NOTES

Movements within Islam
Not long after Muhammad’s death, divisions arose within Islam over his successor. The split between Sunni and Shiite Muslims had a profound impact on later Islamic history.

Rival Factions: Sunnis & Shiites
The Sunnis felt that the caliph (successor to Muhammad) should be chosen by leaders of the Muslim community. Although the Sunnis agreed that the caliph should be a pious (good, obedient) Muslim, they viewed him simply as a leader, not as a religious authority.

The Shiites, on the other hand, argued that the only true successors to Muhammad were descendants of Muhammad’s daughter and son-in-law, Fatima and Ali. The Shiites believed that the descendants of Muhammad were divinely inspired.

Ali became the fourth caliph, but he was assassinated in 661 in a struggle for leadership. Later his son, too, was killed. Many other Shiites died in battle against the Sunnis, trying to install their candidates for caliph. Shiites grew to admire martyrdom (death or suffering in the name of your religion) as a demonstration of their faith.

The split between Sunni and Shiite Muslims has survived for more than 1,300 years. Members of both branches believe in one true God, look to the Quran for guidance, and make the hajj to Mecca. But numerous differences have emerged in such areas as religious practice, law, and daily life. Traditionally, Sunnis have been the majority branch within Islam. Today, about 90 percent of Muslims are Sunnis. Most Shiites live in Iran, Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen.

Sufis
A third tradition emerged with the Sufis, Muslim mystics who sought communion with God through meditation, fasting, and other rituals. Sufis were respected for their piety and miraculous powers. One of the earliest Sufis, Rabiah al-Adawiyya, rejected marriage and devoted her life to prayer. In her poetry, she urged Muslims to worship God selflessly, without hope of reward:

Oh my Lord, if I worship Thee from
fear of Hell, burn me in Hell,
And if I worship Thee in hope of
Paradise, exclude me from Paradise.
But, if I worship Thee for thine own sake,
Then without not from me Thine eternal beauty.
Like Christian monks and nuns, some Sufis helped spread Islam through missionary work. They carried the faith to remote villages where they blended local traditions and beliefs into Muslim culture.

**The Arab Empire**

After the death of Ali, the Umayyad family set up a dynasty (ruling family) that ruled the Islamic world until 750. From their capital at Damascus in Syria, they directed the spectacular conquests that carried Islam from the Atlantic to the Indus Valley.

**The Umayyads** - Even as victories expanded the Arab empire, the Umayyads faced numerous problems. First, they had to adapt from desert life to ruling large cities and huge territories. To govern their empire, the Umayyads often relied on local officials, including educated Jews, Greeks, and Persians. As a result, Byzantine and Persian traditions of government influenced Arab rulers. While conquests continued, vast wealth flowed into Umayyad hands. When conquests slowed in the 700s, the second problem arose. Economic tensions increased between wealthy Arabs and those who had less. Many Muslims criticized the court at Damascus for abandoning the simple way of the early caliphs. Third, Shiites hated the Umayyads because they had defeated Ali and killed his son, dishonoring the Prophet’s family. Lastly, unrest also festered among non-Arab converts to Islam, who under the Umayyads had fewer rights than Arabs.

**The Abbassids** - Discontented Muslims found a leader in Abu al-Abbas, who captured Damascus in 750. Soon, after one of his generals invited members of the defeated Umayyad family to a banquet - and killed them all. Only one Umayyad escaped to Spain, where he set up an independent caliphate at Cordoba. Abu al-Abbas then founded the Abbassid dynasty, which lasted until 1258. The Abbassid dynasty ended Arab dominance and helped make Islam a truly universal religion. Under the early Abbassids, the empire of the caliphs reached its greatest wealth and power, and Islamic civilizations enjoyed a golden age.

**Questions**

1. What was the reason for early conflicts in the Muslim community following Muhammad’s death?
   a. What two groups arose?
2. What kind of person did the Sunnis believe the next caliph should be?
   a. How did they view the caliph?
3. Who did the Shiites believe the next caliph should be?
   a. Why was being a “descendant of Muhammad” valued so highly by the Shiites?
4. Who became the fourth caliph?
   a. What happened to Ali and his son?
   b. What is a martyr?
   c. Why did Shiites admire martyrdom?
5. Identify 3 similarities and 3 differences between the Sunnis and Shiites.
6. Who are the Sufis?
   a. What did Rabiah al-Adawiyya believe?
7. Who ruled following the death of Ali?
8. What 4 problems did the Umayyads face? Be sure to write complete thoughts for each problem.
9. How did the Abbassids contribute to the Umayyad’s end?
10. What impact did the Abbassids have over Islam and Islamic civilizations?

Assignment #2

Essential Questions (to guide you only)

What led to the Abbassid Golden Age? How did the Abbassid Golden Age impact the Middle East, other regions, and later periods in history?

**Directions:** Read the passage below about Ibn al-Nadim’s book, the *Fihrist*, and answer the questions in a Google Doc. Share BOTH Assignment 1 & 2 together upon completion.

Ibn al-Nadim, was a bookseller in Baghdad, the capital of the Abbassid Caliphate at the end of the 10th century. He is most known for his book called the *Fihrist*. It is a bibliography, list of books, chronicling what was in his bookstore. He made notes about some of the books, and put them into categories. Here is an English translation of the table of contents from the *Fihrist*:

**CHAPTER VII**
- Section 1. Philosophy; the Greek Philosophers, al-Kindi and Other Scholars
- Section 2. Mathematics and Astronomy
- Section 3. Medicine: Greek and Islamic

**CHAPTER VIII**
- Section 1. Story Tellers and Stories
- Section 2. Exorcists, Jugglers, and Magicians
- Section 3. Miscellaneous Subjects and Fables

**CHAPTER IX**
- Section 1. The Sabians, Manichaeason, Daysaniyah, Khurramiyah, Marcionites, and Other Sects
- Section 2. Information about India, Indochina, and China

In Chapter VII, Section I of the *Fihrist*, Ibn al-Nadim tells a story about a dream that Caliph al-Ma'mun, ruler of the Abbassid dynasty from 813-833, had in which Aristotle, the Greek philosopher speaks with him. In their conversation Aristotle assures al-Ma’mun that “reason,” logical thinking that science is based on, and “revelation,” which the Islamic faith is based in, can be combined for the good of the public. Al-Ma’mun took this dream as a sign. Al-Nadim wrote the following in the *Fihrist*, explaining the impact of this dream:

*This dream was one of the most definite reasons for the output of books. Between al-Ma’mun and the Byzantine emperor there was correspondence ... so al-Ma’mun wrote to the Byzantine emperor asking his permission to obtain a selection of old*
scientific manuscripts, stored and treasured in the country of the Byzantines. After first refusing, he finally complied, and al-Ma’mun sent forth a number of scholars, among them al-Hajjaj ibn Matar, Ibn al-Batrik, Salman, the director of the House of Wisdom and many others. They selected books from those they found and brought them back to al-Ma’mun, who ordered them to prepare translations of them.

4. Based on this text, what can you infer about life in Baghdad and the relationships between the Abbasid Caliphate and other political powers at the end of the 10th century?

What led to the Abbasid Golden Age?

- The Abbasid Caliphate (750–1258) is considered the Golden Age of Islam because it was a long period of stability in which centers of trade became wealthy centers of learning and innovation.
- As a result of its location at a crossroads of trade between Europe, Asia, and North Africa, the Middle East and especially major trading and religious centers like Baghdad, Cairo, and Mecca, became prosperous cities that attracted merchants and scholars.
- Muslim scholars collected the writings of scholars from Ancient Greece, Classical Greece and Rome, India, and China, translated them into Arabic, then improved on the discoveries of the past.

5. Identify three reasons why a golden age took place during the Abbasid Caliphate.