

Children teach each other

Muslim, Jewish and Christian students are learning about differences and similarities.

By **JORGE BARRIENTOS IRVINE WORLD NEWS**

About 75 shoeless Jewish, Muslim and Christian schoolchildren sat together on Tuesday at Irvine's New Horizon Elementary School, a Muslim school.

"Why do we have to take our shoes off?" asked 11-year-old Joshua Munic from Morasha Jewish Day School in Rancho Santa Margarita.

Like the green kippah on the boy's head, it's a sign of respect, parent volunteer Omar Ezzeldine told him. And it keeps the floors clean.

Munic and his Jewish classmates, students from the Christian St. John's Episcopal School and students from the host New Horizon are learning about their religious similarities and differences as part of the semester-long Jerusalem Sky Project, a program by the Anti-Defamation League Orange County/Long Beach Region.

Tuesday was the first meeting of the three groups of students in grades 4-8. The day was spent learning about Islam, playing a cultural icebreaking game, watching the Muslim students pray and participating in other activities to get to know each other's religions.

Darcy Fehringer, project director, said the project gives students a chance to learn about each other, an opportunity that they don't usually get.

"It gives them a chance to learn what they have in common," Fehringer said. "And also see how their differences make each student unique."

And with religions fighting each other every day in today's world, it is important that the students understand how much they have in common with each other, Fehringer said.

"We really wanted to stay away from greater world issues," she said.

The project gets the students together at each school to learn about each religion.

The idea for the program came from the Anti-Defamation League's New York office and was inspired by the children's book "Jerusalem Sky: Stars, Crosses & Crescents," by Mark Podwal. The book looks at commonalities of the three religions in an artistic and poetic manner, said Melissa Carr, special projects director for the league.

Carr introduced the idea to the Orange County league, and said the program is starting out as a success. "It's more than I imagined," she said. "Today is brilliant. Everyone has learned something new." Umar Abbas, a 10-year-old from New Horizon, sat with his new Jewish and Christian friends during lunch time. "I think it's interesting, and I'm happy to learn about other religions," Abbas said. Benjamin Siegal, an 11-year-old from Morasha, played ping pong with his new friends. "It's very interesting," he said. "We're not really that different." Eddie Pruette, a 13-year-old from St. John's, also thought the project was a good idea.

"We don't usually get a chance to learn about different religions," he said.

Students will meet next at Morasha Jewish Day School in Rancho Santa Margarita on Oct. 12, and will meet on Nov. 8 at St. John's Episcopal School, also in Rancho Santa Margarita.

At the end of the program, students will exhibit poetry and art from 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Nov. 27 at Rancho Santa Margarita Bell Tower.



PHOTOS BY JEFFREY ANTENORE / IRVINE WORLD NEWS

JOSHUA NUNIC (left) and Benjamin Siegel, from Morasha Jewish Day School, raise their hands to answer a question about Islam in America.



OMAR EZZELDINE, of the New Horizon Muslim school in Irvine, lectures to students.

What students learned

- Muslims believe one God - Allah
- Islam is the religion; Muslim is a person who follows Islam
- One in five people in the world is Muslim
- Muslims believe in angels, prophets, Day of Judgment and a holy book
- Muslims pray five times a day

