

Handouts for A Mosque in Sleepyville

Role Cards

A Mosque in Sleepyville (for all participants)

You live in the picturesque town of Sleepyville, a town of about 80,000 people. In the last 60 years, the population has changed radically, partly because younger people have mostly moved to larger cities, as job opportunities are better there, but also because the region has seen the arrival of a large number of immigrant families, many from Muslim countries. Some of these families have been here for three generations, but they are still treated with suspicion as 'newcomers' by many people in the town. They now make up almost 15% of the total population.

The issue that is dividing the town now, is the desire of Muslims in Sleepyville to have a mosque built on a piece of derelict land belonging to the council. This land has been undeveloped and has been a source of complaints to the council for years: it is near the main shopping street and is in an area where vandalism and drug-taking have become a regular problem. Therefore, when a rich business person offered to take the problem off the Council's hands, the Mayor thought his lucky day had come! The Council readily agreed to give up the land and to fund 20% of the construction costs for a new mosque on the site. The remaining 10% of the building costs, which the business person could not cover, were to be found from among the Muslim community. Building was meant to start this week but the Council has been flooded with complaints from angry residents who object to the project. They have called a special meeting, to which all are invited, to resolve this issue. The meeting will take place in 30 minutes.

Role card: The Mayor of Sleepyville

You are the Chair of the assembly and it will be your role, once the meeting starts, to welcome participants and remind them of the rules of debate. During the meeting, you should try to give everyone the opportunity to speak - and should not allow anyone to speak for too long! You are very worried about the bad publicity that this case has been attracting and before the meeting, you plan to try to speak to some of the groups to persuade them to soften their position.

Role card: Town Council member: Traditionalist Party (1 or 2 people)

You represent the Traditionalist Party on the Town Council, and you are strongly opposed to the mosque. You do not think it is right that council land and council resources should be spent on a place of worship that does not respect the traditions of this country and this town. You feel that immigrant families are privileged to be allowed to live here and that they should not try to impose different lifestyles on a country where they are guests. You are also worried that the mosque could become a meeting area for recruiting terrorists.



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Role card: Town Council member: Populist Party (1 or 2 people)

You represent the Populist Party on the Town Council. You supported the original decision to have the Mosque built on the land, partly because you realise that the Muslim community has been very good for the economy of the town and you do not want to alienate them. However, you have been very worried about complaints from residents and do not want to create unnecessary conflict in the community. You are also concerned about your seat in the next council elections, so you will probably support whichever option appears to be least controversial.

Role card: Town Council member: Diversity Party (1 or 2 people)

You represent the Diversity Party on the Town Council. You believe that the relatively large proportion of people from different parts of the world has added to the culture and interest of Sleepyville and you have felt it unfair that the town has deprived many of these people of the opportunity to practice their religion for so long. You can also see that the derelict land is causing social problems in the town and that the Council does not have the money to develop it themselves at the moment.

Role card: Members of the 'Past and Present' Association of Sleepyville (2-4 people)

You are one of the main groups opposed to this mosque. Your members are from traditional (non-Muslim) communities in Sleepyville, and you think it is very important to keep the ancient character of the town, where most of you have lived all your lives. The site that is proposed for the mosque is very central and it would be visible from most places in the town centre.

In particular, the mosque could block out the view of the main church from the town square. You feel that the character of your hometown is being completely changed by a community that arrived here only recently. You do not see why people who arrived in this country from somewhere else should not live by the same rules as you have here.



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Role card: Members of the Youth Action Group 'Young Sleepies for Human Rights!' (2-4 people)

Your group was set up to address some of the worst problems for young people today in Sleepyville. You see the building of the mosque as a solution both to the Muslim community's need for a place of worship, and as a solution to the numerous social problems, which have been a result of the land being left derelict for so long. You support the building of this mosque but you are concerned that the Council may neglect other social problems if they have to contribute financially to the building. In particular, the youth budget over the past five years has been cut to a level where it cannot begin to meet the needs of the town.

Role card: Members of the 'Muslim Association of Sleepyville' (2-4 people)

You have been asking the Council for years to provide a place of worship for the Muslim community, but it has been always refused on financial grounds. You feel that it is unfair that the Muslim community is being asked to find 10% of the building costs, when economic conditions are so harsh for most people, and when the Christian community has eleven different places of worship and these are used by far fewer people than this one mosque would be. You feel that the contribution that your community has made to the town is not appreciated, that people in your community are unfairly discriminated against in various aspects of their life, and that in refusing to allow this mosque, the council is denying members of your community their fundamental right to religious expression.

Role card: Citizens of Sleepyville

You are worried about the conflict that seems to have taken over the town of Sleepyville and you want to go to the meeting of the Town Council in order to vote. At the moment, you do not know what you will vote for: you need to speak to as many different groups as you can and then you plan to make up your mind in time for the vote.

