Building the new house of wisdom (HoW 2.0)  
(Developed by Rob Hallock and Katy Smoot, Sammamish High School)

Islam has spread widely throughout Afro-Eurasia. A vibrant Islamic civilization has emerged, held together by networks of faith and exchange. Islamic civilization has also been characterized as being cosmopolitan, a civilization where diverse people learn from one another and ideas and technologies—both old and new—are discovered, blended, and reinvented.

Islamic scholars want to establish a new House of Wisdom outside of the Muslim heartland of the Middle East (Southwest Asia). They want to build it in the quintessential Muslim region—that is, the region that best reflects the characteristics of Islam civilization. Which region should that be? Regions that are being considered include:

- East Africa (Kilwa & Momabassa)
- West Africa (Empire of Mali)
- Southeast Asia (Malacca)
- South Asia (The Delhi Sultanate)
- Western Europe (Al Andalus-Islamic Spain)

**My Region:** __________________________  **My Teammate(s):** __________________________  **My Position:**       Pro  
Con

**Your Mission:** Your team has been chosen to explain why your region best reflects the characteristics of Islamic Civilization and is host the new House of Wisdom.

Your team will research your region using your **Region Packet, your textbook, and Ibn Battuta’s Descriptions** and find out how it reflects the characteristics of Islamic civilization and connect it to your position about the new House of Wisdom.

**Topics you might consider in your research include:**

- Networks of exchange
- Examples of technology
- Urbanization and key cities
- Examples of religious tolerance
- Trade relationships and items traded
- Diffusion of ideas
- Social hierarchy and gender roles
- Education
- Demography
- Examples of Syncretism
- Geography/where in your region would you locate the new House of Wisdom

**Textbook & Crash Course Resources**

**Strayer Textbook**

- South Asia -p. 489-491
- West Africa -p.492-494
- Western Europe -p.494-495

**Crash Course World History Episodes** (short videos -10 minutes)

13 Islam, the Quran, and the Five Pillars  All Without a Flamewar: Crash Course World History
16 Mansa Musa and Islam in Africa
18 Int’l Commerce, Snorkeling Camels, and The Indian Ocean Trade: Crash Course World History

**Terms/Vocabulary To consider**

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Developed by Rob Hallock and Katy Smoot, Sammamish High School
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Your presentation: Your team will present your case to a committee of scholars BLOCK DAY (Nov. 2\textsuperscript{nd} or 3\textsuperscript{rd}). You will have THREE minutes to state your case either FOR (pro) or AGAINST (con) your region. Each presentation must have following components:

1. Opening statement that
   • identifies what your team believes to be the main characteristics of Islamic civilization
     
     Stem: “The main characteristics of Islamic civilization are ____________________, __________________, and ____________________”
   • uses these characteristics to ID your main reasons why your region should or should not be selected as the home of the new House of Wisdom
     
     Stem: “____________________ best represents these characteristics and therefore be the home of the New House of Wisdom because it ________________________________.”
   • previews what your opponents might say
     
     Stem: “Our opponents may argue that ______________________ should/should not be chosen to host the new House of Wisdom because _________________________________. But we will demonstrate that this is not the case.”

2. Supporting Evidence that
   • Gives examples of your main reasons
     
     Stem: “One example of the cosmopolitan character of ____________________ is ____________________”

3. An Anticipation of and/or Rebuttal of Opposing Arguments
   • Anticipates the argument that the opposing side will use against you and rebuts it (argues against it)
     
     Stem: “Some people may argue that the new House of Wisdom should be located in ______________________ because ______________________ but they are wrong because ________________________________.”

Your roles

Each person should play a visible role during their presentation. You may adopt the identity of a person in that region. For example, a scholar from West Africa could explain how Timbuktu’s extensive library makes it is a good city in which to build the new House of Wisdom. Respectful and appropriate creativity - including costumes and props - is encouraged as is FOOD from your region that demonstrates DIFUSSION of crops as a result of trade in the Islamic Empire (see Hallock for details on this)

One person should do opposition research and be able argue for or against locating the House of Wisdom in another region.

What you will turn in at the time of your presentation:

• A typed or NEATLY handwritten script of your presentation
Ibn Battuta, 14th Century Muslim Traveler, on Sumatra (SE Asia)

Translation by R. Michael Feener.

After twenty-five days we reached the island of al-Jawa (Sumatra)¹ ... that is the island from which the Jawi incense takes its name. We saw the island from the distance of half a day's sail away. Its trees are many, including: coconuts, palms, cloves, Indian aloes, the shaki and barki, papaya, jamun fruit, sweet oranges, and camphor. The people of this island buy and sell with pieces of tin and uncast, unrefined Chinese gold. Most of the best spices on the island are to be found in the country of the unbelievers, there are fewer from the country of the Muslims. When we reached the harbor, the people came out to us in little boats and with them they brought coconuts, bananas, papayas and fish. It is their custom to present these to the merchants, and then each merchant gives whatever recompense he is able to. The Assistant Harbor Master also came out, inspected the merchants who were with us, and permitted us to land.

…I rode together with my companions and we entered the Sultan's capitol, the city of Samudra, which is a large, beautiful city with wooden walls and towers. The Sultan of al-Jawa, al-Malik al-Zahir, is one of the noblest and most generous of kings and belongs to the Shafi'i school of law. He is a patron of Muslim legal scholars who come to his sessions to read and study. He often struggles against and raids the unbelievers. He is humble and walks on foot to the Friday prayer. The people of his country also belong to the Shafi'i school of law. They are eager to fight infidels and enthusiastically accompany the Sultan on his campaigns. They overwhelm the unbelievers living near them, and the unbelievers must pay a tax in settlement.

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¹ Is it Java or Sumatra? At the time of Ibn Battuta’s visit, the Javanese empire of Majapahit was at its height and considered certain territories on the island of Sumatra to be under its vassalage. Despite Samudra-Pasai’s own status as the first polity in the archipelago to become Islamic, its founding families contained princes and princesses from Majapahit, a Hindu-Buddhist empire. This connection with Majapahit bestowed status upon the new sultanate and may be why Ibn Battuta refers to the island on which he landed as al-Jawa (Java), which is in fact directly east of Sumatra. Also, at that time, there was no standard name for the island of Sumatra itself; rather, that name that we’re familiar with today came from the place Ibn Battuta visited: the first Islamic port city of Samudra-Pasai.
Western Europe- Al-Andalus:

- Spain became part of the Islamic world in 711 CE and Islamic Spain was called *al-Andalus*
- *Al-Andalus* participated in actively commercial life of the larger Islamic world and was known for its exports of ceramics, painted tiles, lead crystal, and gold jewelry
- Thriving cities in *al-Andalus* included Toledo, Seville, and Cordoba, the largest city in Europe with well-lit roads, free Islamic schools, and a library containing over 400,000 volumes.
- *Al-Andalus* developed a distinctive Islamic culture blending Roman, Germanic and Jewish traditions with those of Arabs and Berbers and was known for its new architectural and literary styles.
- One of the most significant examples of this new architecture was the Great Mosque at Cordoba which influenced the building of Christian cathedrals in other parts of Europe.
- *Al-Andalus* became a major educational center for Europe and the lands around the Mediterranean Sea as well as a conduit for culture and science between the Islamic and Christian worlds.
- Spain developed one of the most diverse and sophisticated agricultural economy in Europe when the pre-existing agricultural technologies fused with new crops (such as citrus fruits) and irrigational technologies from the east.
- In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, some of the greatest writers in Jewish history worked in Muslim Spain.
- Christians and Jews were subject to a special tax, called the *jizya*, to the Islamic state, which in turn allowed these communities religious autonomy (independence).
- While initially religiously tolerant towards non-Muslims, this changed towards the end of the Calphate
- Some Christians, called Mozarabs, who had long lived under Muslim and Arab rule, adopted many Arab customs, art, and words, while still maintaining their Christian and Latin rituals.
- For much of its history, *al-Andalus* existed in conflict with Christian kingdoms to the north.

Southeast Asia (The State of Malacca)

- The islands of Southeast Asia are located at the center of two very important trading routes: The Chinese segment of the great Euro-Asian trading complex and the Indian Ocean Trade network to the west.
- Islam came to Southeast Asia peacefully through merchants who were part of the Indian Ocean trade.
- Sufi missionaries, Muslims who practice a mystical form of Islam, also spread the religion in the region and often allowed converts to retain their Pre-Islamic beliefs.
- Islam in SE Asia combined elements of animist, Hindu, and Buddhist religious beliefs and rituals.
- Because of its key geographic location, the political and merchant elite in the region adopted Islam in part to facilitate dealings with foreign Muslims.
- Southeast Asian exports included luxury items such as aromatic woods and spices which were important exports to China, India and the Mediterranean region.
- After conversion to Islam, the key cities were linked culturally as well economically, to the merchants and ports of India, the Middle East and the Mediterranean.
- Melaka (Malacca) became a powerful Muslim city-state through the control of maritime trade and had a substantial navy.
- Melaka’s ruling class was Muslim and is generously open to theologians, Sufis and other Islamic authorities. It sponsors missionary campaigns to spread Islam throughout Southeast Asia.
- Parts of SE Asia, such as Bali, remained Hindu and parts remained Buddhist throughout the post-classical period.
West Africa (Mali Empire):

• Islam spread to the West Africa through the influence of Muslim merchants and scholars and was adopted by the rulers of the Sudanic Empires (Ghana, Mali, and Songhay).
• Ghana was the first West African empire whose leaders had converted to Islam and became prosperous by taxing the salt and gold exchanged within its borders.
• Rulers of the later Mali Empire encouraged the conversion to Islam by political and trading elites, however, much of the population never converted.
• The practice of Islam in West Africa was syncretic as Islam combined with the existing pagan traditions and beliefs.
• Mali prospered due agriculture as well as its control of the gold and copper trades and its critical role in the Trans-Saharan trade which included trade with the Middle East, North Africa and Europe.
• Mali ruler Mansa Musa went on a famous pilgrimage to Mecca in the mid-14th century where he gave away so much gold in the city of Cairo that the price of gold declined.
• Mali rulers supported Islam by building mosques, attending public prayer, and supporting preachers. Mansa Musa also invited scholars from throughout the Muslim world to come to Timbuktu.
• Timbuktu, the capital city of Mali, had a cosmopolitan population of 50,000 and was a major center for trade and a center for Islamic education boasting a major university and library.
• Outsiders traveled to the capital for eye surgery.
• Travel was secure and crime was severely punished. Protection and lodging was provided for Muslim merchants from the north.
• West African mosques had a distinctive architectural style that reflected ethnic and regional differences and varied considerably from the traditional patterns of the Middle East and South Asia.
• Scholar Ibn Battuta was impressed by the zeal with which Muslim families in Mali taught their children the Qu’ran and was also shocked by the easy familiarity between men and women.

South Asia (The Delhi Sultanate)

• Trade brought first brought Arab Muslims to the southern coast of India where in many of the coast’s cosmopolitan cities, like Cochin and Calicut Arabic was the preferred language of trade.
• Islam later came to South Asia through conquest by the foreign rulers who created the Delhi Sultanate, however, conversion was not forced.
• Sufi missionaries, who practiced a mystical form of Islam also spread Islam with the support of the Delhi Sultanate.
• 20-25% of the population in S Asia became Muslims during Muslim rule.
• Muslim rulers in S Asia treated Hindus and Buddhists as ‘People of the Book’ which meant that they have the freedom to practice their religion as they chose as long as they paid the jizya, a special tax.
• Local Hindu officials and notables retained their positions and little effort was made to convert locals to Islam.
• Hindus made up the much of the army and also staffed the bureaucracies of the Muslim rulers however, high caste Hindus and Muslims rarely had friendships.
• Most of the converts to Islam were low caste Hindus and Buddhists.
• The works of Hindu mathematicians and astrologers were translated into Arabic and further explored. Indian treatises on subjects ranging from medicine to music was translated into Arabic and studied by Arabic scholars throughout the Muslim world (Dar al Islam).
• Muslims rulers adopted many Hindu customs which were unusual for their religion and in some cases even contrary to Quran. Some Muslim rulers proclaimed themselves to be of divine descent and Muslim communities became socially divided along caste lines.
- The Delhi Sultanate created a strong centralized political authority in India. It established bureaucracy headed by the sultan. There were efforts to improve food production, promote trade and economic growth, and establish a common currency.
- India is at the center of the Indian Ocean Trade route and according to one noted scholar was “on the way to everywhere.” Between 1200 to 1500 the volume of trade in the Indian Ocean increased tremendously.
- The sultanate is noted for being one of the few states to repel an attack by the Mongol Empire and enthroned one of the few female rulers in Islamic history, Razia Sultana, who reigned from 1236 to 1240.

**East Africa-The Swahili Civilization**

- Islam was brought to East Africa by male merchants from Persia and Arabia who intermarried with local women.
- This led to the creation of a new, Swahili culture was a fusion of Islamic, Indian and traditional African elements.
- Swahili cities, such as Kilwa, Mombassa, and Mogadishu on the East Coast of Africa were Islamized and cosmopolitan reflecting their contacts with Arabia, Persia, India, and China. They were major trading ports on the Indian Ocean Trade network. Some Chinese ports sent goods directly to Africa.
- A wide variety of items were exported from the Swahili cities including ivory, gold, slaves, iron, and exotic animals. In return, traders from the East and Persian Gulf brought textiles, spices, porcelain and other finished goods.
- The language of Swahili was a mix African Bantu languages and Arabic and also included words from Persian and Hindi and was spoken widely in East African cities.
- It is estimated that the “Islamic” slave trade from Africa may have exceeded ten million between 750-1500 CE.
- The city of Kilwa, was particularly wealthy as it has access to the gold produced near great Zimbabwe.
- The Muslim Swahili coastal communities were prosperous from their linkage with international trade of the Indian Ocean and maintaining peaceful coexistence with each other.
- Islam was adopted by the rulers and the merchants on the Swahili Coast however, the majority of the population retained their generally animist beliefs. Islam spread very little into the interior of East Africa and Islam did not deeply influence the customs of most Africans.
- Islam was used as a way to give legitimacy to their rule as it opened the door to alliances with Islamic rulers in other lands.