) What does the heart represent? It represents love. How many 'heart' emojis can pupils remember? Show some on screen- you can copy and paste a huge range of 'heart' emojis from an online search. Talk about what each heart emoji represents. As children suggest answers, jot them down. Show children the list of words they have used about the heart emojis- you will have a lot of different ideas about love.

d) Teach that Rumi wrote about love a lot in his poetry: love of God, love between friends, romantic love, spiritual love. There are two activities below:
EITHER: talk about types of love and ask children to design an emoji to represent this type of love.
OR: You might not want to go into the distinction between romantic love and love between friends. Likewise, the idea of spiritual love might be too abstract for pupils. Instead, ask pupils to design their own emoji to represent love generally.
For both of these tasks, give small pieces of paper, you will later connect up the emojis with string.

e) Rumi believed that all types of love were connected by love itself. Collect in all emojis. Stick to a large piece of card or fix to a board or wall. Connect these with coloured string. Look at the whole picture of the love emojis connected together.

f) Teach the word 'Sufi'. Ask pupils to write it down. Rumi was a Sufi, which is a type of Muslim. Teach that Sufis believe humans are connected to each other, the world and God through love.

g) Read the short poems about love by Rumi. They are found in the text above. Let pupils talk about these poems.

2. Keep your dragon in the snow!

Rumi wrote many poems and stories. Most of his work is about love; love for Allah and his love for his lost friend Shams. Like many poets all around the worlds Rumi uses words and ideas to paint pictures and meanings that are sometimes about something else. Rumi was a mystic, this means that he believed that our experiences of God and love can be as important as learning in other ways. Many of Rumi's poems and stories are about how we can tame our desires, our greed for material wealth, our anger and our pride so that we can focus on an inward search for truth. The story of the dragon hunter is a story about what happens when we don't tame our desires.

"A self-styled "dragon hunter" went into the mountains to trap a dragon.
He searched all over the mountain, and at last discovered the frozen body of an enormous dragon in a cave high up on one of the tallest peaks.
The hunter brought the body to Baghdad.
He claimed that he had slaughtered it single-handedly & exhibited it on the banks of the River Euphrates.
Thousands of people turned out to see the dragon.
The heat of the Baghdad sun started to warm up the dragon's body and it began to stir, slowly awakening from its winter hibernation…"

This is a story about a dragon that was frozen and hidden in a cave. When the dragon master captures the dragon he is so proud that lies about how he captured it. He wants to show off his prize, but when the dragon thaws and wakes it starts to breathe fire and destroys everything around him.

LESSON 2:

Keep your dragon in the snow!

a) Bring a large jar with a lid to class. Show the children. Explain that anything they regret they can put in this jar. They do not need to tell anyone about what they regret and no one will ask them. The thought will be kept in the jar and no one will ever see it.

b) Talk about how sometimes we do things we regret. Give an example from your perspective, rather than asking children to share theirs. Talk about a time when you feel you could have been nicer or kinder. Explain that wish you had behaved differently.

c) Put a thoughtful piece of music on that lasts around 1 minute. Pupils they can think in silence while the music plays and if there is something they regret they can come and put it in the jar.

d) When the music ends, mime holding something in both hands and carefully placing it in the jar. Invite children to put something in. It is not compulsory. Place the jar on a high shelf.

e) Tell the story of the dragon hunter (above)

f) Give out a black and white dragon image to groups. Leave space around it. Groups draw colourful flames coming off the dragon to represent the damage it caused.

g) Talk about the sort of behaviour that can cause damage to peoples' feelings. Make a list together. Such as not telling the truth, laughing at someone, pushing someone, etc.

h) Ask groups to write some of these behaviours around the dragon amongst the flames.

i) Talk about what the story means. What does the dragon mean? What does the destruction mean? What is the moral of the story?

j) Take the jar full of regrets and stick a small picture of a dragon on the outside. Place it back on the high shelf.

3. Islam, Dragons and Art

The aim of this section is to introduce pupils to images and ideas that reveal how Islam is not merely a codified religion with a fixed set beliefs and practices but a wider civilisation that is intimately connected to other civilisations and cultures. Sometimes we talk about Islamic art or Islamic culture but this raises the question of what makes it particularly or specifically Islamic? In schools, pupils are often introduced to geomatic designs and motifs as examples of Islamic art but they are not unique to Islam and there are many other traditions of art within Muslim cultures. Muslim communities like other communities are extremely

diverse when it comes to culture so that while it is true that for many Muslims depictions of figures are unacceptable, in other Muslim traditions animals and people are represented in art.
This section utilises images to encourage pupils to encounter and explore;

- the variety of practices and beliefs in different Muslim communities through looking at three dragons.
- the links between dragon images from Muslim cultures and pupils' own ideas about dragons, whether from their background culture or stories and pictures.

- the beauty of images and artifacts created by Muslim artists and artisans from around the world.

Context
The art of central Asia, the eastern Mediterranean and the near east is a hybrid of many different cultures. The 'Silk Road', the main route by which goods travelled between cultures from the early 2nd Century CE was a meeting place ideas and art as well as goods and products. The image of the dragon is an example of how cultures mixed ideas.

The Silk Road

Throughout history Muslim cultures have portrayed dragons in books, manuscripts, literature, pottery and in sculpture. Images of dragons were a frequently represented in books about astrology and in manuscripts. During the Medieval era Muslim dragons were linked with chaos and disorder and were often very snake-like and reptilian. Looking at the images they bear an uncanny resemblance to dragons represented in Christian, Jewish and Mesopotamian art.

Dragon 1: Central Asian-style Dragon in Persia

The Mongol culture of Central Asian was very influential. Dragon-lore, originating in Central Asia, became ingrained in the fabric of many different cultural traditions, for example, the culture and art of Persia. Persia is the ancient culture of the land we now call Iran, one of the world's oldest civilisations and largest empires. Shi'a Islam became the state religion of Iran in the early 1500s, and it remains to this day. However before the advent of Islam, the religion of the Persian empire was Zoroastrianism. Dragons are found in Persian literature, such as the *Shahnama* or the *Book of Kings* written by Ferdawsi in 1010 CE. The *Shahnama* is an epic poem which describes the glory of Persia before the introduction of Islam. It contains mythological creatures as well aa historical references. Also found in the *Shahnama* are stories of heroes fighting dangerous beasts.

Dragons were common in many ancient Muslim cultures who had contact with the Mongols, whether through trade or invasion. Mongol depictions of dragons look very similar to Chinese depictions of dragons, suggesting a string connection between the ancient Mongols of Central Asia and the ancient Chinese of East Asia.

Dragon 2: Baghdad Dragons on the Gates

Baghdad is the capital of Iraq and was one of the culturally and intellectually most important cities in the early Muslim world. It was mostly destroyed through the invasions of the Mongols. The old city has four large gates with doors so heavy it requires many men to close and open each one. The photograph below shows a relief from the Talisman gate of Baghdad. It shows a seated man holding two dragon- serpents by their tongues.

Dragon 3: Ottoman 'Saz' Dragon

The Ottoman Empire was a huge Muslim-controlled civilisation that lasted between the 14th and early 20th centuries. It's centre was the city of Constantinople, now called Istanbul, in present-day Turkey. For over 600 years this empire straddled East and West. During the sixteenth century a type of drawing called the 'saz' style became popular—characterized by the depiction of stylized, serrated leaf foliage, often paired with fantastic creatures including dragons and phoenixes. This imagery appears on Ottoman art in a variety of forms, from rugs, clothing and pictures. This dragon drawing is by the famous Shah Quli, an artist who emigrated from Iran to Istanbul and became head of the royal art studios under Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, the Ottoman emperor. It was drawn using pens made from sharpened grass and was designed so that only one person at a time could look at it.

LESSON 3:

Islam, Dragons and Art

NB: for this lesson you will need small materials that have lots of different textures; scraps of paper, card, plastic, cardboard and pencil shavings destined for the bin could be collected. String, wool and bits of cloth, paper clips, tin foil, pipe cleaners, feathers and any other modelling material would be good. It can be off-cuts from other classrooms or home that would otherwise go in the bin.

You will also need spray paint if you can get it, or ordinary classroom paint in 6 colours.

You will need three dragon images from these three regions. Search for these images:

1) **Persian Dragon:** search for 'Persian dragon', or 'Persian dragon miniature'
2) **Baghdad dragon:** search for 'Talisman gate Baghdad'
3) **Ottoman Dragon:** search for 'Ottoman Saz dragon' or 'Shah Quli dragon'

You will need a map of the Silk Road. Search for 'silk road'. Choose a map that is clear and simple, and shows China, Iran/ Persia and the Ottoman regions/ Turkey.

a) Enlarge the three dragon images and print onto large paper for children to look at in groups. If this is not possible, show them on the screen. Talk about each dragon. Print out each dragon image on A4 for yourself. As the children talk about each dragon, record the words used; these might describe the way the dragon feels, looks, moves, what its character might be like, and the emotions it evokes in children. Show children the words used about each dragon, written round the images.

b) Stand up and find some space, go in the playground if possible. How does a dragon move? Try movements- snaky, fast, slithery, flying. How does it feel to fly? Do they flap their wings, do they glide on air currents? Let the children fly, walk and sit like dragons around the room or playground.

c) Feel your 'dragon' skin- is it scaly, warm, cold, smooth or rough? Feel your dragon wings, belly, arms and legs. Do you have claws? Do you have sharp teeth? Where does the flame come from? Your throat? Your belly? Let the children explain to each other what sort of dragon they are.

d) Back in the classroom, give each child a piece of A3 paper. Using a pencil, let them draw a dragon body across the page. They can add arms, ears, teeth, wings, flames etc later. Now ask children to create the shape of their dragon. Let children move their whole bodies as they draw to feel the strength and length of their dragon.

e) Now children add features to their dragon body in pencil: wings, arms, legs, claws, eyes, flames, mouths, etc. Children go over the edges in black or dark felt tip so the shape of the dragon stands out.

f) Return to the dragon images. Display on screen and hold up the A4 print-outs with words around them. Look at these words again. We will think about how the dragons feel to touch now. If you were to touch your dragon, what would it feel like? Feel things around the room - woolly jumpers, coats, smooth surfaces, rough surfaces- lots of different textures.

g) Pupils choose the textured materials they want to use to represent their dragon's body from the collection of scrap materials. Stick these on with school glue. They can cover some of the surface or all of it. They can scrunch up paper to suggest texture, and overlap materials. Leave these to dry,

h) In the meantime return to the images of our three dragons. Children are going to learn about where they come from in the world. Show the map of the Silk Road. Find China, Iran, Iraq and Turkey. You might like to add the ancient names of the empires; Persian (Iran) and Ottoman (Turkey) as these are names of these regions in the time the dragon art was produced.

i) Look at the image you have found of the Silk Road route. Talk about what this word means. Bring a piece of silk, an ornament and a coin. Show these items and talk about how many goods were bought and sold along the route. Through the Silk Road people from China found out about people from Turkey. This is 4,000 miles away!

j) Ask pupils why a dragon painted in Iran (Persia) looks a lot like a dragon from China. talk about the reasons why.

k) If you think pupils will find it engaging, give some more detail about each dragon from the information above; the artists, the influence, where it is from, etc.

l) Ask pupils if they can tell what the religion of Turkey, Iraq and Iran is. They are all Muslim regions, although there are different branches of Islam within these regions.

m) When the glued-on dragon skin is dry, spray paint or paint (carefully) the dragons.

4. The Whirling Dervishes

The Dervishes, or Mevlevis, are Muslims following the Sufi path who believe that love is the centre of Islam. They are an order of Muslims whose practices and beliefs are based on the teachings of Rumi. They practice Islam in the same way that many other Muslims do, they pray and they study the Qur'an. But they also take part in spiritual practices that help them come closer to God. Their most famous practice is the Sema, the whirling ceremony.

The Sema

'Sema' means listening.in Turkish. It is related to the Arabic, 'sama', meaning listening. The word Sema describes a ceremony which developed in Turkey. The Sema is a whirling prayer ceremony carried out by the Mevlevi Muslims and takes place every year. The dancers whirl round and round with their right hands raised, ready to receive God's grace. As they spin and spin they enter a trance like state where they can no longer tell where they end and God's love begins and they attain spiritual perfection.

It takes months for the dancers to learn the movements. As they twirl their long white dresses spin out around them and they enter a trance where they become closer to God. The spinning and the sense of weightlessness helps them experience a spiritual beauty. The ceremony has seven parts and everything from the music to the way the Dervishes dress has a particular meaning.

When the dervishes whirl they are not spinning in a random and chaotic fashion. As the music starts the dancers (called semazen) walk towards the ring leader who launches each dancer one by one, and then they begin to twirl. They keep one foot on a fixed axis and the other foot crosses over and over in time with the flutes and the drumming.

Rumi and the Dervishes

When Rumi lived in Konya in Turkey he wrote the *Mathnawi,* a series of six books of poetry and spiritual writings that form the basis of the beliefs of many Sufis. Rumi was sometimes called 'Mevlana' by his followers, which means master. Those that follow this path today are called 'Mevlevis'. Rumi's poetry and teachings about love and beauty inspired many people. The practices of whirling and praying occur in other cultures across Asia but Rumi is thought to have started the tradition amongst the Dervishes.

There is a story that Rumi was walking in the marketplace one day. He heard the sound of the goldsmiths hammering their gold. This seemed to strike a rhythm in his heart that he couldn't help but dance to. This so increased his happiness that he stretched out his hands to God and began to dance.

LESSON 4:

The Whirling Dervishes

a) Tell the story (above) of Rumi walking in the marketplace and hearing the goldsmiths hammering. This made him want to dance- he held out his hands to God and danced. Talk to the class about why they think Rumi did this.

b) Talk about how some people believe in a God and want to connect with God. Have pupils heard of other ways to connect to God? Such as praying, singing, being silent, meditating, helping others, etc? Rumi and the people that follow him spin around and around to feel a connection to God.

c) You might allow pupils to stand in the classroom and turn slowly on the spot 5. Talk about what it felt like and what was hard. Mevlevis spin so they can forget about the ordinary world and focus on God. They can't think about what they want to eat, what they want to buy, what is annoying or upsetting them. They have to focus on their steps and the music. They can escape their wants and worries and focus on God. Did pupils lose track of the classroom walls, each other and their ordinary world?
This short video gives an impression of the sema ceremony:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKEltegftb8

d) Revisit Lesson 1 and show the first picture you looked at of Rumi. Can pupils remember the three pieces of information you had at the beginning? Now we know three more things; he had a friend called Shams, he was a Muslim who followed a path called Sufi (Sufism, but this word might be confusing), he thought love connected everything together- God, people, the world. Look at the large heart contained inside the large, old book (lesson 1), and all the feeling words stuck on. Look at the Look at the emojis connected with string (lesson 1). Ask pupils to talk about all the things they can say about Rumi.

e) We can add one more important piece of information to our knowledge of Rumi. This the Sufi school, which he founded.

f) Watch this 5-minute video showing the whole ceremony: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3wi-jhXhYw

Key Stage 2

Rumi the Muslim

Introduction

The lessons on Rumi are designed for the Key Stage 1 age range. They give young pupils a chance to explore places, art and poetry as they learn about Rumi and Sufism.

This final lesson is designed for Key Stage 2, offering progression from the Key stage 1 material. We suggest this lesson is more suitable for older pupils as it involves an exploration of the ways the non-Muslim Western world perceives Islam. This is a more political way of thinking, it makes worldviews such as xenophobia, Islamophobia and 'othering' visible. This might be difficult for some pupils (and possibly teachers). Understanding the ways the Western world views Islam is not the same as gaining an understanding of Islam itself, but ever since Islam burst onto the world scene in the 8th Century, it has been viewed with suspicion and hostility in Western, Christian regions. This final lesson offers a way to explore this context of Islam, a context Muslims in the West must navigate every day.

As part of a Religion and Worldviews approach exploring these more political, complex and potentially painful contexts are as significant for understanding as learning about beliefs and practices.

Rumi in the West

When Chris Martin, lead singer of the band Coldplay, was divorcing his wife, the actress Gwyneth Paltrow, after a 10-year marriage, a friend gave him a book of Rumi poetry. He found Rumi's words helped enormously with his troubling feelings about the divorce. 'It kind of changed my life', he reported later (Doyle, 2015). Chris Martin read Rumi in translation, not in the original 13th Century Persian. There are several translations of Rumi into modern English, Martin read a translation by Coleman Barks. In a subsequent recording, Coldplay include Barks reading a passage of Rumi (in English).

This is the stanza Barks is heard reading:
"This being human is a guest house / Every morning a new arrival / A joy, a depression, a meanness, / some momentary awareness comes / as an unexpected visitor." (Ali, 2017)
You can here this here at a Coldplay concert: https://vimeo.com/178010002

Many other Western artists, actors and celebrities have found inspiration, guidance and comfort in Rumi's poetry, including Madonna and Tilda Swinton. Beyonce names one of her daughters Rumi, after the poet. Search for 'Rumi' on Instagram or Pinterest and you will see many short extracts from his poetry in simple, modern English. In 1994 Rumi was a bestseller, selling 250,000 copies where prize-winning poets do not usually sell more than 10,000 copies. (El- Zein, 2000, p. 72- 73). However it seems that in the process of being translated for modern Western people, much of Rumi's Islamic belief and knowledge has been removed. Amira el-Zein uses the word 'rendering' rather than 'translating', because so much has been changed. She describes how some renderings of Rumi's writing are taken from the original Persian but much of the Islamic references have been removed. Others are more modern versions of English translations, meaning a further layer of Islamic meaning and themes have disappeared.

The purpose of rendering Rumi's writing for a Western audience seems to bring Rumi's insights about life, love and meaning to readers, to help them in their life's journey. However the purpose of Rumi's writing

and teaching, his own reading and learning, and his mystical practices, were to reach Allah, God, as a Muslim. This is not the purpose of the modern English rendering.

Later renderings of Rumi were taken from English translations. The original translations were close to the Persian. It was felt that although they used the same words, they were not poetic enough, so they were rendered into more poetic forms in the English language. These works drifted further away from Rumi's original meaning.

Rasim Bazak also argues that the Islamic nature of Rumi's writings have been lost over the years, not only in the Western world, but also in Turkey, an Islamic society that used to have huge number of Sufi schools living according to Rumi's teachings (Bazak, 2017). Bazak reports that the sacred dance of the Sufis, the sema, is now performed at weddings, in hotel bars, restaurants, and even in shopping centres. It has become a cultural show, and has lost its deep mystical purpose.

The following lesson activities allow older pupils to engage in questions about tradition, change, translation, authenticity and meaning. The activities also develops pupils' understanding of how Islam can be viewed in the Western, non-Muslim world. You could use this lesson as part of an exploration of worldviews, language, or exclusion and Islamophobia.

As years may have passed since learning about Rumi in Key stage 1 you will want to introduce Rumi and his poetry to pupils. Use some of the activities in the previous KS1 lessons to do this.

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RUMI THE MUSLIM

Rumi's popularity in the West

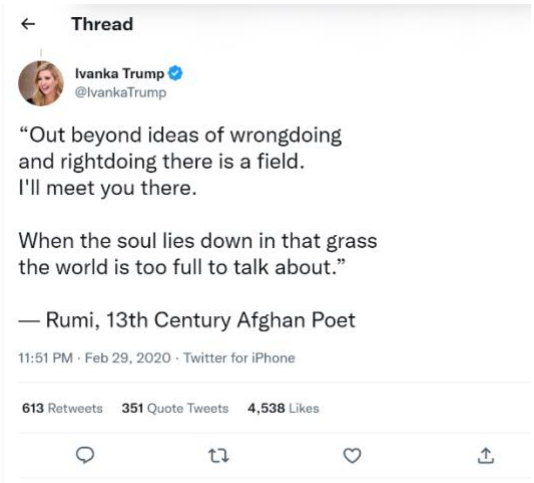
a) Show a picture of Chris Martin and Gwyneth Paltrow (you might have to explain who they are). Explain that after 10 years of marriage they divorced. They have two children together. Ask how Chris Martin might have felt.
b) Display this quote from Rumi:
"This being human is a guest house / Every morning a new arrival / A joy, a depression, a meanness, / some momentary awareness comes / as an unexpected visitor."

Explain that this was a quote Chris Martin found helpful when struggling with sadness and depression after his divorce.
Listen to this being read over the music a Coldplay concert: https://vimeo.com/178010002

c) Show a picture of Brad Pitt, the actor. He has this passage of Rumi tattooed under his arm (you might be able to find a picture of this tattoo):
'*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field.*
I'll meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass,
The world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase each other
Doesn't make any sense'
This is translated Coleman Barks, an American. (*The Essential Rumi,* 1995, p. 36)

d) Ivanka Trump tweeted the same verse. Find her tweet from February 29th 2020: https://twitter.com/ivankatrump/status/1233902648451051521?lang=en.
If this link does not work, below is a screen grab:



[You might want to tell pupils that Ivanka Trump's tweet was in response to the Doha agreement, a deal Trump made with the Taliban that ultimately paved the way for the collapse of the Afghan government and the return of the Taliban to power. Moreover, Donald Trump's ban of refugees from 6 Muslim-majority countries, including Iran, (known colloquially as the 'Muslim ban') would have excluded Rumi from entering the USA).

e) Show an image of Beyonce and Chris Carter with their three children. Their younger daughter is called Rumi, named after the Persian poet
f) After looking at these images and words, what can pupils conclude about Rumi's popularity in the West?

Erasing Islam

a) Show this passage from Rumi, translated by Sharghzadeh, a writer, researcher and scholar of Persian poetry:
'Beyond heresy and faith,
There's another place,
We yearn for what's in
The midst of the desert plain.
When the gnostic arrives there,
He prostrates his face,
There's no heresy, faith,
Or place in that domain.'
Rumi

Translated by Sharghzadeh @persianpoetics

Did pupils spot the similarities with the passage from the first section, tattooed on Brad Pitt and tweeted by Ivanka Trump? Display them side by side so pupils can compare.

b) Ask pupils to highlight words in Sharghzadeh's translation that seem like they might be religious words, or words connected with religion.

c) Give pupils the following information:

Heresy Beliefs or viewpoints that go against official religious beliefs.	**Faith** Belief and trust in something. In religion, belief in and trust of a higher being, or God.
Gnostic A group who searched for truth through personal spiritual knowledge ('gnosis' in Greek) and rejected the official teachings of religious institutions.	**Prostrate** To lay oneself on before someone or something. In Islam, Muslims prostrate themselves in prayer to signify their complete obedience to God

Give pupils time to make sense of these ideas. They might want to write their meaning alongside the words in the passage.
Were pupils right to highlight the words they chose that had a religious meaning?
Read the passage with this understanding in mind. Would pupils say this passage had religious meaning?
Compare to the translation by Coleman Barks- does his translation have any religious meaning?

Extension: you might want to teach pupils that Rumi's original words for 'heresy' and 'faith' were *iman* ("religion") and *kufr* ("infidelity"). Discuss if this changes the meaning. Should Sharghdezeh have kept the original words?

d) Find the website: www.rumiwasmuslim.com. This was started by a friend of Sharghzadeh who was concerned that the deep Islamic meaning was being erased from Rumi's poetry. You might not share the whole website with children, but it is worth a read.
Scroll down on this website, you will find three pages of colourful posts of Rumi quotes. The source is the Instagram page: 'Rumi quotes' (@rumi.quotes). Ask pupils if they can see any mention of the Qur'an, Islamic teaching or Islamic stories. The website notes that Rumi is usually described in the West as a 'mystic' or 'spiritual' but not a Muslim.

- Display this passage, or print one for each table:
'If I live, I'm the Qur'an's servant evermore,
I'm the dirt of Muhammad the chosen one's door.
If someone attributes to me anything more,
Both the person and what they have said, I abhor!

Rumi
Translation by Sharghzadeh

- First underline the references to Islam [the Qur'an and Muhammad]. How does Rumi describe himself in relation to these [he is the servant of the Qur'an and less that Muhammad]?
- Ask pupils how important Islam seems to be to Rumi based on this passage.

e) Coleman barks does not read Persian or Arabic. His poetry is developed from English translations of Rumi. Discuss if Bark's writing can be considered accurate translations of Rumi, if he does not read Rumi in his original language.

Tell pupils that Rumi was America's best-selling poet in 1994. Discuss if American poetry fans are in fact reading Rumi, or a new form of poetry developed from Rumi?

f) Sahar Esfandiari, a journalist, reports Sharghdezeh's views of the loss of Islamic references in Rumi. Show these to the class:

'Many of Rumi's most famous works have been translated from Western scholars to remove any mention of Islam, and often embed orientalist tropes'. [Orientalist= a view of Islam from a mistrustful Western or European perspective]	'[Rumi] didn't emerge in a vacuum, he was Muslim, and his universality should be understood within the context of the Islamic tradition. it's a form of cultural theft and Islamophobic erasure to downplay his Islamic identity'

From: Sahar Esfandiari, 'Reclaiming Rumi: How Islam was erased from the Persian poet's work', in the New Arab, 16th June 2020

Which of these views do pupils agree with? Use these views to support pupils' own responses:

1: Erasing Islam from Rumi's poetry is a form of Islamophobia. It shows the West's negative feelings about Islam and how Western readers cannot enjoy poetry with Islamic themes.

2: Sharghdezeh's translations also change some words, this is just what happens when ancient writing is translated for modern readers

3: It is not Islamophobia, it is just change. Rumi wrote almost 1,000 years ago in a different context, to make his words meaningful to modern Western readers, some references will have to be changed

4: It is not Islamophobic to remove Rumi's Islamic themes and references, but it means his true meaning is lost. His context was Islamic, to truly understand Rumi the reader must engage with his context