

TANENBAUM

Religions in My Neighborhood

Teaching Curiosity
and Respect about
Religious Differences

Including: The Seven Principles for Inclusive Education



Religions

in My

Neighborhood

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

Table of Contents	1
Open Letter to Facilitators, Teachers, Parents and Others	5
Overview of Major World Religions, Spiritual Traditions and Systems of Belief Practiced in the United States	13
Six Goals for Student Learning Outcomes	29
Meeting National Standards	30
The Tanenbaum Pedagogy: The Seven Principles for Inclusive Education	35
CHAPTER I: Differences are Normal: Identities, Families and Communities	47
Goals for Student Learning in Chapter I.....	47
Big Ideas for Chapter I.....	47
Essential Questions for Chapter I.....	47
Chapter I (Unit 1): My Responsibility in My Learning Community	48
Big Ideas for I (1).....	48
Essential Questions for I (1).....	48
National Standards for I (1).....	48
Chapter I (Unit 2): My Identity in My Learning Community	55
Big Ideas for I (2).....	55
Essential Questions for I (2).....	55
National Standards for I (2).....	55
Chapter I (Unit 3): My Participation in My Learning Community	63
Big Ideas for I (3).....	63
Essential Questions for I (3).....	63
National Standards for I (3)	63
Chapter I (Unit 4): My Family in My Learning Community; My Understanding of Difference	70
Big Ideas for I (4).....	70
Essential Questions for I (4).....	70
National Standards for I (4)	70

CHAPTER II: Big Questions with Many Answers	81
Goals for Student Learning in Chapter II.....	81
Big Ideas for Chapter II.....	81
Essential Questions for Chapter II.....	81
Chapter II (Unit 1): A Garden of Questions and Answers about Beliefs	82
Big Ideas for II (1).....	82
Essential Questions for II (1).....	82
National Standards for II (1)	82
Chapter II (Unit 2): Stories Told about Beliefs	88
Big Ideas for II (2).....	88
Essential Questions for II (2).....	88
National Standards for II (2)	88
Chapter II (Unit 3): Stories Told in Different Religions about Beliefs in a God or Gods	93
Big Ideas for II (3).....	93
Essential Questions for II (3).....	93
National Standards for II (3)	93
CHAPTER III: Common Understandings among Different Religions	101
Goals for Student Learning in Chapter III.....	101
Big Ideas for Chapter III.....	101
Essential Questions for Chapter III.....	101
Chapter III (Unit 1): Beliefs about Caring for Each Other	102
Big Ideas for III (1).....	102
Essential Question for III (1).....	102
National Standards for III (1)	102
Chapter III (Unit 2): Beliefs about Caring for the Environment	108
Big Ideas for III (2).....	108
Essential Questions for III (2).....	108
National Standards for III (2)	108
Chapter III (Unit 3): Beliefs about Caring for My Neighborhood and Serving My Community	113
Big Ideas for III (3).....	113
Essential Questions for III (3).....	113
National Standards for III (3)	113
CHAPTER IV: Rituals and Traditions	121
Goals for Student Learning in Chapter IV	121
Big Ideas for Chapter IV	121
Essential Question for Chapter IV	121

Chapter IV (Unit 1): Learning about Rituals and Traditions	122
Big Ideas for IV (1)	122
Essential Questions for IV (1)	122
National Standards for IV (1)	122
Chapter IV (Unit 2): Rituals and Traditions about Sacred Spaces	126
Big Ideas for IV (2)	126
Essential Questions for IV (2)	126
National Standards for IV (2)	126
Chapter IV (Unit 3): Rituals and Traditions about Prayer and Meditation	130
Big Ideas for IV (3)	130
Essential Questions for IV (3)	130
National Standards for IV (3)	130
Chapter IV (Unit 4): Rituals and Traditions about Renewal: Letting Go of Old Ways and Starting Fresh	135
Big Ideas for IV (4)	135
Essential Questions for IV (4)	135
National Standards for IV (4)	135
Chapter IV (Unit 5): Rituals and Traditions about Harvest: Collecting Resources	144
Big Ideas for IV (5)	144
Essential Questions for IV (5)	144
National Standards for IV (5)	144
Chapter IV (Unit 6): Rituals and Traditions about Light: Hopefulness and Waiting	151
Big Ideas for IV (6)	151
Essential Questions for IV (6)	151
National Standards for IV (6)	151
CHAPTER V: Learning about Religious Differences	167
Goals for Student Learning in Chapter V	167
Big Ideas for Chapter IV	167
Essential Questions for Chapter IV	167
Chapter V (Unit 1): Learning about Differences between Religious Groups	168
Big Ideas for V (1)	168
Essential Questions for V (1)	168
National Standards for V (1)	168
Chapter V (Unit 2): Learning from Religious Differences	174
Big Ideas for V (2)	174
Essential Questions for V (2)	174
National Standards for V (2)	174

CHAPTER V

Learning about Religious Differences

GOALS FOR STUDENT LEARNING IN CHAPTER V: 1, 3, 4, 5, 6

BIG IDEAS FOR CHAPTER V

- Religious groups are distinguished by their beliefs, which are often expressed through different traditions and rituals.
- Sometimes religious differences lead to conflict.
- Many religious conflicts are magnified by other big questions such as: *Where do people have spaces where they can live or pray? Who has enough to eat or drink? Who are the rulers of the people? How do the people exercise power? Is everyone able to follow their own religious beliefs, traditions and rituals?*

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER V

- How can we respect religious difference between religious groups?
- If I believe differently from someone else, can I be caring and respectful toward that person?
- How can we figure out if a conflict is religious or about some other big questions (such as access to space, jobs or food)?

Chapter V (Unit 1): Learning about Differences between Religious Groups

BIG IDEAS FOR V (1)

- Religious communities can be distinguished by their different beliefs, which are often expressed through their different traditions and rituals.
- Sometimes religious differences lead to conflict between different religious communities.
- Sometimes these religious conflicts between communities get magnified by other big questions such as: *Where can people live or pray? Who has enough to eat or drink? Who are the rulers and how do the rulers treat these different religious communities?*

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR V (1)

- How can we respect religious difference between religious communities?
- If I believe differently than another, can I also be caring and respectful?
- How can we figure out whether a conflict between religious communities is about religious beliefs or about other big questions?

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR V (1)

- English Language Arts: 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12
- Social Studies: 1, 3, 5

LESSON V (1): EXPLORING BELIEFS ABOUT RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCE

Rationale: Why teach this lesson?

The perspectives of young children are shaped by their experiences with the people with whom they spend the most time: people in their family, their home and their learning communities. Whether a child is taught a religious belief at home, or alternatively, has no exposure to religion at home, it is likely that the child may believe that their home experiences are the “norm.” They are likely to expect all of their peers to have similar experiences and beliefs. When children learn from a very early age that their beliefs are valid and can be affirmed, while simultaneously validating and affirming the beliefs of others, they may be more prepared to develop perspectives that are inclusive and fair for all members of a democratic society.

Instructors can think about this chapter as the culmination and synthesis of the learning activities from the earlier chapters.

Think ahead – What to be prepared for:

When children learn about differences for the very first time, they may form stereotypes about those people or practices that are different. As children explore different religions or non-religious beliefs, rituals, practices and traditions, it is critical that they realize there is much more underneath these different practices and that this lesson just begins to scratch the surface of depth and breadth of diversity within and among differences of religions, belief, traditions and practices.

As we have said many times in this book, it is essential that children and families understand that the learning community is studying about different belief systems, NOT learning how or what to believe. It is critical for the educator to communicate to families that when young children study diverse major world religions, spiritual traditions, and systems of belief practiced in the United States, they have a firm foundation to grow into adults who can lead conflict resolution and engage in full participation in a democratic society.

Objectives for this lesson – Students will:

- Expand understandings of religious diversity.
- See the points of view from diverse religious perspectives.
- Make connections between family life and religious practice.
- Work in small groups to craft “paper people” that represent a range of religious beliefs.
- Work with a large group to build an “inter-religious neighborhood” out of cardboard.
- Learn from peers in the learning community about various religious and non-religious beliefs.
- Heighten awareness of religious beliefs with which they were previously unfamiliar.

Materials needed:

- Overview of Major World Religions, Spiritual Traditions and Systems of Belief Practiced in the United States (at the beginning of this book).
- Books:
 - *Kids Book of World Religions* by Jennifer Glossip (2003). (The watercolor illustrations in this book are especially captivating for very young children who are still emerging readers.)
 - *Children Just Like Me: Celebrations!* by Anabel Kindersley, Barnabas Kindersley (1997). (Informative photographs throughout this book.)
 - *A Faith Like Mine* by Laura Buller (2005) (Informative photographs throughout this book).
 - Drawing paper or oak tag approximately 9” x 12”
- Crayons, markers
- Craft sticks/popsicle sticks
- A wide selection of “skin color” crayons or “skin color” markers
- Tape, cardboard
- Collection of boxes: shoe boxes, shipping boxes (many brown cardboard boxes can be collected from the school cafeteria each day) or folded cardboard.

Time needed:

3–4 class meetings, 45 minutes each

Setting the lesson:

Gather students in a discussion circle. Ask students what they can remember from previous lessons regarding world religions. On chart paper, make a list of all the world religions that students can remember. If the list is brief, consult the Overview of Major World Religions, Spiritual Traditions and Systems of Belief Practiced in the United States at the beginning of this book and add some more religions to the list.

Procedure for the lesson:

Day 1:

Students work in small groups of 2 or 3. Each group will have one of the books listed above or photocopied pages from the books. Each group will read about various religious practices and beliefs and study the illustrations that accompany the text. Very young children will need to work with reading buddies from an older age-group or volunteer adults from the community.

Each group selects at least two or three religions in which the families of their “paper people” will participate. Make a list of the two or three religions for each group. Give each group a manila folder and print the list clearly on the folder for each group. The students may collect information about their selected religions to study and keep the information in the group folder.

The goal is for each small group to learn about two or three religions from these sources.

Each group will make a collection of “paper people” to represent the religious groups they are studying. They will make two or three families with as many individual paper people as the group chooses to craft.

Day 2: Make the “paper people”

Encourage the children to make families of paper people that represent each religious group they are studying. Students should work at the appropriate developmental level to draw human figures, color the skin, features and clothing, cut them out and attach a folded piece of cardboard to help the figure stand-up.

This means that children in the fourth grade may draw fully detailed human features, while kindergarten children may make little “blobs” with arms sticking out (often called “tadpole people” by educators who are discussing developmental drawing skills). These are all appropriate expressions of the human figure across grade levels and developmental learning levels.

Another approach is to provide very young children with photocopies from the books and teach the children to cut out the photos and add color with markers and crayons. This is a more adult-pleasing approach, but it loses the opportunity for children who are emerging from the scribbling stage to develop motor skills that are connected to their cognitive understanding of human diversity.

Also encourage the students to consider inter-religious families that may be headed by adults who have created a union from two different religious backgrounds. If their paper families represent an inter-religious family, what may be the children’s different experiences in those families?

Day 3: Make an inter-religious neighborhood

Students will use boxes to construct a neighborhood in which all these families can reside peacefully. They can use shoe boxes to stack together to make apartment buildings, or individual boxes to make single family homes.

Make paper props to accompany each family. Encourage the children to make a place for the family to gather inside the box: a kitchen, or a family room and all the accoutrements. Instruct students to include evidence of the family's religious beliefs and practices. Will that be evident in their clothing, in a wall decoration, in a special book or other objects?

Day 4:

Gather the small groups together back into a discussion group. Each small group shares information about their paper families and about each family's religious experiences. Lead the group in a discussion about what else is needed in the neighborhood to support each family's religious practices. What kinds of space do these families need for their religious practices? Do they need special foods on an everyday basis, or for special rituals or holy days? Are there religious leaders for different religious communities who live in the community? What other needs might families have to practice their different religious beliefs in a shared inter-religious neighborhood for everyone?

Closure for the lesson:

Set up a display area for the inter-religious neighborhood they constructed (Day 3). Gather students in a discussion group in front of the inter-religious neighborhood. Use chart paper to make a list of each student's ideas about what they think will be needed in the neighborhood to support each family's religious practices.

Assessment for the lesson:

- Can students explain that religious diversity is a normal part of U.S. society?
- Do students exhibit respect for religious difference among their peers in the learning community?
- Can students interpret differences, including religious differences, through respectful curiosity, in a way that promotes respect and inclusion?
- Do students demonstrate empathy for religious differences and accept that religious difference is normal in the U.S. and in their own families, neighborhoods, classrooms, schools, and extended communities?

Chapter V (1) Extensions:

Make more buildings for the inter-religious neighborhood. Each small group collaborates to make specific and appropriate places of worship for each religious practice in the interreligious neighborhood, as well as public community centers for ecumenical and inter-religious events. This will involve finding images for temples, synagogues, churches or cathedrals, gurdwaras, sacred spaces (mountains, for example) in nature – as well as materials for home altars or public prayer spaces.

Resources for Chapter V (1) – to develop background information:

A New Religious America: How a “Christian Country” Has Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation by Diana L. Eck (2001).

Encountering God: A Religious Journey from Bozeman to Banaras by Diana L. Eck (2003).

Taking Religious Pluralism Seriously: Spiritual Politics on America’s Sacred Ground by Barbara A. McGraw & Jo Renee Formicola (2005).