**Objective 2: The Spread and Division of Islam**

**Vocabulary:**

1. Arabic: The common language of Muslims
2. Caliph: Successor to Muhammad and leader of Islam
3. Quran: The holy book of Muslims
4. Shia: Muslims who thought the caliph had to be a descendent of Muhammad
5. Sunni: Muslims who thought the caliph could be any wise man

**Sunnis and Shia Muslims**

Although Islam is a very large religion, it is divided into several groups. The two largest groups today are Sunni and Shia. Although Sunni and Shia Muslims have many things in common, the divide between the two groups sometimes leads to violence. To understand the conflict between Sunni and Shia Muslims today, we need to understand why Islam divided into two groups in the 600s AD. Originally, the divide had to do with who each group wanted to be caliph, or successor to Muhammad and leader of Islam. Over time, the two groups have grown even further apart.

The Sunni Muslims are the group of Muslims that believe any wise person chosen by the community could become the caliph. They were the group that supported the first caliph Abu Bakr to be Muhammad’s successor because he had been Muhammad’s second in command. The Sunni Muslims are the larger group, making up 85% of the world’s Muslims. Sunni Muslims live in most parts of the Middle East, North Africa, and Southeast Asia.

Unlike Sunni Muslims, Shia Muslims thought that whoever became the caliph needed to be related to Muhammad. They wanted Muhammad’s son-in-law Ali to be in charge of Islam, and helped him become caliph after Abu Bakr died. However, the Sunnis murdered Ali, leading to a fight over who would be the next caliph. The Shia wanted Ali’s son Hassan to take power, but the Sunnis supported another man named Umayyad. Umayyad won control of the Muslims, and the Shias broke away from the Sunnis and set up their own system of rule. Today, Shias make up 15% of the world’s Muslims. Most Shias live in Iran and Iraq.

Although they disagreed about who should be in charge of Islam, Sunni and Shia Muslims have many beliefs in common. Both believe in the same God and both believe that Muhammad was His prophet. They both have the Quran as their holy book. In addition, Sunni and Shia Muslims practice the same Five Pillars, and they are united by sharing the Declaration of Faith, prayer, charity, fasting, and the pilgrimage to Mecca.

**The Spread of Islam**

Today, Islam is the second largest religion in the world. Looking at history can explain why it has grown so much. After Muhammad died, Islam spread very quickly to most parts of the Middle East. Islam had already begun to spread during Muhammad’s lifetime due to his strong leadership and military successes. His followers were able to continue the spread of Islam due to military, religious, and economic reasons.

A strong military helped Arab Muslims conquer new lands very quickly. Several factors helped the Muslims achieve military success. First of all, the Muslims had very strong leadership. After Muhammad died, his second-in-command, Abu Bakr, became the caliph, which means successor to Muhammad. Although not all Muslims supported Abu Bakr, he proved that he was a strong leader who directed the Muslim military forces to expand. There were three other caliphs after Abu Bakr who continued his leadership. In addition to strong caliphs, Muslims also had powerful armies. They had skilled riders on both horses and camels, and put time into training to prepare for war. These soldiers were also motivated by a common faith. Lastly, the surrounding Byzantine and Persian empires were weak and many people in those areas supported the Muslims who invaded. All of these military factors laid the foundation for the spread of Islam.

Once the Muslims had conquered an area, they gained many converts to their faith who were attracted to the religion. Many people like how the Five Pillars were easy to understand and follow. Other people were drawn to the equality among all people promised by Islam, especially every person was considered equal before God and you did not need to have priests to run religious rituals. Because of this equality, people of all races were accepted as Muslims and you did not need to be Arab to convert. Muslims also granted religious toleration to people that they conquered, letting them keep their own religions. This actually led to many converts to Islam who were impressed with the fair treatment they had received. The five pillars, religious equality, and fair treatment of conquered people helped Islam continue to gain followers.

The last main factor that helped Islam expand was economics and trade. As they conquered new land, Arab Muslims connected those areas to their large trade network. Because all Muslims had to learn to speak Arabic to recite their prayers, Arabic became the common language of trade and helped people from different ethnic backgrounds to understand one another. The Quran, or holy book of Islam, helped trade by providing rules to make sure trade was fair. Traders themselves also helped spread Islam by talking about it when they travelled places to trade. Some traders even married women of other faith backgrounds and got them to convert to Islam. These economic factors helped unite Muslims in many ways.

These military, religious, economic factors helped to spread Muhammad’s original message. As Muslims from all different backgrounds shared in government, prayed together, and engaged in trade, the Islamic community grew stronger and more united. The effects of Islam’s spread are still a major part of the world today.

**Directions: Using class articles, notes, and the webquest, answer the following questions in complete sentences.**

**Part 1: Spread of Islam**

1. Why was the Muslim military successful in conquering land? Give at least three reasons.
2. What was a caliph?
3. Why did many conquered people convert to Islam? Give at least three reasons.
4. What was the common language that Muslims used to trade with one another?
5. How did the Quran (Koran) help Muslim trade?

**Part 2: Role of Women and Islam**

1. What was one way that Islam helped protect women?
2. How are women restricted in some Muslim countries today? Name at least two restrictions.
3. Do all Muslim women have to wear a veil? Why or why not?

**Part 3: Divisions within Islam**

1. Why did Islam divide into Sunnis and Shias?
2. What do Sunni and Shia Muslims have in common?