

TANENBAUM

# Religions in My Neighborhood

Teaching Curiosity  
and Respect about  
Religious Differences

**Including: The Seven Principles for Inclusive Education**





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Teaching Curiosity and Respect about  
Religious Differences



Imagine...a more peaceful world that respects difference.  
We are committed to making that vision a reality.

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## INTRODUCTORY RESOURCES

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# Chapter V (Unit 2): Learning from Religious Differences

## BIG IDEAS FOR V (2)

- People can find ways to learn from each other about their differences in beliefs and religions.
- People can find ways to solve conflicts around difference, including religious difference.

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR V (2)

- If we disagree about our beliefs, how can we get along together?
- Are there places in our lives where we get along with people who have different religious beliefs from us?
- What happens if people do not try to get along when they believe differently?
- What are some ways to learn from each other about our differences in beliefs and religions?
- When do religious differences lead to conflict?
- Can we arrive at common understandings that reduce religious conflict?

## NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR V (2)

- English Language Arts: 1, 2, 3, 8, 9
- Social Studies: 1, 3, 5, 6

## CHAPTER V (2): FINDING PRODUCTIVE WAYS TO LEARN FROM EACH OTHER ABOUT THEIR DIFFERENCES IN BELIEFS AND RELIGIONS

Lead students in an exploration of the many non-violent movements that have created social change. Read aloud from one or more of these books:

- *Peacemakers in Action: Profiles of Religion in Conflict Resolution* by Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding (2007).
- *After Gandhi: One Hundred Years of Nonviolent Resistance* by Anne Sibley O'Brien and Perry Edmond O'Brien (2009). Go to the book's website at: [http://www.charlesbridge.com/client/client\\_pages/after\\_gandhi/gandhi\\_home.html](http://www.charlesbridge.com/client/client_pages/after_gandhi/gandhi_home.html) and click on "extras;" then click on "teacher's guide." Also click on "downloadable posters" for free portraits of peacemakers.
- United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989)
- *For Every Child* by Caroline Castle (2001).

Following the readings, some of these questions might be asked:

- What have you learned so far about differences between religious groups?
- What more would you like to learn about differences between religious groups?
- Are there sometimes differences within a religious group? Do members of the same family or same religious community sometimes differ from each other in their beliefs, practices, or traditions?
- What are some similarities and differences that you have noticed between different religious groups' rituals and traditions?
- What are some similarities and differences that you have noticed among members of the same religious group's rituals and traditions?
- What are some of the ways that people have found to learn from each other about their differences?

The closing activity for this curriculum is to draw upon the curriculum resources that are linked to "Not In Our Town."

Not In Our Town is a neighborhood and community movement that encourages and connects people who are responding to religious conflict and working to build more inclusive communities. Not In Our Town provides curriculum materials to combat religious intolerance, and a portion of the curriculum is dedicated to understanding religious differences around symbols of light.

Curriculum resources from Not In Our Town are as follows:

- View the PBS DVD Not In Our Town: <http://www.pbs.org/niot/about/niot1.html>

Explain to students that the neighborhood and community actions described through Not in Our Town were inspired by the events in Billings, Montana in 1993, when a number of hate crimes were committed against African Americans, American Indians, and Jews. The community acted assertively and collectively after someone threw a cinder block through the window of Isaac Schnitzer's bedroom, where he had placed a menorah in celebration of the Jewish holiday Hanukkah. Isaac's parents, Tammie and Brian Schnitzer, asked the local newspaper to make this incident front page news so that other people in the neighborhood would understand what it was like to be threatened for being Jewish. In response, the local newspaper, The Billings Gazette, printed a full-page picture of a menorah and urged citizens to put them up in their homes and businesses.

Hundreds of people responded by placing the pictures of menorahs in their windows. In this way, hundreds of people were saying, "We are all supporting the religious practices of Jewish people." Although vandals threw bricks through the windows of a school and two churches that had put the menorahs up, and residents of several homes displaying menorahs received late night calls from individuals making anti-Semitic comments and telling them to go outside and look at their cars, which had been vandalized, the people in this town did not give up. Police Chief Wayne Inman urged more and more

citizens to put up the menorahs. "Visible signs of support for the Jewish community have to increase, not decrease. For every vandalism that is made, I hope that 10 other people put menorahs in their windows."



By the end of December, more than 10,000 people in Billings, Montana had menorahs in their windows." See the website of PBS for this information and more: <http://www.pbs.org/niot/about/niot1.html>.

The Not In Our Town Movement has expanded to many communities responding to many forms of intolerance and religious conflict. It is an example of how a neighborhood took action to end conflict and build a safe, interreligious community where everyone could follow their different beliefs, rituals, traditions and practices.

The PBS website (<http://www.pbs.org/niot/index.html>) contains many resources for activities under the menu tabs: "Citizens

Respond to Hate," "Talk About It," and "Get Involved."

Under "Get Involved," there are a great number of classroom activities that can be freely downloaded at no cost and can be adapted for your students' age group.

