

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Seerah for Kids

The Prophet's life in nine parts -
one sitting at a time

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For parents: how to tell it

One part per sitting.

Nine parts is nine bedtimes, or nine weeks of a weekend class. Told as one long story it becomes a lesson; told in parts it stays a story, and a child asks for the next one.

Say the one idea, then stop.

Each part above has a single idea attached. Say it once, in your own words, and resist adding a second. A story with one point lands; a story with four points has none.

Let the hard parts stay hard.

Ta'if and the boycott are not comfortable, and softening them removes the reason the forgiveness at the end of part 8 means anything. Children handle difficulty in a story far better than adults expect.

Check what you pass on.

The seerah is history, carefully preserved, but popular retellings have added to it over the centuries. See the note below on the cave - it is the clearest example, and knowing about it changes how you read every children's seerah book.

One thing to know

The spider's web and pigeon's nest at the cave of Thawr appears in nearly every children's seerah book, and it is weakly narrated. What the Quran gives is stronger and needs no help (9:40): the two of them inside, the search close enough to hear, and "Do not grieve; indeed Allah is with us." We do not add to what we were given, even when the addition would improve the story.

The seerah in nine parts

Part 1 · The city, and the boy with no parents

ages 4+

Makkah was a trading city built around the Kaaba, which Ibrahim and Isma'il had raised long before - but by then it was filled with idols. Muhammad (peace be upon him) was born there around 570 CE. His father had already died. His mother died when he was about six, his grandfather two years later, and he was raised by his uncle Abu Talib.

The one idea: He knew what it was to lose people, before anything else happened to him. The Quran speaks to him about it directly: "Did He not find you an orphan and shelter you?"

Source: Quran 93:6-8

Part 2 · The man nobody could call a liar

ages 5+

Long before anyone called him a prophet, Makkah called him al-Amin - the trustworthy. People left their valuables with him for safekeeping, including people who later opposed him. When the tribes rebuilt the Kaaba and nearly came to blows over who would set the Black Stone in place, they agreed to accept the judgement of the next man to walk in. It was him. He laid the stone on a cloak and had a leader of each tribe lift a corner, so every one of them carried it together.

The one idea: His character was established before his message was. That is why the accusation that he was a liar never held in Makkah - they had forty years of evidence.

Source: The seerah (Ibn Ishaq)

Part 3 · Read

ages 6+

He used to withdraw to a cave on Mount Hira to think. In Ramadan, when he was about forty, the angel Jibril came to him there and said Iqra - read. He answered that he could not read. It happened three times, and then came the first words of the Quran ever revealed. He went home shaking, and Khadijah - an established merchant, older than him, who had proposed their marriage herself - wrapped him in a cloak and told him Allah would never disgrace him, because of the kind of man he was.

The one idea: The first word of the Quran is a command to read. That is worth saying out loud to a child who is learning to.

Source: Quran 96:1-5 · Sahih al-Bukhari

Part 4 · The years that were hard

ages 7+

For about thirteen years in Makkah the message was met with mockery, then boycott, then violence against the weakest of those who followed it. He went to Ta'if to look for shelter and was driven out by children throwing stones. The seerah records that the angel of the mountains was sent to him and offered to crush the town between two hills, and he said no - hoping that their children, or their children's children, would one day worship Allah.

The one idea: This is the single clearest picture of his character in the whole seerah, and children understand it immediately: he could have ended them, and he thought about their grandchildren instead.

Source: Sahih al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim

Part 5 · The night journey

ages 7+

In one night he was taken from Makkah to Masjid al-Aqsa in Jerusalem, and from there raised through the heavens, where he met prophets who had come before him - Adam, Yusuf, Musa, 'Isa and Ibrahim among them. It was on this night that the five daily prayers were given.

The one idea: The prayers a child is learning were given on the hardest night of his life, right after the year he lost both Khadijah and Abu Talib. Salah arrives as a gift, not a burden.

Source: Quran 17:1 · Sahih al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim

Part 6 · Leaving home

ages 7+

When staying in Makkah became impossible, the Muslims left for Yathrib - afterwards called Madinah. He left last, with Abu Bakr, and they hid three nights in the cave of Thawr while search parties came close enough to be heard. The Quran describes that moment: "the second of two, when they were in the cave, when he said to his companion, do not grieve; indeed Allah is with us." This migration - the Hijrah, 622 CE - is year one of the Islamic calendar.

The one idea: Do not grieve, Allah is with us. Said inside a cave, with the people hunting them audible outside.

Source: Quran 9:40

Part 7 · Building a city

ages 8+

In Madinah the first thing built was the masjid, and the first thing organised was people. Each emigrant from Makkah was paired with a helper from Madinah - the Muhajirun and the Ansar - who shared their home and income with someone they had not previously known. An agreement was drawn up setting out the rights and duties of the city's groups, Muslim and Jewish alike.

The one idea: A community was built deliberately, by pairing people and writing down what they owed each other. It did not happen by itself.

Source: The seerah (Ibn Ishaq)

Part 8 · Going back

ages 8+

Eight years after leaving, he returned to Makkah with an army so large the city did not fight. He entered it having ordered that there be no killing, went to the Kaaba and cleared it of idols. Then he faced the people who had driven him out, tortured his companions and killed his family members, and asked them what they thought he would do. They said: a noble brother, and the son of a noble brother. He told them to go - they were free.

The one idea: He had total power over the people who had hurt him most, and he let every one of them go. This is the part of the seerah children remember for the rest of their lives.

Source: The seerah (Ibn Ishaq)

Part 9 · The last words

ages 9+

On his final pilgrimage he addressed the largest gathering of Muslims of his life. He told them their lives and property were sacred to one another; that no Arab is superior to a non-Arab, nor white to black, except by God-consciousness; that they should take care of women; and he asked them three times whether he had delivered the message. He died in Madinah a few months later, in 11 AH (632 CE), at about sixty-three.

The one idea: The last public thing he said included the statement that no one is above anyone else by colour or by lineage - in the seventh century.

Source: Musnad Ahmad