

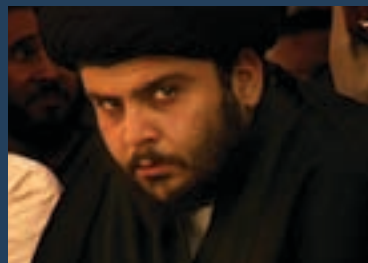
PEOPLE

MOHAMMED is twelve years old. He lives with his grandmother in a Sunni area of Baghdad. He works in a garage, but his boss is often unkind to him.

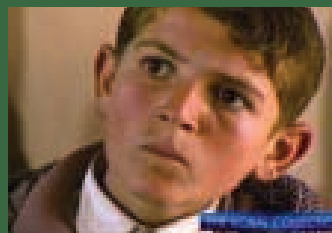


MOHAMMED'S BOSS is unhappy about life in Baghdad since the American occupation. He thinks the US attacked Iraq for its oil. He dislikes the new Iraqi government because he thinks it is unfair to Sunni people like himself.

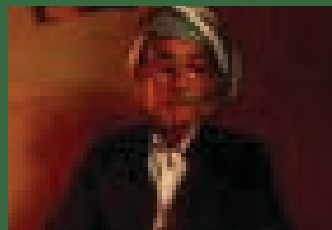
MOQTADA AL-SADR is the religious leader of a special group of Shias. He thinks the US should leave Iraq and the country's people should follow the exact rules of Islam. His followers have their own newspaper and their own army.



SHEIKH AWS is the leader of Moqtada's followers in the city of Naseriyah. He is an intelligent man and a very good speaker.



SULEIMAN is a Kurdish boy from Koretan, in northern Iraq. He wants to do well at school. This is difficult because his father is getting old and Suleiman has to look after the family's sheep.



MAHMOUD is Suleiman's father. He is happy that Saddam Hussein has gone. He hopes this will bring his people more power. He wanted Suleiman to study and work in the Islamic religion. He feels sad because this probably won't happen again.

PLACES



BAGHDAD is the capital city of Iraq. It used to be beautiful but a lot of buildings were destroyed during the war. Both the new Iraqi government and the US Army have their main offices here.

NASERIYAH is Iraq's fourth largest city and an important centre for Moqtada al-Sadr Shia followers. Sheikh Aws is their leader in the city.

SUNNIS AND SHIAS

Islam was founded by Mohammed in the seventh century AD. The Sunnis and Shias are both Islamic religious groups, but they believe in different things. Over the years, this has led to disagreements and fighting.



KORETAN is a Kurdish village in the north of Iraq. The people here make a living from farming and making bricks.

SUNNIS, SHIAS

In Iraq, there are two main Islamic groups, the Sunnis and the Shias. What are the differences between them, and who are the Kurds?

THE SUNNIS: PEOPLE OF THE PROPHET

Most of the world's Muslims are Sunnis. However, in Iraq, there are far fewer Sunnis than Shias. The Sunnis are close followers of the prophet, Mohammed. They believe that Mohammed was God's last, and most important, prophet on earth.



THE SHIAS: FOLLOWERS OF IMAM ALI

The word 'Shia' or 'Shiite' means 'a follower of Imam Ali'. Ali was the prophet Mohammed's cousin. After Mohammed died, Ali tried to lead the Muslim world. But most Muslims refused to accept him and the Shia group was formed. Imam Ali is buried in the city of Najaf.

Both Sunnis and Shias agree on one thing: the Koran is the word of God spoken through Mohammed. Both groups of believers follow its message closely.



What do these words mean? You can use a dictionary.
 prophet bury ethnic persecute haven

AND KURDS

THE KURDS: A PEOPLE WITHOUT A COUNTRY



The Kurds live in an area of mountains covering parts of Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Iran. They call it Kurdistan but it is not a country. They are the largest ethnic group in the world without their own country.

The history of Kurdistan is violent. For hundreds of years, their people have been persecuted by their neighbours. The worst attack happened in 1988 when Saddam's cousin, Ali Hasan al-Majid, destroyed around 1,200 Kurdish villages. During Saddam's rule around 300,000 Kurds were killed.

In the 1990s, things got better. The Kurdish area was protected by the USA and Britain, and called a 'safe haven'.

The safe haven meant that the Kurds were allowed to rule themselves. Later,

after Saddam had gone, they held their own elections.

Today, most Kurds in Iraq realise that having their own country is not yet possible. They would like to see Iraq as a set of states, similar to the USA. Their state would be the largest. It would still be part of Iraq, but would manage the lives of its people on its own. Kurdish politicians would still be part of the government. Their dream of self-rule is also closer today than ever.

What do you know about other world religions? Talk to a partner.

