

## Religious Education (Primary): Grandma Sumah at the wedding.

The lesson has a special focus on celebrations within different communities and is based on **Untold Stories** from lost communities. The outline here is based on a Granddaughter's account of her Grandma's behaviour at a wedding in Darfur. If you have time you could spend a second lesson helping students to research activities which take place at a Jewish wedding and link this to the story of the lost Jewish communities of Greece (<http://education.hmd.org.uk/case-studies/the-untold-stories-of-lost-communities>).

### Preparation

In the week leading up to the lesson **ask** students to collect pictures of special occasions. These could be family or community events or religious celebrations such as a wedding, a baby naming ceremony, a party celebrating a school anniversary or a citizenship ceremony. Students could bring in family photographs or cut out pictures from magazines. **Bring** some yourself to add to the collection.

**Make sure** that everyone has at least one picture of a celebration. **Go round** the class and **invite** individuals to describe one of the events on one of their pictures. **Use** questions to **encourage** students to unpack their images. **Remember** that some photographs might be personal and others might be of celebrity events such as a footballer's wedding. Suitable questions could be:

Did the student attend the event?

If not, how did the student find out about the event?

When did the event take place? Recently, a few years ago or a long time ago?

Where did this event take place?

Who is in the picture?

Was this a happy or a sad occasion? How do we know this?

Was this an event for young people, old people or people of all ages?

What are the people in the picture doing/eating/drinking/enjoying/sharing?

How did you learn about this event?

After everyone has made a contribution **work out** together which occasions have proved to be the most popular by counting the number of wedding photographs, baby photographs, parties etc. **Ask** a student to come out and draw a rough bar graph on the board to illustrate the count.

**Introduce** the concept of celebration within religious and if you feel it is appropriate, secular communities.

**Ask** why we enjoy sharing our celebrations with other people? What things do we share at our celebrations? Responses could include music, dancing, special food, having fun together or, in a religious community, sharing the joy of welcoming a new member into a faith or witnessing a couple exchanging their special promises to each other in front of God. **Explain** that some of these celebrations and ceremonies are called rites of passage because they mark special occasions in our journey through life. Most people like all generations of their family to gather together to celebrate a rite of passage. A rite of passage is a very important occasion. We want to remember it.

**Ask** why we often enjoy wearing new or even special clothes to attend these celebrations. Other questions to **explore** could be what examples of special clothes can everyone think of and is there any special meaning linked to the colour or style of clothes people wear? Where do our celebrations take place, in a religious building, a civic building, our own homes? Do we ever prepare special food which we only eat on certain occasions?

**Think** about how we might feel if it was no longer possible to hold celebrations and special events? **List** agreed suggestions of feelings on the board.

**Arrange** students in small groups and **outline** the story described in *Grandma Sumah at the wedding* which you will find at the end of this lesson plan. **Relate** the events using your own words. You could **use** a small drum to add the sounds mentioned in the story of the celebration as you describe the events. **Place** as much emphasis as possible on the fun and joy of the occasion. **Make sure** everyone notices the important part that Grandma Sumah plays in the event.

After the story **remind** everyone that the occasion you have outlined was a rite of passage, just like some of the others the group discussed earlier. **Ask** students to explain to you how we can tell that this wedding was an important occasion for the bride and groom's families and for the whole community.

**Give** the groups a large sheet of black paper, one gold and one silver marker pen (the sort of pens we use to write on cards or make decorations at festive times.) **Challenge** groups to think about the wedding you have described and to use the gold pen to write down a list of things that took place on the celebration day eg guests arriving, singing, searching for the bride. When the list is complete they should talk about the activities and draw a silver circle around all the things that might also happen at a wedding celebration which might take place in their own community today. **Instruct** groups to hold up their papers for everyone to see. **Talk** about the words they have circled and **point out** that weddings and other rites of passage are important in family and community life all over the world.

**Encourage** everyone to focus on the part Grandma Sumah plays in the story. **Ask** someone to describe what she does. How can we tell that she has a very important

place within her family and her community; that her actions and the actions of the bride's Grandma are an expected part of the celebration?

**Discuss** the different roles older people play in weddings in our own community. To **encourage** student response offer some anecdotal evidence of your own eg 'Grandparents are very important guests at weddings. I once went to a wedding where the bride's Grandma was determined to wear a larger hat than the groom's Grandma. She said that she had bought the new hat to show the groom's family that she knew how to dress well. Of course everyone likes to dress up for a wedding, not just the bride and many of the guests wore amazing hats too just like my friend's Grandma but we all knew that Grandma's hat was really spectacular because she was so happy and proud to be an honoured guest at her grandchild's wedding. I wonder if Grandma Sumah was feeling the same sort of pride but showing it in a different way?' **Ask** how Grandma Sumah's actions might help to pass on special traditions from one generation to another. Who passes traditions and customs on to us today?

**Explain** that taking part in special celebrations helps us to learn about the beliefs and values that are important in our own families and communities. A special celebration often brings people of all ages together. **Ask** students to think of words we could use to describe how we think older people might feel when they watch a younger and much loved member of the family take the central role in a special celebration. **Encourage** a focus on positive emotions at this stage but then **remind** students of their original feelings list; the list on the board which shows how they thought we might feel if we could no longer celebrate special occasions in our community.

**Explain** that the wedding celebration where Grandma Sumah had her argument took place in a small village in Southern Darfur which is in Sudan. **Point out** Sudan on a globe or world map.

**Tell** everyone that the village where Grandma Sumah and many of the wedding guests lived was destroyed in genocide. **Explain** that genocide is when one group of people hate another group of people so much that they try to destroy their communities and their lives. Lots of people are murdered and all that they value is deliberately destroyed. Hundreds of villages like the one where Grandma Sumah lived have been burned to the ground. You may **add** a few more details chosen from the lost villages of Darfur case study (<http://education.hmd.org.uk/case-studies/the-villages-of-darfur>) if you think it is appropriate **but HMDT do not advise giving a copy of the document to students because some of the details are quite harrowing.**

**Explain** that many of the guests who attended the wedding lost everything they owned. They became refugees with no home, no money and no place to go. Wedding celebrations and other happy occasions and important ceremonies can only live on in the memories of the refugees. **Instruct** everyone to look at the

feelings list again. Students imagined how we might feel if we could no longer celebrate our own rites of passage, **explain** that for the people of Darfur these feelings were not imagined. They became real.

**Announce** that 27 January is a special day to remember all the communities which have been lost because of genocide. Students all over the UK have been asked to help people think about this by sharing **Untold Stories** with them. The story of Grandma Sumah at the wedding party is one such story. Many people will not have heard it, so if we all tell someone else about it today we are helping to remind other people to notice that in Darfur people are still suffering because of hatred.

One of Grandma Sumah's Granddaughters escaped from Darfur. She was in her village when it was set on fire and reduced to ashes. Today she lives here in the UK and works as a doctor. Her name is Halima Bashir. She wrote her memories of Grandma Sumah and the rest of her family especially for people to read and remember. She wants us to know that when we hear about Darfur on the news it isn't only buildings which vanish. The traditions and customs of the place also disappear.

Today, by thinking about the celebrations we value here in <insert name of your school> and by listening to the **Untold Stories** of Grandma Sumah and her community at the wedding we have made sure that the people of Darfur are not forgotten.

### **Grandma Sumah at the wedding**

Freely adapted from Halima Bashir's *Tears of The Desert*<sup>1</sup>

Towards the end of my summer holiday there was a big wedding in a neighbouring village. The groom was a close cousin and we all had to go to support his side of the family. That evening the groom had his head ritually shaved. There was singing and dancing and drumming, as we celebrated the groom being cleansed of his hair in preparation for the wedding.

The groom had already paid the bride's family a quantity of gold and a number of animals. He had also bought a new set of clothes for the bride's family members, so that they could look their best on the wedding day. For their part, the bride-to-be's family had built a house for the newly-weds and furnished it completely even down to the kitchen things.

The day after the head shaving we headed over to the bride's family home. Grandma came with us. We took our place on rugs on the floor as we waited for the bride to appear. Everyone kept asking when we would get to see her but there was a problem, the bride's family had hidden her so that they could ask for a higher bride price.

The bride's Grandmother and Grandmother Sumah had a long argument about it. Grandma Sumah spoke loudly and clearly, she enjoyed representing the family.

The argument went backwards and forwards, our Grandma facing their Grandma and trying her best to win the argument. It went on and on. So far there was no food or drink served. In our culture, if a wedding goes ahead without any arguments people don't really enjoy it. Both Grandmas made sure that the arguments were long and clever even though they both knew that the bride price had really been agreed long before the wedding. They really enjoyed themselves but I was wondering whether they would ever stop arguing so that we could have something to eat.

Eventually the wedding feast was served, but it was well after midnight by the time we were finished. My cousin refused to eat. He couldn't relax until he had seen his bride. Still the bride refused to come unless her family said that it was all right for her to do so. Eventually, the groom lost his patience and he and his friends searched for the bride and carried her across the village to the wedding house...

The drummer picked up his drum, made from cow skin stretched over a hollowed out tree trunk. The wood was decorated with carvings of beasts, birds and mythical spirits, as each new person entered the wedding house the drummer beat out a deep pounding rhythm, calling out their name with details of their own family and

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<sup>1</sup> *Tears of the Desert* by Halima Bashir and Damien Lewis is published by Hodder and a donation for each copy sold will be made to The Aegis Trust.

their family's most famous exploits - there was dancing and singing - the guests sang a song that came from deep within their hearts.

We have our tribe around us  
Our family around us  
Our children around us  
Our lands around us  
Our camels around us  
Our cattle around us  
We are Zaghawa  
We are Zaghawa

The party lasted all night.