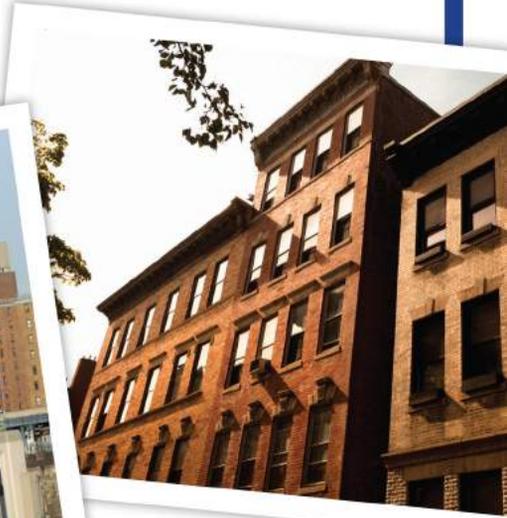


TANENBAUM

# 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.

Published in 2012 by  
Tanenbaum  
254 West 31st Street  
7th Floor  
New York, NY 10001  
[www.tanenbaum.org](http://www.tanenbaum.org)

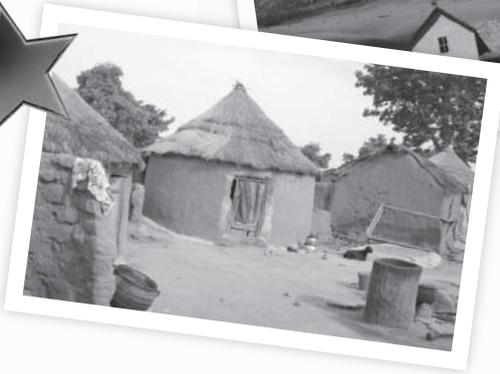
Copyright © 2012 by Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding

ISBN: 978-0-9851610-2-6

Printed in the United States of America.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted, reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

For more information, contact Tanenbaum's *Education* Program:  
212.967.7707 · [education@tanenbaum.org](mailto:education@tanenbaum.org) · [www.tanenbaum.org](http://www.tanenbaum.org)



# Religions in My Neighborhood

Teaching Curiosity  
and Respect about  
Religious Differences

## INTRODUCTORY RESOURCES

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

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





---

# Religions in My Neighborhood

---

Teaching Curiosity  
and Respect about  
Religious Differences

## AN OPEN LETTER TO FACILITATORS, TEACHERS, PARENTS AND OTHERS WHO USE THIS BOOK:

*Religions in My Neighborhood: Teaching Curiosity and Respect about Religious Differences* is designed to help children in learning communities (such as schools, after-school programs, weekend or vacation programs) understand the importance of social and cultural differences among the members of their living and learning communities. In particular, it enables them to feel comfortable noticing and talking about religious differences and to see religious differences as a normal, understandable and interesting part of other social and cultural differences they may have noticed – and wondered about.

Children notice differences among other children in their learning communities who may come from different faith traditions. They observe that the rituals or beliefs held by people they meet in everyday life are not always the same as the ones in their homes. And they see how the architecture of worship differs even in some of their neighborhoods and in the illustrations they see in picture books, on TV or in film and video. *Religions in My Neighborhood* helps children understand the world in which they live.

*Religions in My Neighborhood* can be used to supplement pre-existing curricula – or stand on its own for short-term or after-school programs. It is geared toward children in grades K–4, ages 5–9, although the units can be readily adapted for mixed age groups or older students. Its primary purpose is to help and inspire teachers/facilitators and their students to explore religious and cultural differences, and to develop respect for the diversity they encounter in their extended families, neighborhoods and learning communities.

To get started, teachers and facilitators may want to review the curriculum's useful introductory material. The section titled *Overview of Major World Religions* provides background information on the world's major belief systems and includes helpful citations for further inquiry. The overall *Six Goals for Student Learning Outcomes*, developed from Tanenbaum's *Six Behavioral Outcomes for Students*, guide the instructional units in each chapter. The section on *Meeting National Standards* shows teachers and facilitators

how *Religions in My Neighborhood* can be a useful tool for meeting national standards in Social Studies and English Language Arts. Finally, Tanenbaum’s *Seven Principles for Inclusive Education* spell out the instructional, pedagogical approach taken in all the units throughout this book, suggesting important dimensions of inclusive education for teachers and facilitators to keep in mind.

The instructional units in each chapter are supplemented by further readings and other teacher/facilitator resources. For example, each chapter and every unit opens with explicit instructional objectives and key questions for use by instructors. Each chapter references the specific *Six Goals for Student Learning Outcomes* that have shaped that chapter. To aid educators in adapting curricular units to the standards that guide many school curricula, each unit is also preceded by the specific National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) standards that it addresses. There are also optional “extensions” for teachers and facilitators who want to develop additional curricular materials on their own, beyond the curricular units in any given chapter.

Teachers and facilitators will recognize that we have adapted the principles of “backward design” from Wiggins and McTighe (2005),<sup>1</sup> which involve working backwards from clear goals or student outcomes, to the specific student activities that will foster those goals and outcomes. Following the Wiggins and McTighe method, we clarify our “Big Ideas” and our “Essential Questions” for each chapter and for each instructional unit within each chapter, and we incorporate as curricular building blocks the six major facets of understanding (explanation, interpretation, application, perspective, empathy and self-knowledge) that anchor Wiggins and McTighe. These learning blocks are as important to a five-year-old as they are to a ten-year-old, and for that reason, we have developed this curriculum with a five-year age/grade range in mind.

We acknowledge how daunting and challenging it is to teach *about* religious differences, especially when many people think (wrongly) that it is not legal or appropriate to do so. How often do we hear that teachers/facilitators must not teach “about” religion, or that by teaching “about” religion, schools and programs are appropriating a role better left to the family? We respond to this challenge by raising a related challenge – namely, that the nearly 50 million children in today’s U.S. schools (2010)<sup>2</sup> are the most diverse in our national history. Their various religious beliefs, faith traditions and practices form an important part of that diversity – sometimes visible, sometimes not. In many cases, and for many children, religion and faith constitute the most immediate and important dimension of their personal or family identity.

The living and learning communities inhabited by our children – in their schools, after-school programs, neighborhoods, and extended families, and on TV or in other media – present them with differences of religious belief, ritual, tradition and form of worship on a daily basis. These differences include children whose families may be secular, non-observant, and/or non-religious, with beliefs that are often puzzling to children from more religious or observant backgrounds.

Our challenge is this: If we avoid noticing and talking about differences based on religion, including differences based on secular and non-religious family beliefs, while focusing our attention on differences

---

1 Wiggins, G., & J. McTighe, *Understanding by Design, expanded 2nd edition*, The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (2005).

2 National Center for Education Statistics, <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=372> (2010)

based on race, ethnicity, class and gender, we are by our very silence and omission suggesting one of two things. We imply that religion is not worthy of inquiry and attention, or that it is somehow secret or frightening. In either case, this silence or omission is insulting to children for whom religion is important, and it perpetuates stereotypes based on misinformation, bias and ignorance.

The avoidance of these discussions in schools and after-school programs is sometimes based on the fear, in publicly-funded programs, of violating the “separation of church and state.” It also occurs due to lack of teacher preparedness, or worry that children or their parents will object to any discussion “about” religion in school, based on a concern that it could involve favoring specific religious beliefs.

We agree that it is important that teachers and facilitators have clearly established and appropriate objectives for teaching *about* religious differences and that the instructional activities meet those goals. *Religions in My Neighborhood: Teaching Curiosity and Respect about Religious Differences* provides the goals, key questions, frameworks and instructional activities that will help novice as well as experienced teachers facilitate discussions about religious differences – without fear *and* without endorsing any specific religious perspective.

It is helpful to know that the National Council for the Social Studies makes clear that “knowledge about religions is not only a characteristic of an educated person but is absolutely necessary for understanding and living in a world of diversity.”<sup>3</sup> According to the American Academy of Religion, “illiteracy regarding religion 1) is widespread, 2) fuels prejudice and antagonism, and 3) can be diminished by teaching about religion in public schools using a non-devotional, academic perspective.”<sup>4</sup> Increasingly, there are models of school and after-school curricula that teach *about* religion so that students can learn how to be respectful and knowledgeable about the religious differences presented by other students, their families, and, as they grow older, the religious differences they will experience in their neighborhoods and workplaces.

To meet the challenge of teacher preparedness, we include resources for teachers and facilitators who are interested in learning “the how” of teaching *about* religions and religious differences, while also respectfully negotiating differences in student beliefs and faith traditions. These resources appear at the end of this open letter.

*Religions in My Neighborhood: Teaching Curiosity and Respect about Religious Differences* is the result of a collaborative project of the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding. This curriculum is a product of Tanenbaum’s *Education* Program and is co-authored by Patty Bode, Maurianne Adams and Rita Hardiman. Tanenbaum is a secular, non-sectarian, not-for-profit organization that combats religious prejudice and builds respect for religious diversity by training professionals in schools, workplaces and healthcare facilities and by supporting the work of religious peacemakers in areas of armed conflict. Our programs help to prevent and reduce hatred and religious ignorance. Tanenbaum’s *Education* program is based on the principle that multicultural education should no longer stop at the threshold of religion. In its intensive educator training programs, workshops and curricula, Tanenbaum works to ensure that today’s teachers

---

3 Study about religion in the social studies curriculum, National Council for Social Studies, <http://www.socialstudies.org/positions/religion/> (1998).

4 AAR Religion in the Schools Task Force, *Guidelines for Teaching About Religion in K-12 Public Schools in the United States*, American Academy of Religion, [http://www.aarweb.org/Publications/Online\\_Publications/Curriculum\\_Guidelines/AARK-12Curriculum\\_Guidelines.pdf](http://www.aarweb.org/Publications/Online_Publications/Curriculum_Guidelines/AARK-12Curriculum_Guidelines.pdf) (2010).

and facilitators develop the skills to help children recognize, respect and negotiate religious differences. When our children become adults, Tanenbaum's program and its materials will have prepared them to engage the full range of the world's diversity, including religious diversity.

Tanenbaum's *Education* staff is always available to hear any questions, ideas, concerns and stories you may have, as users of this book, about these issues. We encourage you to contact us for any support that you may need in implementing this curriculum. You may always reach us by email at [education@tanenbaum.org](mailto:education@tanenbaum.org) or by phone at 212.967.7707.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK:

- Remember that teaching about religion and religious understanding does not – and must not – include teaching or recommending any specific religion or religious beliefs. It is important that the teacher or facilitator adopt a pedagogy stance aligned with *The Seven Principles* (pages 33–42) that helps children notice and discuss religious differences, without communicating the facilitator's personal religious beliefs.
- The five chapters in this curriculum follow an intended sequence of topics.
  - Chapter 1 starts with building a learning community that includes all of the children and acknowledges their families, their homes and neighborhood communities, and their understanding of differences. The units in Chapter 1 focus on their identity within the learning community, and their responsibilities toward each other as they participate in their learning community.
  - Chapter 2 broadens out to ask about different life-questions, different beliefs that address those questions, and the stories that different religions tell to convey their beliefs.
  - Chapter 3 looks at some of the commonalities among different religions, such as the emphasis on caring for each other, for the environment, and for one's community.
  - Chapter 4 draws attention to different rituals and traditions as they involve holidays focused on the seasons, as they involve prayer and meditation, and as they involve renewal, resources and light.
  - Chapter 5 brings attention back to the learning community itself, as the children reflect upon learning “about” religious differences and what they have learned “from” religious differences.
- Teachers and facilitators may want to follow the sequence laid out in this book, or they may want to build a different curricular sequence from the units in each of the chapters. For example, units may be built around seasonal change and associated holidays, such as the different beliefs and rituals associated with Thanksgiving and the harvest, with the religious or secular holidays that take place in the winter, and the religious and secular activities of renewal associated with spring. However, whatever curricular sequence that teachers and facilitators decide to follow, we stress the importance of dedicating time up front, in the beginning, to building an interactive and participatory learning community.

- We have developed only one activity for each unit, with each chapter having several units (18 units in total). Each activity is followed by “extensions” which provide additional ideas and resources to help teachers and facilitators develop their own units.
- The *Six Goals for Student Learning Outcomes* and the *Seven Principles for Inclusive Education* provide criteria for the creation of additional units, or for the adaptation of materials in this curriculum to a range of ages, grade levels, or educational settings and contexts.
- Several of the citations that follow are especially useful for teachers and facilitators who may want further guidance for teaching about religion in public schools. The materials from Tanenbaum and The First Amendment Center are especially helpful in this regard.

## RESOURCES:

### Tanenbaum:

*Education* Program, <https://www.tanenbaum.org/programs/education>

The Golden Rule, <https://www.tanenbaum.org/resources/golden-rule>

Shared Visions, <https://www.tanenbaum.org/resources/shared-visions> (Excerpts from holy texts showing the common threads weaving between different faith communities)

### Books:

Salili, F. & R. Hoosain (Eds.), *Religion in Multicultural Education* (2006).

Haynes, C.C., S. Chaltain, J.E. Ferguson, Jr., D.L. Hudson, Jr., & O. Thomas, *The First Amendment in Schools: A Guide from the First Amendment Center* (2003).

Diamond, M.R., *Encountering Faith in the Classroom: Turning Difficult Discussions into Constructive Engagement* (2008).

### Websites:

American Academy of Religion,  
[http://www.aarweb.org/Public\\_Affairs/Religion\\_in\\_the\\_Schools/default.asp](http://www.aarweb.org/Public_Affairs/Religion_in_the_Schools/default.asp)

Anti-Defamation League, [http://www.adl.org/main\\_Education/default.htm](http://www.adl.org/main_Education/default.htm)

The First Amendment Center, <http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org>  
(Visit section on Lesson Plans)

Facing History and Ourselves, <http://www.facinghistory.org>

The Pluralism Project, <http://www.pluralism.org/resources>

Teaching Tolerance, <http://www.tolerance.org>

We consider it a particular opportunity to share this curriculum and our collaboration with you. This curriculum provides you with the resources to embark on preparing your students as global citizens. We are proud to present it to you.

**Tanenbaum**

Joyce S. Dubensky  
*CEO*

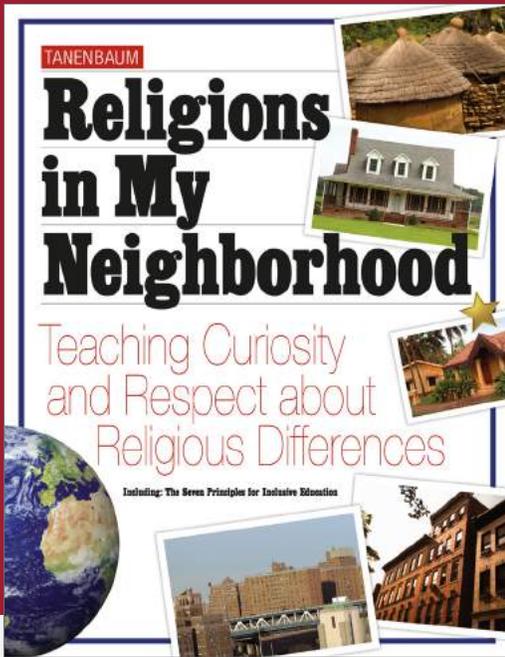
Mark Fowler  
*Managing Director of Programs*

**In proud collaboration with our co-authors of this sourcebook:**

Patty Bode, Ed.D  
Director of Art Education for Tufts University

Maurianne Adams, PhD  
Professor Emerita in Education, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Rita Hardiman, Ed.D  
Social Justice Education Consultant



# Religions in My Neighborhood Curriculum and Teacher Training Program

A SERIES FOR K-4 EDUCATORS

With leading multicultural education specialists, Tanenbaum created the *Religions in My Neighborhood* initiative, which incorporates Tanenbaum's state-of-the-art teacher training and a standards-based curriculum for K-4 educators. *Religions in My Neighborhood* helps teachers tackle differences—including religious differences—head-on.

## Religions in My Neighborhood Teacher Trainings

Attend a half-day or full-day workshop for elementary educators, afterschool coordinators, curriculum coordinators and directors. Participants in our workshops:

- overcome concerns (and fears) on how to teach about religion
- learn how to incorporate religion into lesson plans in accordance with state and federal laws
- create action plans that incorporate activities from the *Religions in My Neighborhood* curriculum into your lessons, meeting standards and simultaneously building student practices of respect

## Religions in My Neighborhood Cultivates Global Citizens

*Religions in My Neighborhood* helps teachers instruct students:

- about the reality of different religions and religious beliefs
- that religious differences are normal
- how to be respectfully curious

## Religions in My Neighborhood Makes it Easier to Teach About Religion

Tanenbaum's curriculum, framed by Wiggins and McTighe's *Understanding by Design*, makes teachers' jobs easier. Teachers can use *Religions in My Neighborhood* as a stand-alone curriculum or as a supplement. Features include:

- lesson plans on respecting others' beliefs
- compatibility with Common Core Standards
- alignment with national English & Social Studies Standards
- extension activities for different types of learners

### WHAT DO YOU DO NEXT?

Learn more about teacher trainings: [info@tanenbaum.org](mailto:info@tanenbaum.org)  
Purchase *Religions in My Neighborhood*: [bit.ly/OrderRIMN](http://bit.ly/OrderRIMN)  
Visit [bit.ly/TanenbaumED](http://bit.ly/TanenbaumED) or call us at (212) 967-7707



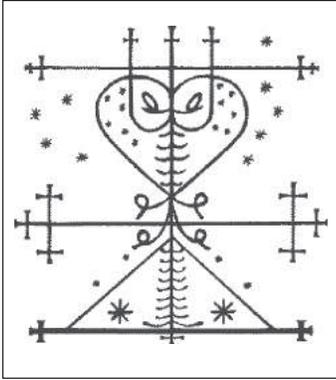


# Overview of Major World Religions, Spiritual Traditions and Systems of Belief Practiced in the United States

There are numerous religions and spiritual traditions in today's world. Some are well-known, established religions with millions of followers/members worldwide, while others are more localized with smaller numbers. Because this curriculum is intended for use in the United States, it focuses on religions, spiritual traditions and belief systems that are more prevalent in the U.S. This overview is therefore not inclusive of all groups globally, nor does it provide a comprehensive overview of each tradition.

It is important to remember that the practice of these traditions varies widely among individuals and communities, and the teacher/facilitator is likely to encounter many differences even within groups of children who practice the same faith tradition. The reader/teacher/facilitator is provided a short description and guided to various links and texts to develop a more comprehensive knowledge of each religion. The following websites are helpful for further exploration into belief systems generally:

- The Pluralism Project, [www.pluralism.org](http://www.pluralism.org)
- Adherents.com, [www.adherents.com](http://www.adherents.com)
- The Pew Forum, [www.pewforum.org](http://www.pewforum.org)
- Belief Net, [www.beliefnet.com](http://www.beliefnet.com)
- Patheos, [www.patheos.com](http://www.patheos.com)
- BBC Religions, [www.bbc.co.uk/religion](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion)



Veve (symbol) for Maman Brigitte,  
a spirit of Haitian Vodou

## AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS AND AFRO-CARIBBEAN RELIGIONS

African Traditional Religions and Afro-Caribbean Religions encompass a wide range of traditions originating in various African cultures. Some of these spiritual paths are rooted in indigenous philosophy and religion and pre-date European colonialism in Africa and the Caribbean. Many of these traditions are *syncretic*, meaning they combine elements of traditional African religion with another tradition such as Christianity. These traditions are practiced throughout the African Diaspora including in the Caribbean, South America and the U.S. Many remain relevant today due to followers who have been able to retain their traditional

culture despite changing cultural environments.

Some examples of these traditions include Yoruba, Santeria, Palo Mayombe, Candomblé, Vodoun (or Voodoo), and Shango. In each tradition, followers may believe in the Judeo-Christian God of the Old Testament and New Testament (although they may assign God different names) as well as a variety of spirits. Sacred texts include the Old and New Testaments as well as writings by key figures within each tradition.

Because of the variety of these traditions and their integration with other traditions, the precise number of practitioners is difficult to obtain, but has been estimated to be about 100 million worldwide.<sup>5</sup> It is not known how many people in the United States practice one or more of the spiritual traditions that are rooted in African and Afro-Caribbean religions. Estimates range from hundreds of thousands to several million.

The more recent Rastafari Movement was founded in the 1930s in Jamaica, but has spread beyond the Caribbean to the U.S., the U.K. and other countries. Even though the Rastafari Movement emerged from the island of Jamaica, it includes Ethiopian traditions and a theology that is based in part on Old Testament prophecies and the New Testament's Book of Revelation as well as on the writings and thoughts of founder Marcus Garvey. Rastas worship Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie as a *messiah* (literally, "anointed one").

### Additional resources:

[www.pluralism.org](http://www.pluralism.org)



Secular Humanist Symbol

## ATHEISM AND NON-RELIGIONS PHILOSOPHIES

Some people and groups have developed philosophies and sets of beliefs that embrace scientific knowledge and/or reason and the existence of natural law to guide them. In contrast to those who embrace a (supernatural) belief that focuses on the existence of a God or a divine entity, atheists, brights and humanists typically deny the existence of a God and are guided by reason and science. Additionally, individuals who identify as such do not follow sacred texts, prophets or religious leaders, nor are they

<sup>5</sup> Adherents.com, [http://www.adherents.com/Religions\\_By\\_Adherents.html](http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html)

likely to have a particular set of rituals or traditions that reflect their beliefs, significant dates or milestones in those belief systems.

There are several terms that are commonly used to describe non-religious peoples, organizations and movements. These terms include: agnosticism, atheism, brights, freethinkers, humanism, naturalism, rationalism, and skepticism. Some, like agnostics and freethinkers, take into consideration the possibility of a God or other supernatural entity, and believe that human knowledge is limited to the natural world and the mind is incapable of discerning whether or not a divine being exists. In contrast, others who identify as atheists have no religious belief and do not believe in the existence of a god or gods, or other supernatural entities.

It is critical to note that absence of belief in a god or affiliation with a religious tradition does not mean the absence of an ethical or moral code. Atheists, agnostics, humanists and freethinkers often have very strong ethical codes based on respect for the innate humanity of their fellow women and men.

Approximately 1.1 billion or 16% of the world's population<sup>6</sup> and 35 million or 16% of the U.S. population identify as non-religious/secular, agnostic, atheist or "none of the above" in a listing of organized religious groups.<sup>7</sup> (It is important to remember, however, that some of the "none of the above" may still believe in a deity while declining to affiliate with a particular religious denomination.)

#### **Additional resources:**

Council for Secular Humanism, [www.secularhumanism.org](http://www.secularhumanism.org)



Nine-pointed star, often used by Baha'is as a symbol of their faith

### **THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH**

The Bahá'í Faith was founded in 19<sup>th</sup> century Persia (present day Iran) after a proclamation of the Báb, who claimed to be a messiah-like figure of Shi'a Islam. The Báb said there would soon be another in the line of prophets that included Moses, Muhammad and Jesus, and this prophet was Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith.

Bahá'ís believe that there is one Creator who has had many prophets through the ages as exemplified through different world religions. Furthermore, Bahá'ís consider the spiritual truth of all religions to be the same.

Bahá'ís believe that "humanity is one single race and that the day has come for its unification in one global society. God, Bahá'u'lláh said, has set in motion historical forces that are breaking down traditional barriers of race, class, creed, and nation and that will, in time, give birth to a universal civilization. The principal challenge facing all people is accepting the reality of their oneness and assisting the processes of unification. One of the purposes of the Bahá'í Faith is to help make this possible."<sup>8</sup> Some of the practices and principles include: daily prayer and communion with God, a life dedicated to the service of humanity, fellowship with the followers of all religions, equality of women and men and the abolition of extremes of poverty and wealth. The nine-pointed star is the Bahá'í symbol and represents spiritual completion.

<sup>6</sup> Adherents.com, [http://www.adherents.com/Religions\\_By\\_Adherents.html](http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html)

<sup>7</sup> Pew Forum, <http://religions.pewforum.org/affiliations>

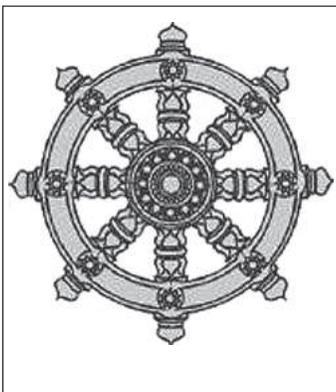
<sup>8</sup> The Bahá'í Faith, <http://www.bahai.org/>

While the beginnings of the Bahá'í Faith have a background in Shi'a Islam, its followers view the Bahá'í Faith as an independent religion. The analogy of Christianity forming as an independent religion out of Judaism is often used to show this. Historically, however, there has been some religious tension and persecution by some Islamic practitioners who do not recognize the Bahá'í Faith as an independent religion, but rather as apostasy from Islam.

Globally, the Bahá'í Faith is widely representative of many nationalities, races and cultures. There are roughly 150,000 to 767,000 Bahá'ís in the United States<sup>9</sup> and 7 million worldwide.<sup>10</sup>

### **Additional Resources:**

The Bahá'í Faith, [www.baha'i.org](http://www.baha'i.org)



The Dharmachakra, representing the Noble Eightfold Path

## **BUDDHISM**

Buddhism is a spiritual path that follows the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, known as the Buddha or the “Awakened One.” Buddhism originated in the Indian subcontinent about 2600 years ago and spread into Asia and Eastern Europe after the passing of the Buddha. Today, Buddhism has around 350 million followers worldwide (6% of the world’s population)<sup>10</sup> and 2-3 million followers in the United States.<sup>9</sup> There are many branches of Buddhism, including Southern or Theravada Buddhism, Eastern or Chinese Buddhism and Northern or Tibetan Buddhism. Most denominations do not believe in a god, although some do have deities and others revere enlightened teachers as one might

worship a deity. The primary Buddhist texts, interpreted differently by followers of different branches, are: the Pāli Canon (which includes rules for discipline, discourses and philosophy), Mahayana Sutras (original teachings of the Buddha), and the Dhammapada (Buddha’s direct scriptures).

Buddhism’s principal teaching is the *Four Noble Truths*. These truths are: (1) all living beings (people, animals) suffer; (2) the cause of suffering is selfish desire and attachment; (3) one can stop the suffering; and (4) the way to stop the suffering is to follow the *Noble Eightfold Path* (guidelines laid out by the Buddha for leading a righteous life). Another guiding principle in Buddhism is called the *Middle Way*, which suggests that life is to be lived in moderation without extremes of self-indulgence or self-denial. Buddhists are also called to follow the *Five Noble Precepts* (separate from the Four Noble Truths): refraining from killing, stealing, harsh language or lying, sexual misconduct, and indulging in intoxicants.

One fundamental belief of Buddhism is *samsāra*, or the cycle of reincarnation – the concept that people are reborn after dying and may go through many cycles of birth, life, death and rebirth. After many such cycles, if a person releases his or her attachment to desire and the self, *nirvana*, or enlightenment, can be attained. This state of liberation and freedom from craving and suffering ends the cycle.

<sup>9</sup> The Pluralism Project, <http://pluralism.org/resources/statistics/tradition.php>

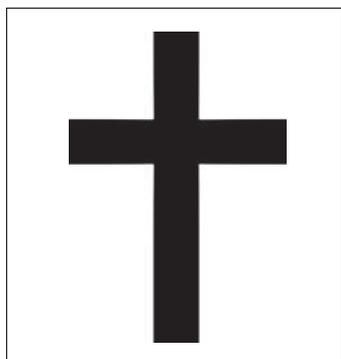
<sup>10</sup> Adherents.com, [http://www.adherents.com/Religions\\_By\\_Adherents.html](http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html)

As many strains of Buddhism are non-theistic paths, some members of other faith traditions also embrace Buddhist beliefs and practices alongside their own.

### Additional Resources:

Bodhi, B., *The Noble Eightfold Path. The Way to the End of Suffering*, <http://www.buddhistinformation.com/>

Knierim, T., *The Precepts*, <http://www.thebigview.com/www.religioustolerance.org/buddhism>



The cross

## CHRISTIANITY

Christianity is a *monotheistic* religion (i.e., it teaches that there is only one God), the second of three faiths that trace their lineage back to the figure of Abraham (the other two are Judaism and Islam). It is based on the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth as they appear in the New Testament of the Holy Bible. The term New Testament is used by Christians to refer to the section of the Bible that presents the life of Jesus and the early development of Christianity. From the Christian perspective, the Jewish Bible is considered the Old Testament.

Christianity began in the 1st Century C.E.<sup>11</sup> as a sect springing from Judaism, in that Jesus Christ and the earliest Christian followers were Jews. Since then, it has grown worldwide to include approximately 2.1 billion adherents (33% of the world's population),<sup>12</sup> with a diverse set of groups or denominations whose beliefs often differ from one another, while sharing the core belief in one god and in Jesus Christ as the savior of human kind. Among the major divisions of Christianity are Roman Catholicism, Eastern and Oriental Orthodoxy, and the many denominations within Protestantism.

For Christians, Jesus is considered the son of God and *Messiah* (or “Christ”) as prophesized in the Old Testament and Hebrew scriptures. Christ is believed to be the savior of humanity and many Christians believe he is both God and man. His death is understood as a sacrifice to save humankind from its sins. The cross is a symbol of the death of Jesus, and how he overcame death and sin. Christians draw their morality from the example of Jesus and from holy scriptures, especially the New Testament and the *Ten Commandments* (some traditions, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, or Mormonism, also have their own holy books).

Christianity is currently the largest and most practiced religion in the world. In the United States, roughly 77% of the population identifies as Christian.<sup>13</sup> As in some other faith traditions, there are debates within Christianity as to which denomination is more true to “real” Christian beliefs than others; at their most explicit, these debates include some who conclude that certain groups claiming to be

<sup>11</sup> C.E. refers to the term “Common Era” (rather than A.D. for “Anno Domine.”), although it still refers to historical events that occurred after the birth of Jesus Christ. The term B.C.E. means “Before the common era” (rather than B.C. for “Before Christ.”)

<sup>12</sup> Adherents.com, [http://www.adherents.com/Religions\\_By\\_Adherents.html](http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html)

<sup>13</sup> Gallup, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/117409/easter-smaller-percentage-americans-christian.aspx>

Christian actually are not. For example, there are some Christians who do not view Mormons as Christian, while others would exclude Catholics from those considered to be Christian. As with Judaism and Islam, there is a continuum of adherents ranging from fundamentalists who view the Bible as the inerrant word of God to those who embrace pluralism and many expressions of the faith.

Among the Protestant traditions are Episcopalians or Anglicans, Methodists, Lutherans, Baptists, Mennonites, Amish, Presbyterians and Congregationalists. Other denominations of Christianity include Mormons (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints or LDS Church), Seventh Day Adventists, Pentecostals, and Christian Scientists.

The Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox denominations include Russian Orthodox, Greek, Armenian, Serbian, Romanian, as well as Coptic (Egyptian) or Byzantine Christians.

In addition to these long established and larger Christian groups, there are other faith traditions that have adopted some of the theology, traditions and rituals of Christianity and blended them with other faiths and spiritual practices. For example, the Native American Church in the U.S. blends indigenous culture and beliefs of American Indian tribes with some Christian traditions, and some Afro-Caribbean churches blend practices with roots in African-based spirituality with Christian theology and ritual.

#### **Additional Resources:**

[www.pluralism.org](http://www.pluralism.org)

[www.religioustolerance.org](http://www.religioustolerance.org)



The Hindu Om (or Aum)

#### **HINDUISM**

Hinduism is an amalgamation of numerous cultures and practices that evolved over time. Historically and culturally, the religion's roots can be traced to ancient civilizations and religions in present day India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, and other countries on the Indian subcontinent. It is generally accepted to be the oldest organized religion in the world, dating to circa 3000 B.C.E.

Unlike many religions, Hinduism does not attribute its foundations to a single individual or text, but rather acknowledges its variety of influences. Hinduism also does not have a single theology, central religious organization or single declaration of faith. Hinduism teaches that no particular religion has exclusive rights to salvation; rather, it views all genuine religious paths as facets of God. Many forms of Hinduism recognize a single major deity, Brahman, and see a variety of gods and goddesses as expressions of a Supreme God that can all be worshipped in many different ways. Therefore, Hinduism is considered by some to be monotheistic, and by others to be polytheistic. However, though a wide range of beliefs characterize the religion, most Hindus believe that there is one ultimate reality behind the universe that cannot be fully grasped by humans – i.e., one all-pervasive Supreme Being. God, or ultimate reality, is incomprehensible and encompasses all.

Hindu deities are manifestations of different characteristics of the ultimate reality. Individual practitioners may focus their worship on one particular deity or more. For example, the commonly worshipped deities Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu represent the creative, destructive, and sustaining powers of the ultimate reality and each has its own worshippers.

Hinduism includes a vast and rich scriptural body, which has been developed throughout its history. Of these texts, the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, and the *Tantras* are authoritative for most Hindus.

Most Hindus believe that the universe involves endless cycles of creation, preservation, and dissolution, with no designated beginning or end. Each individual goes through a cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (*samsāra*), governed by the law of cause and effect by which individuals create their own destiny through positive or negative thoughts and deeds (*karma*). Each individual chooses a discipline (*yoga*), and path (*marga*), which becomes his/her religious life (*dharma*). A spiritually awakened master, or guru, guides the adherent. The ultimate goal of a believer's life is to liberate oneself (*moksha*) from the cycle of rebirth through the realization of one's identity with the ultimate reality.

Worship is also very important in Hinduism, ranging from daily prayer rituals to ceremonial worship, or *puja*. Many Hindus have shrines in their homes. In addition, many Hindus maintain vegetarian or vegan diets, often derived from one of its core principles, *ahimsa*, the principle of nonviolence.

Today, the world's Hindu population is estimated to be around 900 million people (14% of the world's population).<sup>14</sup> There are approximately 1.2 million Hindus in the United States.<sup>15</sup> This includes adherents of Hinduism-inspired movements founded in the United States such as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), more commonly known as Hare Krishna.

### **Additional Resources:**

Hinduism Today, [www.hinduismtoday.com](http://www.hinduismtoday.com)



A Lakota medicine wheel

### **INDIGENOUS SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS OF THE UNITED STATES AND NATIVE AMERICAN SPIRITUALITIES**

Native American spiritualities are very diverse, as it refers to the traditions, rituals, and spiritual beliefs of the thousands of peoples indigenous to North America, who have lived in the Americas for centuries prior to European arrival and up to the present. As such, it has many manifestations, varying from tribe to tribe, including different creation stories, relations to an afterlife and belief or non-belief in the same, and different rituals for accessing the spirit, enlightenment or visions.

Historically, Native American religious and spiritual practices were completely integrated with day-to-day life and did not entail any special observances or times; indeed, no Native American language has a word that translates into “religion.”

<sup>14</sup> Adherents.com, [http://www.adherents.com/Religions\\_By\\_Adherents.html](http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html)

<sup>15</sup> The Pluralism Project, <http://pluralism.org/resources/statistics/tradition.php>

It is difficult to accurately characterize similarities in belief across the many Native American tribes or nations, so generalizing about Native American spiritual traditions can also be misleading. However, it is generally true that the indigenous people of North America have had a very decentralized, localized and personal set of spiritual traditions. While there may be tribal elders, sometimes referred to by the misnomer of *shaman* (a term of Central Asian/Siberian origin), there is no religious establishment of religious leaders such as priests, ministers, rabbis or gurus as found in other religious traditions. Native American spiritual beliefs are passed from one generation to the next through oral tradition and ritual, rather than through written holy texts.

In general, most Native Americans believe that all things in the universe are alive, contain a spirit, and should be valued accordingly. Special reverence and respect is given to the earth, which is believed to nourish and sustain life. They strive to live in balance and harmony with the material and spirit worlds; how one carries this out is highly personal and often guided by dreams and visions.

It is difficult to discuss the spiritual philosophy and traditions of the indigenous people of North America without acknowledging how colonialism and oppression affected the culture and language (phenomena that also affected other groups such as the Africans and Afro-Caribbeans who developed syncretic belief systems). The research report, *Native American Religious and Cultural Freedom: An Introductory Essay*, states, “Despite centuries of hostile and assimilative policies often designed to dismantle the structures of indigenous communities, language, and belief systems, the late twentieth century marked a period of remarkable revitalization and renewal of Native traditions. Built on centuries of resistance as well as strategic accommodations, Native communities from the 1960s on have vigorously pressed their claims to religious self-determination.”<sup>16</sup>

Given displacement from traditional tribal lands, declining numbers of Indians and the personal nature of Native American spiritualities, the exact number of followers is difficult to estimate. There are approximately 3 million people in the U.S. who identify as Native Americans or Alaskans, but it is impossible to say how many of these practice a form of Native American spiritualities.<sup>17</sup> The Native American Church, which is a formal religious organization, is estimated to have 250,000 members (as of 1996), with approximately 80 chapters and members belonging to some 70 Native American Nations.<sup>18</sup> The Native American Church is syncretic, in that it incorporates Christian theology and some rituals with the cultures of American Indian tribes. Because of the use of peyote, a hallucinogenic, by some Native American religious organizations, the organization has had to fight to practice its traditions, often through court battles in the U.S.

---

<sup>16</sup> President and Fellows of Harvard College & Diana Eck, *Native American Religious and Cultural Freedom: An Introductory Essay*, The Pluralism Project (2005).

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Census, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/00000.html>

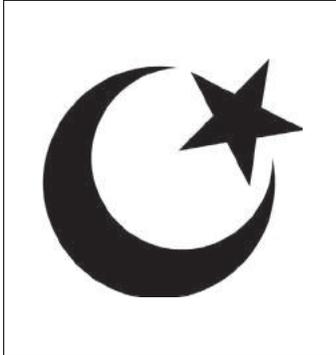
<sup>18</sup> Smith, H. & R. Snake, *One Nation Under God: The Triumph of the Native American Church*, (1996).

### Additional Resources:

Hirschfelder, A.B. & P. Molin, *Encyclopedia of Native American Religions* (2001).

Eck, D.L., *A New Religious America: How a “Christian Country” Has Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (2002).

Smith, H. & R. Snake, *One Nation Under God: The Triumph of the Native American Church* (1996).



The star and crescent moon

## ISLAM

Islam is a monotheistic religion, the third of the three faiths that trace their lineage back to the figure of Abraham (along with Judaism and Christianity). It is the second-largest religion in the world today, with roughly 1.5 billion followers around the world (21% of the world’s population)<sup>19</sup> and 5-6 million in the U.S.<sup>20</sup> Followers of Islam are known as Muslims. The word *Muslim* can be translated as “One who submits to God” while *Islam* can translate as “submission,” referring to the complete surrender to God, or *Allah* (the Arabic term for God).

Islam’s holy book is the *Qur’an*, which Muslims believe was revealed directly from Allah to Muhammad, who lived in the 7th century. As such, it is believed to contain the direct words of God.

There are *Six Articles of Faith* that the majority of Muslims share, called the *Aqidah* (creed). The most fundamental concept is belief in the oneness of God and of Muhammad as his final messenger (also one of the *Five Pillars*, outlined below). Acceptance of this belief through the *shahadah* (“confession,” or stating one’s belief in this tenet) makes one a Muslim. The other five articles of faith are:

- Belief in all God’s messengers, which includes belief in Muhammad, and also in Jesus, Moses, and Abraham, among others, as divinely inspired teachers and prophets;
- Belief in God’s holy scriptures, as revealed to the messengers (i.e., the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, New Testament, and Qur’an);
- Belief in a final day of judgment when all people, both Muslim and non-Muslim, will be held accountable for their actions and judged by Allah;
- Belief in angels, who are responsible for the laws and workings of nature; and
- Belief in fate (i.e., God’s divine plan for the world).

Islam’s core tenets and practices are the Five Pillars. They are: (1) belief in the Oneness of God and belief that Muhammad is His last messenger; (2) ritual prayer, performed five times daily; (3) concern for and

<sup>19</sup> Adherents.com, [http://www.adherents.com/Religions\\_By\\_Adherents.html](http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html)

<sup>20</sup> The Pluralism Project, <http://pluralism.org/resources/statistics/tradition.php>

almsgiving to the needy; (4) self-purification through fasting during the holy month of Ramadan; and (5) a pilgrimage to Mecca (called the *Hajj*) made once in one's lifetime by those who are able. Many Muslims keep a *halal* diet, avoiding pork and alcohol and only eating meat that has been slaughtered in accordance with halal requirements; some also avoid shellfish.

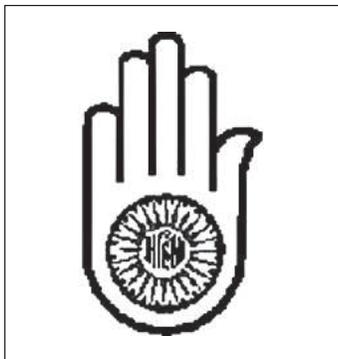
There are two major branches of Islam: Sunni, which is the larger, and Shi'a. Most Muslims in the U.S. are Sunni. The split between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims comes from a dispute over who should lead the Islamic community: Shiites believe that the leader can only be someone descended directly from the Prophet Muhammad or from those appointed by the Prophet or God to lead, while Sunnis believe that the most qualified person in the community should lead. There is also a mystical branch of Islam called Sufism, which seeks communion with God during this lifetime.

The Nation of Islam is a separate sect originating in the U.S. and founded by Wallace D. Fard Muhammad, popularized by Malcolm X and led today by Louis Farrakhan. The Nation of Islam advocates for lifting up the spiritual and economic condition of African-American men and women. It has been considered a heretical sect by some Sunni and Shi'a Muslims.

#### **Additional Resources:**

Islam.com, [www.islam.com](http://www.islam.com)

Islam101, <http://islam101.net>



The raised hand symbol from the universal Jain emblem, representing Ahimsa (non-violence)

## **JAINISM**

Jainism, a religion based primarily in India, holds as a core tenet that it is an eternal belief system, without beginning or end. However, its organized practice dates to somewhere between the 9th and 6th centuries B.C.E. There are roughly 4.2 million Jains worldwide<sup>21</sup> and 100,000 Jains in the United States.<sup>22</sup>

Jainism, derived from a Sanskrit word meaning “follower of the Jina, or conqueror,” was established in our era by Mahavira (“the Great Hero”). He is considered only the most recent of 24 jinas (teachers) who brought Jainism to the world in previous eras of time.<sup>23</sup>

Jains believe that animals and plants, as well as human beings, contain living souls. Each of these souls is considered of equal value and to be treated with respect and compassion. This manifests in Jains being strict vegetarians and living lives that minimize the use of the world's resources. Jainism teaches that the way to liberation and bliss is to live a life of harmlessness and renunciation. Like Hindus, Jains believe in reincarnation and seek to attain ultimate liberation, which means

<sup>21</sup> Adherents.com, [http://www.adherents.com/Religions\\_By\\_Adherents.html](http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html)

<sup>22</sup> The Pluralism Project, <http://pluralism.org/resources/statistics/tradition.php>

<sup>23</sup> Beliefnet, <http://www.beliefnet.com>

<sup>24</sup> BBC Religions, [www.bbc.co.uk/religion/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/)

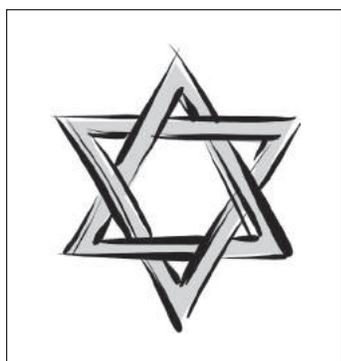
escaping the continuous cycle of birth, death and rebirth so that the immortal soul lives forever in a state of bliss. There are no gods or spiritual beings that will help human beings, and Jains rely on themselves to live a principled life. Jains take 5 great vows, the mahavratas, which are non-violence, non-attachment to possessions, not lying, not stealing and sexual restraint.<sup>24</sup>

Jainism has no priests or formal clergy, although there are Jain monks and nuns who are role models of Jainism, leading lives of asceticism, where they practice strict celibacy, non-attachment to possessions and non-violence.

### **Additional Resources:**

Jainism Global Resource Center, [www.jainworld.com](http://www.jainworld.com)

Jain Net, [www.jainnet.com](http://www.jainnet.com)



The star or shield of David

## **JUDAISM**

Judaism is a monotheistic religion and the earliest of the three faiths that trace their lineage back to the figure of Abraham (along with Christianity and Islam). Jewish tradition teaches that Judaism dates back to 2000 B.C.E., with a *covenant* (divine agreement) between G-d<sup>25</sup> and Abraham. According to Jewish tradition, Abraham was the first person to recognize and worship the one true G-d. In return, he was promised many offspring, among whom today are the Jewish people. Judaism's worldwide population today is approximately 14 million,<sup>26</sup> and its U.S. population is roughly 5-6 million.<sup>27</sup>

Judaism has a rich history that has shaped its traditions. The central sources of authority in Judaism are both its holy scriptures and these historic traditions. Its core tenet is that there is one omnipotent, omniscient creator G-d who made a covenant with the Jewish people, to whom G-d gave commandments and laws to follow. These laws are recorded in the *Torah* (which includes the Ten Commandments given to Moses, a prophet who brought the Jews out of slavery in Egypt, led them back to Israel, and gave them laws that he received from G-d) and the oral interpretations of the law transcribed in the *Talmud*. The *tanakh*, or Hebrew Bible, is comprised of the *Torah* (laws), *Nevi'im* (Prophets) and *Ketuvim* (Writings).

For many Jews, the Jewish religion is a way of life and source of community; Judaism teaches that the covenant created a personal relationship between G-d and the Jewish people, and Jews often share a sense of community and responsibility with and for one another and for the broader community. Core values include *Tikkun Olam* (repairing the world), *Tzedakah* (charity), peace, family, community, justice, and living life in a holy manner. Many Jews keep a *kosher* diet, which forbids pork, shellfish and mixing meat and dairy, among other rules.

<sup>25</sup> Many Jews traditionally refrain from writing the name of God in such a way that destruction of the paper (or other medium) will destroy the word. For this reason, G-d is often used as an alternative. Although not all Jews follow this proscription, this chapter renders the word as "G-d" out of respect for that practice. The Hebrew term for the divine being is Jehovah.

<sup>26</sup> Adherents.com, [http://www.adherents.com/Religions\\_By\\_Adherents.html](http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html)

<sup>27</sup> The Pluralism Project, <http://pluralism.org/resources/statistics/tradition.php>

There is a wide spectrum of observance among contemporary Jews, and there are four main forms of Judaism in the world today: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist. Orthodox Jews are generally most strict about following Jewish law as written. There is also a *non-theistic* (i.e., non-G-d centered) movement for Jews called Humanistic Judaism that celebrates Jewish cultural heritage while remaining non-theistic. Though followers of each of the traditions self-identify as Jewish, the more conservative or orthodox traditions in Judaism do not necessarily recognize the more liberal as being part of Judaism.

### **Additional Resources:**

Telushkin, J. & W. Morrow, *Jewish Literacy* (1991).

Steinberg, M. & H.B. Jovanovich, *Basic Judaism* (1975).



The Torii Gate, a Shinto religious symbol marking the entrance to sacred space

## **SHINTO**

Shintō is the ancient, native religion of Japan, and often considered a type of animism (the belief that many beings, living or non-living, have souls). Shintō obtained its name from the combination of Chinese words “shin” and “tao” meaning “The Way of the Gods.” Shinto is an ancient religion that dates back to 500 B.C.E. and has been influenced by ancient Chinese thought, Buddhism, Confucianism and even Christianity. The Shinto Online Network Association states that Shinto “is a general term for the activities of the Japanese people to worship all the deities of heaven and earth.” It was once the state religion of Japan, but since the Japanese surrender in World War II, it has been separate from the govern-

ment and ruling bodies in Japan. Shinto now exists in four forms: Shinto of the Imperial House, Shrine Shinto, Sectarian Shinto and Folk Shinto.

Shintō has no founder or sacred texts. Followers worship the *Kami*, who are localized gods or spiritual beings that reside in particular places, natural processes or objects such as the sun, lakes, or shrines. The most worshipped *Kami* is Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess.

Because Shintō is so closely tied to the Japanese way of life and is often practiced alongside other religions and philosophies like Buddhism or Confucianism, the number of its followers is difficult to estimate. The worldwide population of Shintō followers is estimated to be around 4 million, the majority of whom reside in Japan.<sup>28</sup> But when looking at individuals who mix Shintō with another belief system (like Buddhism), the number increases to approximately 100 million.<sup>29</sup> There are no reliable statistics for the number of Shintō residing in the United States.

<sup>28</sup> Adherents.com, [http://www.adherents.com/Religions\\_By\\_Adherents.html](http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html)

<sup>29</sup> Religioustolerance.org, <http://www.religioustolerance.org/>

## Additional Resources:

*Shintō: A Portrait*, [www.silcom.com/~origin/sbcr/sbcr131](http://www.silcom.com/~origin/sbcr/sbcr131)

*Shintō and Buddhism: The Wellsprings of Japanese Spirituality*,  
[www.askasia.org/frclasrm/readings/r000009.htm](http://www.askasia.org/frclasrm/readings/r000009.htm)

*Shinto Online Network*, [www.jinja.jp/english](http://www.jinja.jp/english)



The Khanda, the Sikh national emblem or coat of arms

## SIKHISM

Sikhism was founded in the 15th century C.E. in present day Northern India and Pakistan by Guru (“enlightened leader”) Nanak Dev. The teachings of Guru Nanak and his nine successors, also called gurus, form the basis of the religion.

The primary sacred text of Sikhism is the *Guru Granth Sahib*. In Sikhism, this sacred text acts as a living, perpetual guru to guide all adherents in the absence of additional human gurus.

Sikh, from the Sanskrit *shishya*, means “disciple” or “seeker of truth.”

Sikhs believe in “God as the source of all life and that human life is the opportunity for spiritual union with the Supreme Being – to merge with the Ultimate Reality as a drop of water merges with the ocean and becomes one with it” (R. Singh and G. Rangel, 2000). Important values in Sikhism include: equality of men and women of all races and religions; being generous toward the less fortunate and serving others; seeking truthful living that renounces worldly temptations and sins; and lastly, the notion that everyday life provides the opportunities to seek and find God, in contrast to other faiths where union with God may be sought in asceticism or separation from everyday life.

Some Sikhs may choose to take a unique form of commitment called Amrit, which includes observing special rules, such as wearing the five articles of faith, or the five K’s. These are: (1) *Kesh* (hair): Leave hair uncut, (2) *Khanga* (comb): Keep a comb in the hair, representing cleanliness, (3) *Kirpan* (sword – a word that is a combination of an act of kindness and honor): Wear a steel sword, representing protection from injustice, (4) *Kara* (iron bracelet): Wear a bracelet that acts like a wedding ring, indicating the bond between God and the wearer, (5) *Kachera* (long underpants): Wear a specific undergarment signifying self-discipline. Many Sikh men and women wear a turban to cover their long hair. Sikh temples are called gurdwaras.

There are estimated to be 250,000 Sikhs in the United States,<sup>30</sup> and approximately 23 million throughout the world.<sup>31</sup> In the U.S. there is a unique sect called American Sikhs who have a different leader/guru, Yogi Harbhajan Singh. They wear all-white dress and both women and men wear turbans.

<sup>30</sup> The Pluralism Project, <http://pluralism.org/resources/statistics/tradition.php>

<sup>31</sup> Adherents.com, [http://www.adherents.com/Religions\\_By\\_Adherents.html](http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html)

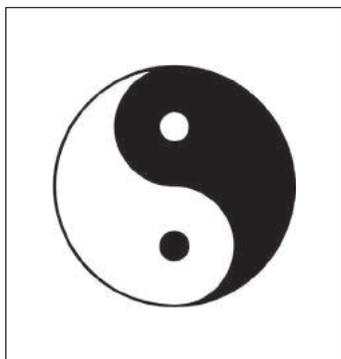
### Additional Resources:

Sikhs.org, [www.sikhs.org](http://www.sikhs.org)

SikhNet, [www.sikhnet.com](http://www.sikhnet.com)

Sikh Coalition, [www.sikhcoalition.org](http://www.sikhcoalition.org)

SCORE, [www.sikhcouncilusa.org/page.aspx?tabname=Sikhism](http://www.sikhcouncilusa.org/page.aspx?tabname=Sikhism)



The Taoist taijitu, representing the principle of yin and yang

## TAOISM

Taoism is a religion/philosophy that originated in China. It is believed to be founded by Lao Zi, who lived between 604-531 B.C.E., and authored the *Tao-te-Ching*, a central text for Taoist thought. The “Tao” is generally translated into “the path” or “the way,” although the concept itself cannot be described or defined, but rather must be experienced.

Still, the concept refers to a particular rightful way of living one’s life. In Taoism, several concepts are often emphasized. These include *wu wei* (“without action,” a term that signifies knowing when to act and when not to act, in accordance with natural forces) and *opposition*, the idea that

everything is composed of opposing forces (hot and cold, high and low, yin and yang), which must be balanced. Through the ages, Taoism has involved god and ancestor worship, as well as alchemy and medicine-making. Ultimately, however, the goal of the Taoist believer is to harmonize the self with the *Tao*, or “path.”

Estimates of the number of followers range between 20 and 225 million, as many individuals practice Taoism in conjunction with other faiths such as Buddhism and Confucianism.<sup>32</sup> About 30,000 Taoists live in North America, with most living in the United States.<sup>33</sup>

### Additional Resources:

Hartford Institute for Religion Research, [www.hirr.hartsem.edu/ency/Taoism.htm](http://www.hirr.hartsem.edu/ency/Taoism.htm)

International Taoist Tai Chi Society, [www.taoist.org](http://www.taoist.org)



The Pentagram, a symbol of faith associated with Wicca and Neopaganism

## WICCA AND NEO-PAGANISM

Neo-Paganism refers to a wide variety of modern traditions that emphasize a revival of ancient pagan practices and beliefs.<sup>32</sup> The largest and most well-known of the neo-pagan religions is Wicca. It is based on a number of modern teachings, including Gerald Gardner’s *Book of Shadows*, but is a reconstruction of the beliefs, symbols and gods or goddesses of the ancient Celts (800 B.C.E.). It does not have a central orthodoxy, and the practices of Wiccans vary widely. Depending on one’s viewpoint and

<sup>32</sup> Patheos, <http://www.patheos.com>

<sup>33</sup> Theologicalstudies.org, <http://www.theologicalstudies.org/page/page/4368801.htm>

which Wiccans one is referencing, Wiccans can be monotheistic, recognizing one God with male and female aspects; polytheistic, believing in many gods and goddesses; or atheistic. One of the primary tenets of Wicca is the emphasis on equality between the feminine and the masculine. The elements of Earth, Air, Fire and Water are central to the religion and are one of the meanings behind the pentagram symbol; one point of the star per element, in addition to the spirit. Many Wiccans are solitary practitioners, while others form groups of believers sometimes referred to as covens or groves. It is a decentralized religion with individuals developing their own beliefs, rituals and practices. Wiccans have a history of being marginalized and oppressed by Christian groups primarily because of the Christian view that they are associated with Satan or Satanic cults, a claim that Wiccans deny. There are roughly 1 million neo-pagans around the world<sup>34</sup> and Wicca and other neo-pagan religions are experiencing a rapid growth both in the U.S. and worldwide.

#### **Additional Resources:**

Church and School of Wicca, [www.wicca.org](http://www.wicca.org)



Ahura Mazda, the highest deity of Zoroastrian worship

## **ZOROASTRIANISM**

Zoroastrianism was founded by Zarathushtra (or Zoroaster in Greek), a Persian who lived in what is now Iran around 600 B.C.E. It is a monotheistic religion founded during a time and in a place where polytheism dominated. It may have been the first monotheistic religion.

Zoroastrians believe Ahura Mazda to be the Creator of all. A major concept includes the struggle between truth/order and falsehood/chaos. Truth and order are associated with the Creator, Ahura Mazda, and humans participate in the faith by living a life of good thoughts, words, and actions that aim toward eliminating chaos.

In spite of its relatively small numbers, Zoroastrianism has had a major impact on Judaism, Christianity and other beliefs because its theology professed beliefs about God and Satan, heaven and hell, the soul, the virgin birth of a savior, and resurrection, later reflected in subsequent religions.<sup>35</sup> Today, there are approximately 200,000 Zoroastrians worldwide,<sup>36</sup> with about 18,000 residing in the United States.<sup>37</sup> The number of Zoroastrians is dwindling because conversion to the religion is prohibited and intermarriage is not permitted.

#### **Additional Resources:**

BBC Religions, [www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/zoroastrian](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/zoroastrian)

Freedman, S.G., *Matters of Faith and Heart Guide a Zoroastrian Matchmaker*, [www.nytimes.com/2009/02/07/us/07religion.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/07/us/07religion.html)

<sup>34</sup> Adherents.com, [http://www.adherents.com/Religions\\_By\\_Adherents.html](http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html)

<sup>35</sup> [Religioustolerance.org](http://www.religioustolerance.org/), <http://www.religioustolerance.org/>

<sup>36</sup> Patheos, <http://www.patheos.com>

<sup>37</sup> The Pluralism Project, <http://pluralism.org/resources/statistics/tradition.php>



# Six Goals for Student Learning Outcomes

These six goals are derived from Wiggins & McTighe (2005), *Understanding by Design*, 2nd edition, and have been reframed by the present authors to apply to the subject of student learning about religious differences. They are sourced by Tanenbaum's *Six Learning Outcomes for Students*.

1. Students/participants *can explain* that diversity (including religious diversity) is a normal part of U.S. society.
  - a. Students/participants *can explain* that socially just communities acknowledge, respect, and value the ways in which people are different. This includes religious difference.
2. Students/participants *reveal self-knowledge* about their own beliefs.
3. Students/participants *can apply* basic skills of listening attentively, questioning respectfully, and participating thoughtfully.
  - a. Students/participants *can listen attentively and reframe* what they have heard in ways that match what the speakers have said.
  - b. Students/participants *can raise questions* with respect.
  - c. Students/participants *will participate thoughtfully* in the activities.
4. Students/participants *can interpret* differences, including religious differences, through respectful curiosity, in a way that promotes respect and inclusion.
5. Students/participants *see in perspective* different points of view.
  - a. Students/participants *see in perspective* when points of view are stereotyped or prejudicial to others.
  - b. Students/participants *see in perspective* how and why stereotypes develop.
  - c. Students/participants *can demonstrate* that they are willing and able to disrupt or debunk religious stereotypes and prejudicial assumptions when they hear them.
6. Students/participants *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.

# Meeting National Standards

Many teachers are required to address national standards in all aspects of their curricula, and *Religions in My Neighborhood: Teaching Curiosity and Respect about Religious Differences* can be a useful tool for doing so.

To assist educators in meeting curriculum standards, we have provided two lists of national standards. For social studies, we provide the portion of the National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies that the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) categorizes as the *thematic standards*, because these are the social studies standards that are most relevant to *Religions in My Neighborhood*. These national *thematic standards* are drawn from the website and publications of NCSS: <http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands>.

In addition to social studies content, educators will find that many of the lessons also integrate English Language Arts content. Accordingly, we provide the Standards for the English Language Arts from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) (in partnership with the International Reading Association) drawn from their website and publications: <http://www.ncte.org/standards>.

Many of the lessons in *Religions in My Neighborhood* will also be useful in meeting other content area standards such as science, math, health and the arts.

We invite educators to use this curriculum in the ways that are most relevant to their learning communities and to match the lessons with standards that best meet the needs of their teaching goals. We acknowledge that educators are creative thinkers and bring a great deal of intellectual prowess to the implementation of curriculum, so we encourage using *Religions in My Neighborhood: Teaching Curiosity and Respect about Religious Differences* with an engaged and interactive approach to meeting standards.

# NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES

## Thematic Standards for Social Studies

.....

- 1 Culture and Cultural Diversity... *Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.*
- 2 Time, Continuity, and Change... *Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ways human beings view themselves in and over time.*
- 3 People, Places, and Environments... *Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments.*
- 4 Individual Development and Identity... *Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity.*
- 5 Individuals, Groups and Institutions... *Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions.*
- 6 Power, Authority, and Governance... *Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create and change structures of power, authority, and governance.*
- 7 Production, Distribution, and Consumption... *Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people organize for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services.*
- 8 Science, Technology, and Society... *Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of relationships among science, technology, and society.*
- 9 Global Connections... *Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of global connections and interdependence.*
- 10 Civic Ideals and Practices... *Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic.*

[www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands](http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands)

# NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

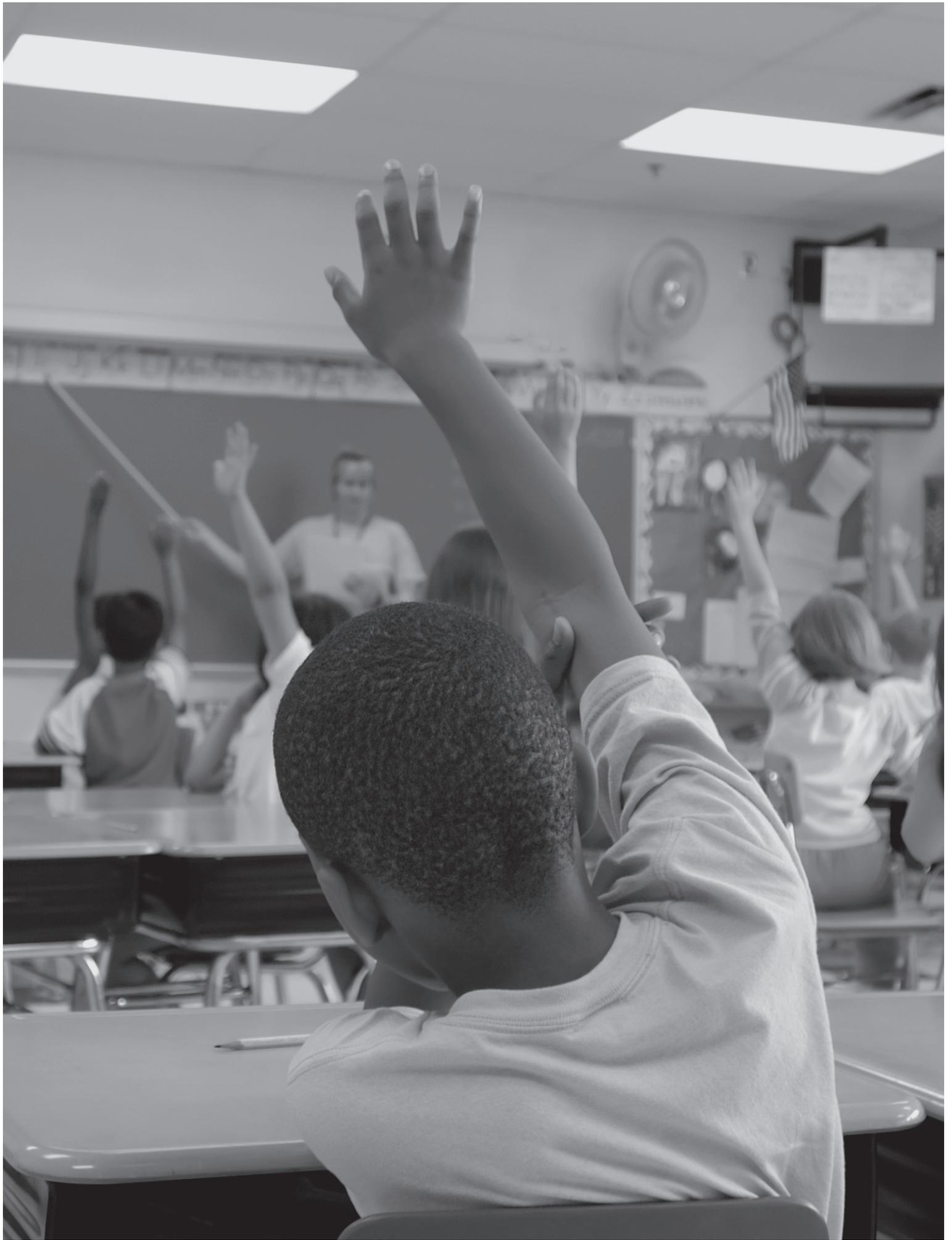
## Standards for English Language Arts

.....

- 1 Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
- 2 Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
- 3 Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
- 4 Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
- 5 Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
- 6 Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
- 7 Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
- 8 Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
- 9 Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

- 10 Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum.
- 11 Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
- 12 Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

[www.ncte.org/standards](http://www.ncte.org/standards)



# Tanenbaum's Educational Pedagogy: The Seven Principles for Inclusive Education

The Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding is committed to developing educational programs that fulfill several educational commitments that prepare students to become effective global citizens. As you implement Tanenbaum's *Religions in My Neighborhood: Teaching Curiosity and Respect about Religious Differences*, you are partnering with us to achieve the following seven principles:

- **Teaching all Students**
- **Exploring Multiple Identities**
- **Preventing Prejudice**
- **Promoting Social Justice**
- **Choosing Appropriate Materials**
- **Teaching and Learning about Cultures and Religions**
- **Adapting and Integrating Lessons Appropriately**

More information about each principle is detailed in the following pages.

# Teaching All Students

Students learn in different ways. It is, therefore, important to develop the skills to teach in different ways. For example, some students learn best when introduced to information visually, while others learn best through hearing information, working in groups or activity-based projects. By using several different approaches to the same material within the same lesson or activity, information can become more interesting and tangible to a greater number of students.

Some ways to accomplish this are:

- **Think of three different ways to teach a lesson.** You could teach a new concept or definition by: (1) having students create a web map on newsprint to represent a concept or a definition (visual), (2) giving a brief lecture about the concept or definition (auditory), or (3) having students act out the concept or definition using various clues (kinesthetic). Of course, there are other strategies as well, such as doing a group brainstorm on chart paper to evoke students' prior knowledge about what they already know about the topic, reading a story aloud that illustrates the concept or inviting students to draw an illustration of what they guess the concept might mean. There are many modes to uncover student knowledge and expand new ideas. By incorporating at least three different approaches in your instruction, you will have increased your student's learning outcomes by a factor of three.
- **Ask other teachers how they have taught or would teach a lesson.** Try out new approaches, even if you may not have used that approach before.
- **Share with your colleagues** a lesson that you created and ask if they see evidence of the three learning styles being addressed or have any other ideas or suggestions. Learn from each other!
- **Listen carefully to student's questions and comments.** Learning is a dialogue between students and teachers, with both asking questions and seeking answers from each another. Allow and encourage students to feel comfortable enough to ask for more information, or to seek clarification of information that has already been given. Draw upon the prior knowledge and life experience that students bring to the classroom. Integrate their comments and questions authentically into discussion.
- **Expect student's backgrounds and abilities to be different.** Try to be considerate of these differences and help the students reflect on their individuality to cultivate a sense of belonging in your learning community.

# Exploring Multiple Identities

Building confidence and affirming identity for students supports their learning. Students who are excited about themselves and other people, and who are inquisitive about the world around them, will more easily learn to be compassionate and understanding of people who are different from them. They are less likely to hold negative feelings about others if they are comfortable with themselves and also with those who are different.

Here are some ways to affirm and encourage student's identities:

- **Create activities** that help students talk about, and feel pride in, themselves and their unique experiences.
- **Engage students in projects** where they can talk about their *experiences* in relation to the academic content so that their experiences gain status by becoming part of academic knowledge.
- **Encourage all aspects of each student's individuality.** Let them know it is okay to be themselves.
- **Create an environment where it is safe to wonder and investigate about self and others.** Help students to see that none of us is a “final product!” Rather, we are all in a constant state of developing as learners and as members of our communities.
- **Discuss all areas in which a student may find opportunities for success** — academic, artistic, athletic, physical, emotional and personal.
- **Help students understand** the ways in which their identities and their experiences may be linked to their gender and sexual identity, their ethnicity and racial identity, or their religious beliefs and religious identity.
- **Maintain a respectful environment among the students.** Help them to use respectful language and behaviors with all their classmates and peers. Work with students so that they learn to disagree respectfully. Students should not shy away from conflicting ideas but learn how to use divergent points of view as an opportunity to deepen their understanding of themselves and others. Cultivate a classroom community where questions are welcomed and expected.

# Preventing Prejudice

All of us are influenced by the legacy of institutionalized inequalities that permeate history as well as the stereotyped ideas and images we encounter everyday. The best way for an educator to address preconceived stereotypes and to prevent them from escalating into feelings of prejudice and bias is to create awareness. This can be done by discussing students' stereotypes in both large and small groups.

*This topic may bring up some challenges and sensitivities from the class and the teacher, as well. Here are some ways to discuss the topic of prejudice. It is important to talk about all topics the students bring up. If the educator feels uncomfortable speaking about specific topics, please feel free to contact Tanenbaum about ways to address or improve the situation.*

These are a number of suggestions about how to create student awareness of stereotyped beliefs and inequality:

- **Teach explicitly about histories of unfairness, or institutionalized inequality.** Guide students in understanding that institutionalized inequality is not everybody's fault, but that it is everybody's responsibility to become aware, and to create fair and equitable learning communities.
- **Talk about all of the student's feelings and attitudes.** Do not ignore prejudicial behaviors or feelings. They will not go away on their own. Cultivate a productive atmosphere of trust, examination and responsibility rather than one of guilt.
- **Set clear boundaries and rules** about behaviors that are based on prejudices, such as teasing, bullying or excluding. Set goals for an anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-biased classroom or learning community. Work explicitly with students to create ways to recognize and interrupt discriminatory or biased language and acts. Be clear with students that you and they will benefit from an inclusive learning community.
- **Introduce key words to students that can alert them to the presence of a stereotype.** "All women..." "They always..." "My people would never..." and "Those people..." are a good start.
- **Help students to identify prejudicial behavior (as opposed to making generalizations).** We all put people, places and things into categories so that we can contextualize them in relationship to ourselves. But when we place a value on people that is less than the value we place on ourselves, we are prone to treat those people in an unfair manner.

- **Don't be afraid to talk about stereotypes.** If you do not feel you have been able to get a point across, you can always come back to it at a later time or consult with another educator for assistance.
- **Train students to discern fact from fiction, especially when it comes to stereotypes.** If a student makes a statement or uses words that are prejudiced or are based on a stereotype, the teacher should address the situation by asking questions about the information source, asking whether there are other points of view on the stereotype. The teacher should provide concrete information that will enable students to rethink their stereotypes based on new information.

For example, if a student says that women are not good at sports, ask the student, “What makes you say that?” or “Does anyone know of women who have excelled in sports?” Try to help students gain an understanding of their own source(s) of misinformation. Then, engage in activities and dialogue that illustrate the many professional and amateur female athletes who have defined sports throughout the ages (such as Wilma Rudolph, Kerri Strug, Lisa Leslie, Dara Torres, Mia Hamm, Serena Williams, Venus Williams and more).

- **Develop dialogue and reflection.** Help the students ask themselves, *Why do I feel this way? Where did I learn this misinformation? How can I incorporate and act upon this new information?*

# Promoting Social Justice

Young people are good judges of what is or is not fair. Talk to students about issues of fairness, and of justice or injustice in terms of equality for all.

Here are some ways to promote social justice in your classroom:

- **Make comparisons.** Help students compare situations of injustice in their own lives to larger social issues. For some students, their experiences of injustice are directly linked to larger social issues, such as access to equitable education, immigration rights and civic neglect of urban environments. For other students, these larger social issues will be “new” ideas with which to grapple. These dialogues help students develop empathy and awareness of their personal context within the broader community.
- **Develop a worldview.** Encourage students to explore their perspective on issues within and outside their immediate communities and their relationship to the larger world. For example, if the air or water in their community is polluted, what are the sources of pollution?
- **Engage in critical thinking.** Ask students to explore why they think what they think and examine where they got their opinions. Have they taken other people’s perspectives into account? Assist students in activities to gain accurate information or to see other perspectives.
- **Explore power dynamics.** Ask students if every view has been represented in a given situation. Ask students to explore how they define “power,” who has power, who doesn’t, and examine issues of access to power. Use students’ own experiences to explore power dynamics. Who has greater or lesser power on sports teams? In math or spelling or beauty competitions? In the classroom? In the school?
- **Encourage students to develop a sense of civic responsibility.** Use academic learning to encourage students to understand their unique roles in society and the contributions that they can make. Provide role models by teaching about students and communities who have created social change.
- **Bring these discussions into all subject areas.** Don’t limit your discussions to one day a week, month, or year. Fully integrate a social justice perspective into all content areas. These topics can be addressed continuously and in many different contexts. For example, you can draw attention to a character’s behavior in a book or have students solve a math problem that compares the resources of one city with another.
- **Service learning and action planning.** Get students involved in taking social justice issues into their own hands. Service opportunities can help students feel empowered to address issues of inequity in their own communities. Help students develop concrete projects that are achievable and relevant in their own communities. Guide students in critically examining the misguided assumptions of taking on the role of “rescuer” in humanitarian aid/“charity work.” Engage the voices and viewpoints of the communities with which the service learning is taking place.

# Choosing Appropriate Materials

It is important to choose books and materials that reflect accurate images of diverse peoples. Books, magazines, movies, web-based media and handouts can be guides for behavior and ideas, but they also have the potential to perpetuate some stereotypes. Read over all materials you are planning to use with students and decide if they promote a positive and appropriate image of people and themes.

The following are a number of things to keep in mind when choosing what you present to the students:

- **Be diverse.** Have multiple pictures, sources, or readings by and about different groups and people.
- **Let groups speak for themselves.** Use sources from within the contexts you are studying. For example: when studying about women, make sure you use women authors to describe situations, not just men writing about women.
- **Experts are everywhere.** Go outside the traditional people, organizations and resources to find sources that relate to your studies. These will offer a unique perspective that can round out more traditional sources. Draw from the richness of democratic media such as YouTube, blogs and other interactive sources.
- **Use primary sources.** Secondary sources are useful – but are used best to accompany primary sources and not as a stand in for them.
- **Show past and present images of different groups.** Societies and cultures are constantly changing and people often appear very different now from how they may have appeared in the past. It is important for students to recognize the ways in which culture and people change over time. For example, ceremonial dress is for ceremonies. Make sure that students don't confuse the actions and dress celebrating an important day for a cultural or religious group with the usual daily actions and dress of that same group.

# Teaching and Learning about Cultures and Religions

It is important that students learn about other cultures and religions in a positive and comfortable manner. This includes learning about the cultural and religious differences among their peers, as well as other cultures and religions that are more remote from their experiences.

Some ways to do this are:

- **Teach students the value of asking questions.** As a teacher, model ways of asking respectful questions in the classroom or learning community. Encourage them to think about how to ask respectful questions of each other and to practice doing so.
- **Discuss appropriate ways to ask questions about identity, religion, culture and race.** Help the students use positive terms to gain information about others.
- **Provide anonymous ways for students to ask questions.** For instance, provide an anonymous “question box” in a prominent place in the classroom. This is essential for a learning community that hopes to open dialogue. When students realize they may ask previously silenced questions, they can become more eager participants in their learning.
- **Emphasize that culture is not a fixed or permanent condition.** Society and culture are constantly changing. Languages, religions, rituals, traditions and ways of knowing change over time. People often appear very different now from how they may have appeared in the past. It is important for students to recognize the evolving nature of, and the inaccuracies of, previously assumed images.
- **Allow opportunities for students to learn about the ever changing cultures of the world.** Complicate this goal through a range of subjects – not just social studies. For example, an abacus can be a tool to teach both math and the similarities between Chinese, Japanese, and Russian cultures. Yet, the use of the abacus has changed drastically in the past fifty years, especially the past ten years – the lifetime of many of our students – so these kinds of examples should be approached with a contemporary framework. Furthermore, avoid making sweeping statements about “Chinese, Japanese, and Russian cultures” or other cultural groups. There is vast diversity within every cultural group. It may be more helpful for students to grasp the notion of diversity within groups and geographic regions than to try to oversimplify the experiences of a certain people, nation or region.

- **Help students see a range of nuanced views and make connections within and between cultures.** For example, a generalization such as “Muslim women cover their hair” is not only false, but it does not address the range of beliefs among Muslims about modesty in dress and what that entails. A more helpful discussion may guide students in seeing connections between Islam and other religions where people may cover their hair in different instances due to religious requirements and preferences (for example: Amish women, Jewish women, Greek Orthodox women, Sikh men and women, Catholic women, etc.) These discussions require constant attention to nuance and acknowledging the spectrum of practices that spring from the range of ways people interpret their religious teachings and beliefs.

# Adapting and Integrating Lessons Appropriately

It is important that educators be flexible in the adaptation of all the lessons in our curriculum as well as prescribed curriculum in general. Sometimes, the most teachable moments are unplanned and unscripted. Often pre-designed lessons are a good starting point for dialogues or critical thinking.

Some ways to do this include:

- **Be mindful of who is in your classroom, so that the lessons can be more culturally-relevant.** When utilizing a lesson that shows representations of a particular place (such as the country of Kenya in East Africa), first ask students if they have ever been to the place in question. **The students who have been there, or have family from there, may be able to participate in the activity in a leadership role.** Also, be cognizant that stereotypes or ignorance on the part of students or educators can make some students hesitant to share their connection or personal stories. Students and families may feel more trusting to share stories in a classroom that makes distinctions among the range of perspectives and experiences held by individual Kenyan families and that avoids the all-too-common pitfall of assuming that all experiences from Kenya, or worse, from the continent of Africa, are similar. It is also presumptuous to assume that the student from the place in question is an expert or wants a leadership role. Caution should be taken to be certain that the student is comfortable sharing. For example, students or family members who have survived severe conditions and possibly entered the United States as refugees may not have a desire, nor be prepared to “show and tell” something about their homeland.
- **Proceed with caution and thoughtfulness about student family histories.** Provide meaningful opportunities for students to present their beliefs and traditions, based on their own readiness and willingness to share them. This is very important so that you can make connections throughout the various lessons to their personal experiences. Themes of family history and immigration are commonly used in classrooms that aim to bring a multicultural perspective; however, when doing this, a social justice perspective points to the need to include discussions on the forced immigration of enslaved people and refugee people, as well as the forced migration and genocide of American Indian people. Children of adoption and foster care may not have access to stories of “where my family is from,” so caution needs to be taken in how to include stories of questioning. Do not assume students have access to family history, or that it is a topic with which the family wants to share.
- **Do not assume that you can tell where students are from or how they identify just by looking at them, by the sound of their names or articles of dress.** Remember race and ethnicity are social constructions, not scientific law.
- **Be aware of what is engaging to your students.** If you are teaching in a place where Reggaeton is the popular music of choice, substitute an appropriate Reggaeton song instead of something that is not as relevant to students.





# CHAPTER I

## Differences are Normal: Identities, Families and Communities

**GOALS FOR STUDENT LEARNING IN CHAPTER I: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6**

### **BIG IDEAS FOR CHAPTER I**

- We learn in communities of care and respect where difference is normal.
- We create our learning community by agreeing on our guidelines together.
- Learning communities are comprised of people and families with different ways of being, knowing and believing.

### **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER I**

- What is a learning community?
- How do we develop a caring and respectful learning community that embraces difference?

# Chapter I (Unit 1): My Responsibility in My Learning Community

## **BIG IDEAS FOR I (1)**

- We can together build a community in which everyone can learn.
- Learning, creating and caring in a community of respect helps me learn more about myself, others and our place in our world.
- If you are respectful in asking questions and expressing curiosity, people will tell you more. We learn more from each other with respect.

## **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR I (1)**

- How do we build a learning community?
- How do we develop caring communities?
- How do we cultivate respect of difference?

## **NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR I (1)**

- English Language Arts: 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 11, 12
- Social Studies: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10

## LESSON I (1): MY RESPONSIBILITY IN MY LEARNING COMMUNITY

### **Rationale: Why teach this lesson?**

When students participate in the development of classroom guidelines, they are more apt to embrace the structures and expectations of the learning community. Whether you call these ideas “Rules of Respect” or “Our Community Understandings” or something else, setting the stage for a mutually respectful, collaborative environment is essential for learning through this curriculum.

### **Think ahead:**

Some students may not be accustomed to being invited to speak their mind about how they hope their learning community will operate, and those students may need extra encouragement to vocalize their thoughts. Other students may be more assertive and not accustomed to “sharing the floor” and may need some modeling on how to listen attentively and live with their peers’ ideas, even if they disagree with them.

The manner in which the facilitator models a democratic dialogue with students will set the tone for this activity, and may even influence future learning experiences in the curriculum. Be prepared to field all possible ideas of how students want to run their learning environment. The more open-minded and open-hearted the educator remains, the more participation will be elicited.

Students often surprise us in the effectiveness of their peer-developed guidelines. You may want to visit The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>38</sup> Though it is obviously written in adult language, it can provide a foundation of knowledge for the facilitator to help children formulate their own language of respect.

### **Objectives for this lesson – Students will:**

- Develop the concept of “respect in practice” in the classroom.
- Brainstorm ways in which students are respectful in classroom conversation and actions.
- Expand vocabulary of words that help describe difference.
- Agree on the language for a poster that will be permanently posted and regularly referenced in the classroom.

### **Materials needed:**

- Chart paper and markers
- Possible: post-it notes or index cards

### **Time needed:**

45 minutes

---

<sup>38</sup> The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr>

**Setting the lesson:**

Welcome students to this new activity. Explain that our learning community is a community of trust and respect. Remind students that they are always trusted in this community and that to maintain the trust and respect, it will be helpful to hear all their ideas. Establish ways to make certain that all students have a chance to speak.

**Procedure for the lesson:**

Use big chart paper that is visible to all students.

Invite students to think about: “What does respect look like? Sound like? Feel like?” Make a chart paper similar to the worksheet included here. Write all students’ responses on the chart paper so they feel affirmed in their participation and the other students see the value of a democratic dialogue. You can do this as an open conversation or with each student writing or drawing on a post-it note (or index card, or small scrap of paper) to stick it to the chart paper. Another way to get started is for each student to work on their own ideas on the worksheet, and then bring their worksheets to the whole group. Be certain each student’s views are represented on the big collaborative chart paper. Ask for more ideas until everyone has spoken.

Sometimes these conversations generate ideas and viewpoints as well as personal stories, so it may be useful to have another piece of chart paper to list “what respect does *not* look like.”

After generating a wide range of responses from many students, shift the question back to the more specific point: What does a respectful learning community look like? Sound like? Feel like? Document these ideas on chart paper or simply circle any repetitious ideas that appear on the first chart paper.

Explain that we want to generate a few simple sentences to make a big poster for our learning community.

**Closure for the lesson:**

Decide with the students on a few simple, meaningful statements to create the final poster. Guide them to encompass their ideas into effective statements.

Some sentences may include ideas such as:

- Tell your classmate how you feel instead of shouting, hitting them or talking behind their backs.
- Listen closely when someone else talks.
- Listen with an open mind.
- Share your ideas with an open heart.
- Show consideration for other people’s ideas and opinions.
- Ask other people to tell you more about their ideas.
- Help each other. Get help when needed.
- If someone is being hurtful to others, interrupt the hurtful actions. Say “Please don’t do that” or “You’re not following OUR rules.”

**Assessment for the lesson:**

Short term: Did students share ideas by applying basic skills of listening attentively, questioning respectfully and participating thoughtfully?

Long term: Do students demonstrate investment in the classroom Rules of Respect by following them, referring to them, reminding one another of them and suggesting new ones? Do the students demonstrate empathy for differences?

**NOTE to teachers: This can be an effective tool when reinforced regularly throughout the term. Reference your rules/guidelines to applaud your students when they are using the rules/guidelines in their interactions and learning with each other. Remind students when rules/guidelines are not being followed as a guide for what is agreed upon and expected by all in the classroom.**

**Chapter I (1) Extensions with children’s literature on respect:**

Read aloud from one or more of the following selection of children’s books. On chart paper, list the ways in which the characters display caring and cultivate a community of respect.

Engage students in dramatizing the stories with variations on the outcomes depending on how caring and respect are exhibited.

*Emily’s Caring and Sharing* by Cindy Post Senning, Peggy Post, and Leo Landry (2008).

*Frog and Toad are Friends* by Arnold Lobel (1979).

*Stone Soup* by Jon J Muth (2003).

*Since We’re Friends: An Autism Picture Book* by Celeste Shally and David Harrington (2007).

*Crow Boy* by Taro Yashima (1976).

*Oliver Button is a Sissy* by Tomie dePaola (1979).

*Thee, Hannah!* by Marguerite De Angeli (2000).

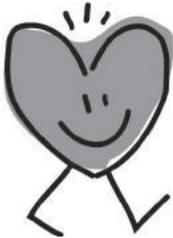
**Chapter I (1) Extensions to explore and express understandings of respect:**

Students can create skits of how they respect each other either using the scenarios (included at the end of this unit) or a situation where they felt respected.

Teach the students how to create acrostic poems with RESPECT spelled out vertically. Encourage them to come up with words connected to the concept of respect that start with each letter in the word. For instance:

Ready to help  
Empathy  
Share with one another  
Partnership  
Everybody Listens  
Caring  
Trust

# What does respect...

LOOK LIKE?	SOUND LIKE?	FEEL LIKE?
		





## Respecting Each Other – Scenarios

Are the following scenarios examples of respectful behavior or disrespectful behavior? Why? If the behavior is disrespectful, what are some respectful things you could do in the situation? If the scenario is respectful, what are some other examples of respectful things you could say?

- Jessica and Alex were shooting baskets on the basketball court after school. Marisol saw them and thought it would be fun to play. She asked them if she could join their game, and Jessica said, “No, I don’t think so. We just wanted it to be the two of us.”
- Tacari and William were waiting in line for lunch. The line was very long, and everyone was hungry. Joe got to lunch late, but he was very hungry, so he took a spot in front of Tacari and William.
- Ms. Abiola asked her class “What can we do to help our planet?” A lot of hands went up, and Susan said, “Recycle!” Then she said, “Oops, I’m sorry I didn’t raise my hand.”
- One day after school Amina decided she wanted to stop for a snack on the way home. She asked her best friend, Billy, if he wanted to come with her. Billy said, “Sure, I’ll come, but I don’t have any money.” When they got to the store, Amina bought him a snack. Billy said, “Thanks a lot!”
- The class was playing a baseball game, and Adam was on first base. When Maria hit the ball, Adam ran to second base, but he tripped over his shoelace and was out. When he got back to the dugout, Sam said, “Way to go, loser. Next time, tie your shoes.”
- James and Thomas were reading each other’s short stories in school. They were asked to give each other comments. James said, “I think you describe your setting really well; I can see where it takes place in my mind.” Thomas said, “The things you have your characters say really keeps me interested in your story.”

# Chapter I (Unit 2): My Identity in My Learning Community

## **BIG IDEAS FOR I (2)**

- Exploring and expressing my identity affirms me in who I am and helps me imagine who I can become in my ever-changing growth.
- Exploring and expressing my identity opens up my understanding of the identity of others and how their identities also change.

## **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR I (2)**

- Who am I?
- How do I identify?

## **NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR I (2)**

- English Language Arts: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 11, 12
- Social Studies: 1, 3, 4

## LESSON I (2): MY IDENTITY IN MY LEARNING COMMUNITY

### **Rationale: Why teach this lesson?**

Most children in grades K–4 do not often spend a great deal of time pondering the question “Who am I?” Their everyday world shapes their perspectives on their identities, which are taken for granted. Starting to unpack the multiple components of identity can help young children begin to reflect upon the many different aspects of their lived experiences. This lesson is developed with the understanding that as children become more aware of who they are and how they became who they are, the more they can appreciate the differences in who their peers are and how their peers became that way. In K–4 children’s terms, “The more I understand myself, the more I can understand you.”

### **Think ahead:**

The concept of identity is rather abstract for K–4<sup>th</sup> grade students. Helping students express a “sense of self” will require helping them to conceptualize the larger notion of identity. Engaging students in guessing about identifying factors about fictitious characters may be helpful to launch the discussion as pointed out in the “procedure” below. It is critical to launch the discussion with fictitious characters, or examples of people from history and current events, so that children in the class do not inadvertently become objects of discussion or the spokesperson for an identity group with whom they may, or may not, identify.

After introducing the concept of identity in this way, children may eventually (and quite naturally) chime in, “Michael Phelps likes to swim like I do!” or “Barack Obama is black (or mixed, or biracial) like me, and a strong leader.” Or, if discussing fictitious characters, “Dora the Explorer is bilingual like Tatyana!” This is a natural, healthy response in a dialectical classroom and is appropriate as long as children are not being “named” against their wishes. Affirming children in naming themselves is essential. In the case of Dora and Tatyana, one affirming response would be, “Yes, we are fortunate to have many languages spoken in our class. Tatyana, are there other ways that you would describe Dora or yourself? In addition to Dora’s and your terrific language skills, what else do we know about Dora, or about you? You can tell us in the group, or you can put it on your work sheet.”

### **Objectives for this lesson – Students will:**

- Guess about identity components of fictitious characters to become more aware of the topic of identity.
- Brainstorm the many aspects of their lives that help make them who they are.
- Brainstorm lists of experiences with their classmates to generate their own thought process and make them more cognizant of others’ experiences.
- Create a self-portrait that includes images of their faces as well as images of components of their identities.
- Become more thoughtful about the multiple influences on their identities.
- Become more cognizant of, and respectful toward, the similarities and differences in their learning community.

**Materials needed:**

- Book: *Just Like Me: Stories and Self-Portraits by Fourteen Artists* edited by Harriet Rohmer (1997). (If you cannot order a copy of this valuable book, try your local library or inter-library loan.)
- List of fictitious characters with whom your students will be able to identify
- Drawing paper
- Art materials such as pencils, markers, oil pastels, and if possible and available, tempera paint or watercolor with brushes and water cans for brushes
- Clean-up materials such as sponges, paper towels, hand washing sink area or buckets/bins for hand washing

**Time needed:**

2 or 3 class meetings, 45 minutes each

**Setting the lesson:**

Make a list of fictitious characters with whom your students will be able to identify some characteristics, and who are relevant to your students' age groups and your students' contexts. For example, Dora the Explorer, Pirate Jack Sparrow, Curious George, Kermit the Frog, Zoe Muppet on Sesame Street, Willy from the Ezra Jack Keats book *The Snowy Day*, Grace from Mary Hoffman book *Amazing Grace*, etc. If possible, provide pictures of the character from books or internet sources.

Collect art materials and consider your work-space for your students. Working with paint is not required for this lesson, but it can be very enriching and exciting as long as you have a space that can be forgiving of a few splashes or spills and has a water source for clean-up.

## **Procedure for the lesson:**

### **Day 1:**

Lead a group discussion in which children name the characters you have considered and for which you gathered pictures. List one character on chart paper, and discuss the character's identity.

For example, Dora the Explorer. What do we know about her? We know she is Latina, (although we do not know from which Latin American country her family originates), she is bilingual in Spanish and English, she is adventurous, she likes animals (especially Boots the monkey), she is athletic (especially in baseball in which her father is a coach, and also in soccer), she is a girl and she has a family: Mami, Papi, sister Alicia, cousin Diego.

Many things make up her identity. List the things: Race/ethnicity, language, favorite pets, sports, family life, gender. Consider some other characters and what we know about them. Then ask: *What do we want to know about Dora? What do we want to know about the other characters?*

After discussing several characters (or people from history and current events) lead students in considering the components of identity. Encourage them to consider all the notions that were discussed in the group dialogue about characters. Also encourage them to add aspects of self that you may not have discussed yet. Explain that they do not have to fill in all the blanks; say, "Pick the ones that are most important to you and feel free to add some that we may not have discussed."

They can answer the question in picture form or text form on the following worksheet.

*Note: If religion is raised by students, treat it as a part of identity, like other parts of one's identity. If it isn't raised by the students, wait until Chapter 2 where it is raised directly.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

# My Identity Has Many Parts

**My learning community:**

**My language(s):**

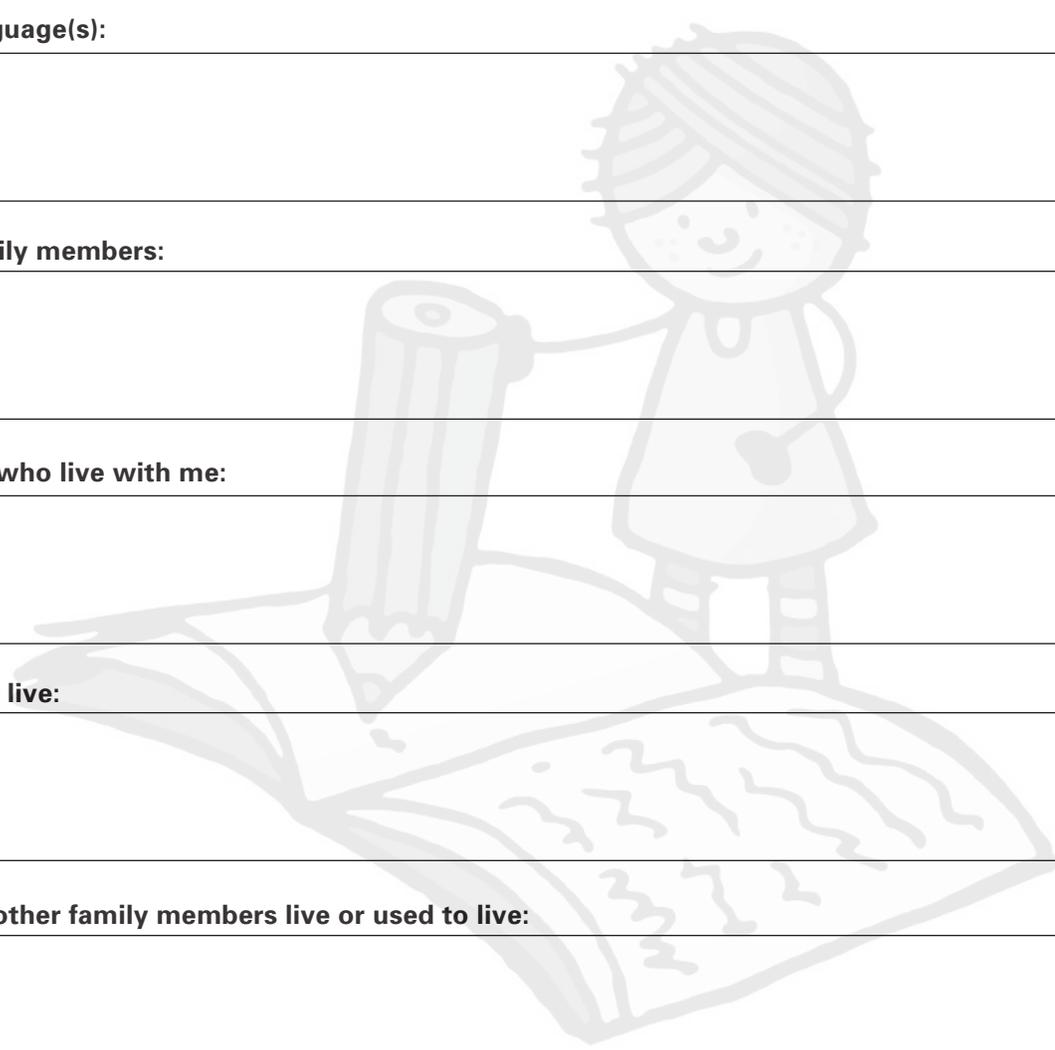
**My family members:**

**People who live with me:**

**Where I live:**

**Where other family members live or used to live:**

**Places I have been:**



**My friends:**

**My favorite activities:**

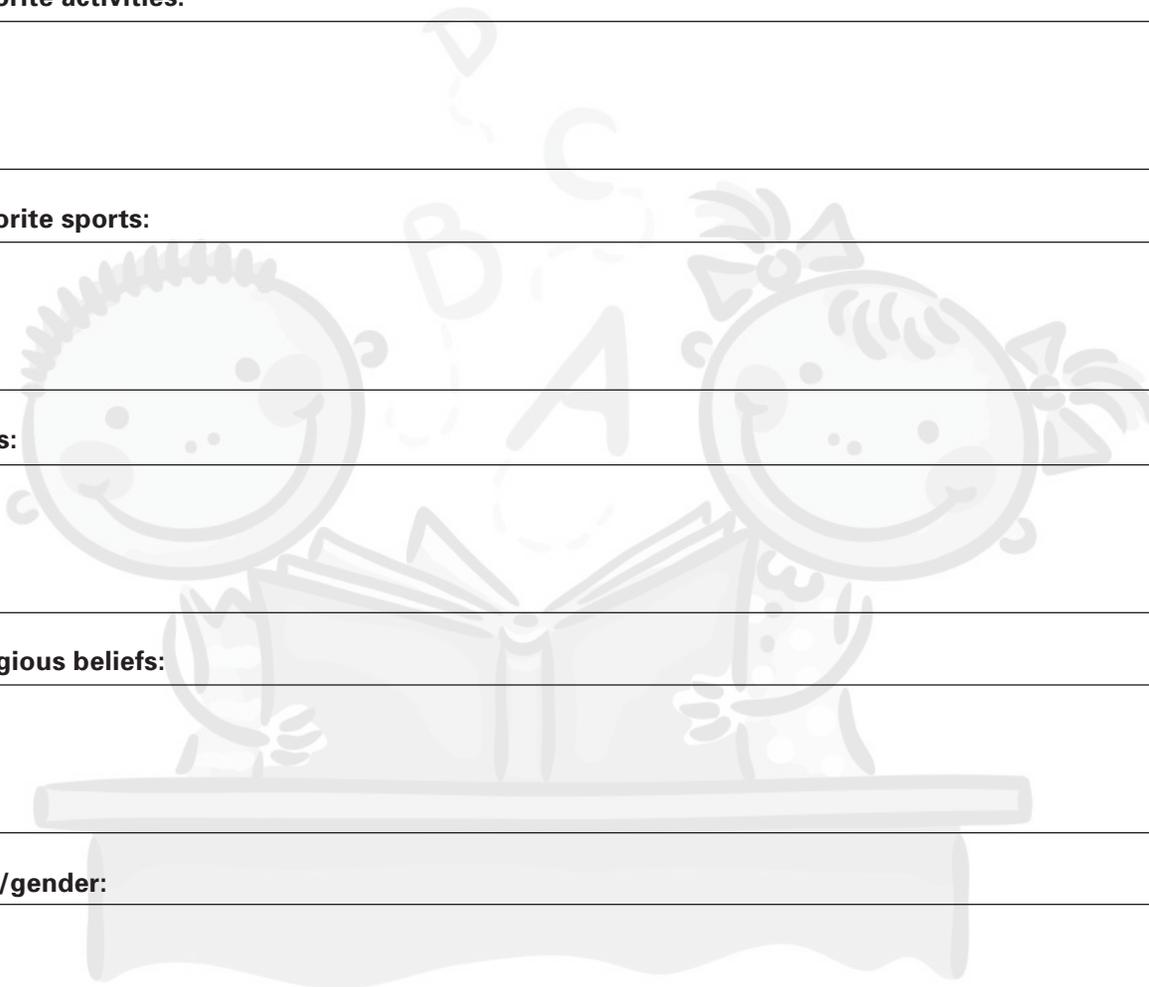
**My favorite sports:**

**My pets:**

**My religious beliefs:**

**My sex/gender:**

**More ideas about me:**



**Day 2:**

Revisit worksheets from yesterday. Discuss how you could show all these pieces of your identity in artwork. Discuss self-portraits. If available, look at examples from the book *Just Like Me: Stories and Self-Portraits by Fourteen Artists* edited by Harriet Rohmer (1997).

This book provides examples of self-portraits by artists who represent a wide range of racial and ethnic heritages. The artists also include pictorial clues about their identities in their paintings. The book provides a one-page narrative written by each artist in kid-friendly language accompanied by two photographs of the artist: a current photo and a photo from early childhood. The book provides a valuable model of self-portraiture on many levels. Children see that the paintings do not look identical to the artist's photo. There is lots of room for artistic expression, which encourages students who may be less confident to dive in and try to express their ideas in visual art. It also connects the world of ideas and notions of identity with pictures.

You do not have to be an art teacher to lead a vibrant self-portrait lesson. One way to get students started on drawing a self-portrait is to instruct students to draw a simple oval on the page, which will serve as the face. They can fill in the features, as they like. Then encourage students to add various symbols and pictures in the background, in their hair or as part of their faces. Most students in grades K-4 are still confident enough to tackle a self-portrait without overly detailed instruction from the teacher. Typically, their developmental perspective still allows them to be pleased with their work.

Encourage them with specific comments such as, "I like the choices you made by putting that shape in this corner and that color on your shirt; it really tells me a lot about you." These specific details will be much more encouraging than the more superlative "It's beautiful!" The specificity will help them to expand on what they have already done. Some students get discouraged because of social pressures on what art "should look like." For these children, it helps to say, "If I wanted it to look like a photograph, I would have handed you a camera. This is about expressing your identity! Let's look at the other artists' work and learn from their ideas."

Allow ample time for work and for clean up.

**Day 3:**

Continue with the art making process on the self-portraits. Encourage students to talk about their work and their symbols of identity as they engage in the art – that is, what do they use to symbolize various aspects of who they are. They can talk about each other's work as well as their own. As they finish, help them create "artist statements" to be displayed with the portraits as explained below, in Closure.

**Closure for the lesson:**

Invite K–1 children to dictate to you, or to a helping adult, their narrative about their self-portraits. Write down their dictation to post with their artwork. Another more ambitious and technologically-dependent strategy is for each child to talk to a video camera while explaining his or her work, and to screen the video on TV near the art display. Some children may not be allowed to be captured on film due to the cultural or religious beliefs of their family or community. You can also allow for a “Meet the Artist” session where each child can present her or his self-portrait to the group.

Children in grades 2, 3 and 4 can write their own artist’s statements. Revisit the narratives from the *Just Like Me* book and notice some of the ways in which the professional artists told their stories. Complete artists’ statements, and prepare artwork and statements for an art display. Invite members of the larger learning community and family members to view the exhibit.

**Assessment for the lesson:**

- Do students reveal self-knowledge in their artwork and writing?
- Can students explain diversity in their own identities and the identities of their peers?

**Chapter I (2) Extensions about identity**

Exhibit the artwork and poetry of each student in a public place such as a bulletin board or display case. Develop a community event or celebration to highlight the work. Consider the possibility of each student reading his/her narrative about the work at the event. This might be a great activity to do for your first Parents Night or other occasion where parents/guardians can see their children’s work.

Consult the National Gallery of Art website listed in the footnote below (and in Resources) for the lesson plans and student activities on the theme of *Who Am I?: Self-Portraits in Art and Writing*.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> National Gallery of Art, [http://www.nga.gov/education/classroom/self\\_portraits/](http://www.nga.gov/education/classroom/self_portraits/)

# Chapter I (Unit 3): My Participation in My Learning Community

## **BIG IDEAS FOR I (3)**

- A learning community cultivates the following qualities:
  - Attentive listening: Students learn from other students, teachers and community members.
  - Respectful questioning: Students safely uncover their curiosities about differences, including religious differences.
  - Thoughtful participating: Students and teachers join and contribute to learning activities.
  - Curious investigating: Students ask questions and look for new information to challenge stereotypes.
  - Academic recording: Students document and share the knowledge gained in their learning communities.

## **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR I (3)**

- How can I expand my learning opportunities as well as the learning of my peers?

## **NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR I (3)**

- English Language Arts: 4, 11, 12
- Social Studies: 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10

## LESSON I (3): MY PARTICIPATION IN MY LEARNING COMMUNITY

### **Rationale: Why teach this lesson?**

Developing group practices for the learning community that bring a sense of ritual to shared discussion can increase respectful participation and inclusion. Students in grades K–4 are developmentally ripe for learning habits of community-mindedness. The combination of symbolism and concrete action in the Talking Stick practice can affirm students’ development in sharing dialogue.

### **Think ahead:**

This lesson draws upon the tradition of the Talking Stick used by many Native American tribal communities, but not by *all* Native Americans.

Please note that a frequent pitfall of teaching with content drawn from Native American sources is to paint all Native American experiences with a broad brush and neglect to distinguish the wide diversity across the range of Native American tribal communities. In this case, avoid giving the impression that all Native Americans use (or used in the past) the tradition of the Talking Stick. You might even explore the traditions of Native American tribes that are local to your community. A helpful resource is the National Congress of American Indians.<sup>40</sup>

To teach students respectful language, discuss the project as a Talking Stick *inspired by* Native American traditions and, whenever possible, be specific about certain tribal groups’ traditions such as Ojibwe, Cherokee, Black Feet, Chotaw, etc. An appropriate way to discuss the lesson is as a study of one Native American tradition practiced by members of specific tribes. As you launch into producing your classroom talking stick, call it “Our Classroom Talking Stick” or “Our Community Talking Stick” or invent a new term together such as “Our Turn-Taking-Wand.”

In addition to being a dynamic hands-on activity that can have lasting effects in your learning community’s dialogue, this lesson is an opportunity to build students’ understanding of the existence of broad stereotypes, as well as how to debunk myths and interrupt inaccurate stereotypes about Native Americans. By using this lesson with these considerations, educators can avoid the risk of perpetuating stereotypes. The simple act of teaching children to call an object by an accurate title can go a long way in the road to respecting differences.

---

<sup>40</sup> National Congress of American Indians, [www.ncai.org/Tribal-Directory.3.0.html](http://www.ncai.org/Tribal-Directory.3.0.html)

In addition to the resources listed in Setting the Lesson, the following book may be very useful for lessons that address Native American peoples, and is listed in the Resources at the end of the chapter: “Teaching About Native Americans” by Karen D. Harvey, Lisa D. Harjo & Jane K. Jackson (1997, *NCSS Bulletin* 84). In that curriculum bulletin, Harvey, Harjo & Jackson provide some important and useful cautions:

- Do not use alphabet cards that say A is for apple, B is for ball and I is for Indian.
- Do not talk about Native Americans as if they belong to the past.
- Do not talk about “them” and “us.”
- Do not lump all Native Americans together.
- Do not expect Native Americans to look like Hollywood movie Indians.
- Do not let stereotypes go unchallenged.
- Do not let students get the impression that a few “brave” Europeans defeated millions of “Indian savages” in battle.
- Do not teach that Native Americans are just like other racial and ethnic minorities.
- Do not assume that Native American children are well acquainted with their heritage.
- Do not let students think that native ways of life have no meaning today.

**Objectives for this lesson – Students will:**

- Students will learn how the talking stick activity can help them to apply basic skills of listening attentively, questioning respectfully and participating thoughtfully.
- Students will be able to explain diversity among the wide range of Native American identities.
- Students will learn to demonstrate empathy in discussion for the person who is speaking.

**Materials needed:**

- Research on Talking Stick traditions and practices
- A few tree branches or sturdy sticks
- Sand paper torn into pieces the size of a child’s palm
- Yarn, ribbon, shells, feathers or other objects to decorate the stick
- Craft glue or wood glue works a little better than regular white school glue
- School glue is fine if resources are limited

**Time needed:**

2 class meetings, 45 minutes each

### Setting the lesson:

Read information about the Talking Stick by Carol Locust, Ph.D., (Tribal affiliation – Eastern Band Cherokee) at the Native American Research and Training Center in Tuscon, Arizona.<sup>41</sup> The information is taken from the Acacia Artisans website.<sup>42</sup> The following is quoted directly from Dr. Locust's web text:

The talking stick has been used for centuries by many American Indian tribes as a means of just and impartial hearing. The talking stick was commonly used in council circles to designate who



had the right to speak. When matters of great concern came before the council, the leading elder would hold the talking stick and begin the discussion. When he finished what he had to say he would hold out the talking stick, and whoever wished to speak after him would take it. In this manner the stick was passed from one individual to another until all who wished to speak had done so. The stick was then passed back

to the leading elder for safe keeping.

Some tribes used a talking feather instead of a talking stick. Other tribes might have a peace pipe, a wampum belt, a sacred shell, or some other object by which they designate the right to speak. Whatever the object, it carries respect for free speech and assures the speaker he has the freedom and power to say what is in his heart without fear of reprisal or humiliation.

Whoever holds the talking stick has within his hands the sacred power of words. Only he can speak while he holds the stick; the other council members must remain silent. The eagle feather tied to the talking stick gives him the courage and wisdom to speak truthfully and wisely. The rabbit fur on the end of the stick reminds him that his words must come from his heart and that they must be soft and warm. The blue stone will remind him that the Great Spirit hears the message of his heart as well as the words he speaks. The shell, iridescent and ever changing, reminds him that all creation changes – the days, the seasons, the years – and people and situations change, too. The four colors of beads – yellow for the sunrise (east), red for the sunset (west), white for the snow (north) and green for the earth (south) – are symbolic of the powers of the universe he has in his hands at the moment to speak what is in his heart. Attached to the stick are strands of hair from the great buffalo. He who speaks may do so with the power and strength of this great animal.

The speaker should not forget that he carries within himself a sacred spark of the Great Spirit, and therefore he is also sacred. If he feels he cannot honor the talking stick with his words, he should refrain from speaking so he will not dishonor himself. When he is again in control of his words, the stick will be returned to him.<sup>43</sup>

For more information about the Talking Stick, write to Dr. Carol Locust at [carollocust@aol.com](mailto:carollocust@aol.com).

<sup>41</sup> Native American Research and Training Center, <http://nartc.fcm.arizona.edu/>

<sup>42</sup> Acacia Artisans, <http://www.acaciart.com/stories/archive6.html>

<sup>43</sup> This material is reproduced on Acacia Artisans and in this curriculum with the permission of Dr. Carol Locust.

**Procedure for the lesson:**

The teacher will bring in a few sturdy tree branches or sticks so that students can work in small groups. Be sure to have some extra sticks on hand for any emergencies, and also one additional stick to use as the teacher's demonstration piece. Rather than every single child producing a talking stick, it makes sense to have a few sticks for small groups. It is also more manageable to have a few sticks being developed, rather than trying to get 25 children all working on only one stick. Each group can produce a Talking Stick.

Consider how you will break the class into small groups and how many you will place in a group. Weigh the pros and cons of the groups being predetermined and teacher-selected or student-selected. Make a decision and stick with it.

Decide how many sticks you want the class to produce. For example, if you have five sticks you can designate one for each day of the week, or perhaps the students decide which stick to use for the month or one week at a time.

**Day 1:**

Discuss the information about the Talking Stick in Setting the Lesson above. Start with questions such as: *Have you ever heard of a Talking Stick? Yes? What do you know? No? What can we guess it might be?* Discuss where, when and how the stick is used.

It is okay for teachers not to know everything. You can say to your students, "I don't know but I'll find out and let you know. Would anyone like to help me research this question?" For questions that arise for which we do not have answers, make a chart paper list of "investigations" so students and teachers can research more information. Enlist the help of a school or town librarian or Native American cultural center, museum or online community.

After discussion, demonstrate the process. Explain that the class will be organized into small groups, and that each group will make one stick to be shared in the learning community. On Day 1 you might be limited to accomplishing just the discussion and the sand paper portion of the activity. Teach students how to use sandpaper to smooth the stick. Demonstrate various ways in which the stick can be decorated with the materials. Decorate the stick any way you like. Use glue, tape or yarn to wrap objects on the stick, like feathers and even small rocks, by tying knots around them. Feel free to draw objects of nature that are important to you around the stick, or perhaps a design of your choice.

After the discussion and demonstration, organize the small groups. Explain that the goal for today is to get the stick smoothed out with sand paper, and that tomorrow they will be decorating.

Students use sandpaper to smooth the stick.

**Day 2:**

Facilitate a brief discussion about what students remember from the previous discussion. Remind students of any pointers about the decorating process. Organize students into their small groups and launch into the decorating process. Complete decorating and leave time for all students to responsibly participate in clean up.

**Closure for the lesson:**

Using the Talking Stick:

- The community sits around a circle and the Talking Stick is passed around the circle.
- The person holding the Talking Stick has the power to talk, and everyone else has the power to listen attentively.
- The Talking Stick is used to share news, ideas, opinions or things for which students are grateful.
- The Talking Stick can be used everyday in the learning community.
- Ask, “How can using the Talking Stick in our learning community help us follow our Rules/ Guidelines for Respect (or whatever language you chose)?”

**Assessment for the lesson:**

- Do students apply basic skills of listening attentively, questioning respectfully and participating thoughtfully?
- Can students explain diversity among the wide range of Native American identities?
- Do students demonstrate empathy in discussion for the person who is speaking?

**Chapter I (3) Extensions for participation in my learning community**

Lead classroom discussion, games and art activities that help students become self-reflective about their learning, and more aware of how they learn most effectively. Students document their ideas on an activity page, binder, folder or in a sketchbook where they can revisit the following prompts as they develop more awareness of their own learning strengths:

I learn most effectively when I...

I learn most effectively when my teacher...

I learn most effectively when my peers...

## Chapter I (3) Extensions for peer learning strategies participation in my learning community

Peer-learning methods for approaching classroom dialogue are:

### **Fish Bowl Classroom Method**

For a “fish bowl,” the teacher or facilitator needs to prepare questions for the “fish” (those sitting in the center to discuss a topic) and the “bowl” (those in the outer circle who observe). The facilitator sets up the “rules” for a fish bowl. Those sitting in the center have definite questions to talk about – how they learn best, what they hope for from each other, other questions that the facilitator considers important – and those sitting around them think about what is being said. Children can take turns being the “fish” at a designated time, when some leave the center of the circle and others enter. After the “fish” have spoken, those in the outer circle need to make appreciative comments about something they heard or something they hadn’t thought about before. Only after making appreciative comments, can they ask clarifying questions for more information.

### **Concentric Circle Discussion Method**

The facilitator prepares a number of questions for the children to talk about. The children are placed in two concentric circles of the same number, the inner circle facing out and the outer circle facing in. With equal numbers, each outer-facing student is facing an inner-facing student. They take each other’s hand and greet each other.<sup>44</sup> Then they talk about the first question from the facilitator. The outer circle moves one person to the left, takes the hand of the new partner, and greets them. The facilitator then asks them to talk about the second question. There should be enough questions for one complete rotation, so that everyone in the inner/outer circles have greeted and talked with each person in the facing circle.

---

<sup>44</sup> Keep in mind that some children may have cultural and/or religious requirements which prevent them from holding hands with other children. This can be a teachable moment in the learning community.

# Chapter I (Unit 4): My Family in My Learning Community; My Understanding of Difference

## **BIG IDEAS FOR I (4)**

- I can expand my definition of family by learning about differences within my own family. There are differences within my immediate family and within my extended family.
- I can expand my definition of family by learning about other definitions of family.
- Definitions of family are learned and emphasized by community customs, religious beliefs, and by culture. I can choose to limit or expand my definition of family.

## **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR I (4)**

- Who is my family? When I say “family” whom do I include?
- How do I learn to define family?
- How can I learn from my family and other peoples’ families?

## **NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR I (4)**

- English Language Arts: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 11
- Social Studies: 1, 3, 4, 5

## LESSON I (4): MY FAMILY IN MY COMMUNITY; MY UNDERSTANDING OF DIFFERENCE

### Rationale: Why teach this lesson?

The primary rationale for this lesson is for students to learn that there are many definitions of family and that some of those definitions may be very different from their own. Moreover, students may develop more expansive definitions of family by learning about the family experiences and perspectives of their peers. We aim to get to know our students, emphasizing how much we honor difference.

This lesson can help students expand their perspectives about the different ways of being, knowing and believing, starting with the roots of their experiences. In this way students can start to integrate their understandings of respect, their own identities, and their learning community into their broader understandings of difference. By expressing this lesson in a family portrait, the students are revisiting their artistic expression from Lesson 2 of this chapter, and expanding on the skills they built when producing their self-portrait.

### Think ahead:

While the topic of family has a great deal to offer students in grades K–4, there are also some cautions to consider as framed by Sonia Nieto and Patty Bode in *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (2008) specifically in *CH10: Adapting Curriculum for Multicultural Classrooms*:

The topic of family is an attractive theme for teachers because it offers many promising possibilities. The promise lies in the idea that every student from preschool through high school may be able to tell a story about family and relate to ideas about family change. Such stories and ideas provide ways for teachers and students to collaborate and involve every student in the curriculum. Yet, if these attributes are not approached with a problem posing, multicultural perspective, a curriculum about family can prove to be problematic – and even damaging to students.

Beforehand, try to anticipate the multiple and various ways the children in your learning community may differently define family:

- The perspective of children of adoption is frequently omitted in classroom discussions about heredity and family trees.
- Families headed by single parents are still not affirmed in many curricula even though as of 2007, nearly 26% of children in the U.S. live in single-parent households.<sup>45</sup>
- Families who are headed by adults who are not married – whether homosexual or heterosexual – are excluded from traditional definitions of family, and the children of these families are sometimes subject to being questioned about the validity of their family structure.

---

<sup>45</sup> Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/63/5/41919559.pdf>

- Students who have family members who are incarcerated rarely see a welcome opportunity to share their story, and they are silenced by some teachers if they attempt to raise the topic.
- Families caring for members with mental illness may be reluctant to participate in a classroom invitation to share stories from home.
- Families who are headed by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people have been the specific target of recent political and public campaigns and are frequently ignored or deliberately silenced in school curricula.
- Children may define family as a group of people from their neighborhood, their faith community, their school, their homeless shelter, their after-school program and others who provide them with care (adapted from Nieto & Bode, 2008, pp. 384-385).

Keep these insights in mind as we attempt to answer the question about how to define family with young children in a way that supports a collaborative community with respectful curiosity about differences. We urge you to be prepared to embrace all responses that children present.

### **Objectives for this lesson – Students will:**

- Brainstorm various concepts related to *family*.
- Listen to and discuss read-aloud stories in the book *Families* by Susan Kuklin (2006).
- Articulate their definition of family.
- Develop a *family portrait*.
- Learn to respect the many ways in which their peers in their learning community and beyond define family.

### **Materials needed:**

- Books
  - *Families* by Susan Kuklin (2006).
  - *In Our Family: Portraits of all Kinds of Families* (with Curriculum Guide) by Gigi Kaeser, Peggy Gillespie & Rebekah Boyd (2003).
  - *Nothing to Hide: Mental Illness in the Family* by Jean J. Beard, Peggy Gillespie, Kay Redfield Jamison, Kenneth, M.D. Duckworth & Gigi Kaeser (2002).
  - *Of Many Colors: Portraits of Multiracial Families* by Peggy Gillespie, & Gigi Kaeser (1997).
  - *Love Makes a Family: Portraits of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Parents and Their Families* by Gigi Kaeser & Peggy Gillespie (1999).
- Chart paper and markers
- Drawing paper

- Art materials such as pencils, markers, oil pastels, and if possible and available, tempera paint or watercolor with brushes and water cans for brushes
- Clean-up materials such as sponges, paper towels, hand washing sink area or buckets/bins for hand washing

**Time needed:**

4 class meetings, 45 minutes each

**Setting the lesson:**

Revisit our self-portraits from Lesson 2 of this chapter. Remind ourselves of what we included in our self-portraits. Consider what and who might be included in family portraits. Develop a collective understanding of the phrase “family portrait” – then launch into exploring the notion of *family*.

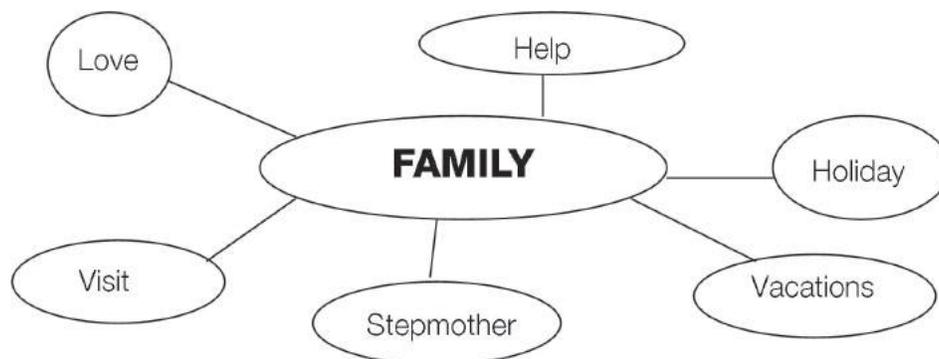
Try to borrow or acquire a copy of the book, *Honoring Our Ancestors: Stories and Pictures by Fourteen Artists* edited by Harriet Rohmer (1997). This book provides examples of family portraits by artists who represent a wide range of racial and ethnic heritages. The fourteen artists in the book also represent fourteen different ways of defining and portraying “ancestor.” The artists also include pictorial clues about their identities in their paintings. The book provides a one-page narrative written by each artist in kid-friendly language accompanied by two photographs: a current photo of the artist and a photo of the ancestors they are honoring in the artwork.

The book provides a valuable model of family portraiture on many levels. Children see that the paintings do not always portray figures of people. Some artists just use symbols to portray their loved ones. There is lots of room for artistic expression, which encourages students who may be less confident to dive in and try to express their ideas in visual art. It also connects the world of ideas and notions of identity with pictures.

**Procedure for the lesson:**

**Day 1:**

Start with a brainstorm web on chart paper or on the board, similar to the one below. Ask students: *What comes to mind when you think of the word ‘family’?* Record the students’ responses on chart paper. You can record their responses in a word web. An example is given below:



**Expand the discussion to emphasize diverse family experiences:**

*Do all families have the same number of people?*

*Do all family members live in the same house or apartment or location?*

*Do all family members have the same skin color?*

*Do all families start out the same way? Are all family members related by birth?*

*Do all families believe the same things?*

**Day 2:**

Revisit brainstorm word web from yesterday. Consider which of these ideas apply to your definition of family. Discuss the notion of family portraits. If available, look at examples from the book: *Honoring Our Ancestors: Stories and Pictures by Fourteen Artists*.

As we said in Lesson 2, you do not have to be an art teacher to lead a vibrant family portrait lesson. One way to get students started on drawing family portraits is to instruct students to choose how many people they will portray and draw that number of simple ovals on the page, which will serve as the faces. They can fill in the features, as they like. Then encourage students to add various symbols and pictures in the background or in their hair or as part of their faces.

As we stated in Lesson 2, most students in grades K-4 are still confident enough to tackle a portrait without overly detailed instruction from the teacher. Typically their developmental perspective still allows them to be pleased with their work. Encourage them with specific comments such as, “I like the choices you made by putting that shape in this corner and that color on your shirt.” These specific details will be much more encouraging than the more superlative “It’s beautiful!” The specificity will help them to expand on what they have already done. Some students get discouraged because of social pressures on what art “should look like.” For these children, it helps to say, “This is about expressing your identity! Let’s look at the other artists’ work and learn from their ideas.”

Allow ample time for work and for clean up.

**Day 3:**

Continue with the art making process on the family portraits. Encourage students to talk about their work and their symbols of family as they engage in the art. They can talk with their peers and you about the process. As they finish, create “artist statements” to be displayed with the portraits as explained below, in Closure.

**Closure for the lesson:**

Invite K-1 children to dictate to you, or to a helping adult, their narrative about their family portraits. Write their dictation to post with their artwork. You can also allow for a “Meet the Artist” session where each child can present her or his family portrait to the group.

Children in grades 2, 3, 4 can write their own artists’ statements. Revisit the narratives from the *Honoring Our Ancestors* book and notice some of the ways in which the professional artist told their stories. Complete artists’ statements, and prepare artwork and statements for an art display. Invite members of the larger learning community and family members to view the exhibit.

Another more ambitious and technologically-dependent strategy is for each child to talk to a video camera while explaining their work, and to screen the video on TV near the art display. Some children may not be allowed to be captured on film by the cultural or religious beliefs of their family or community.

Exhibit family portraits with accompanying artist statements.

**Assessment for the lesson:**

- Do students reveal self-knowledge in their artwork and writing?
- Can students explain diversity in their own identities and the identities of their peers?

**Extensions Chapter I (4) Difference is normal:**

In our learning community, we like to say “difference is normal.” It seems like a funny thing to say. We mean *difference is expected* in our community. We do not expect everybody to be the same. We do not expect everybody to believe the same things. We do not expect every family to have the same kinds of people. Let’s talk about the phrase “difference is normal.” Let’s make a list on chart paper of our ideas and questions about that.

Below are some ways to frame the discussion:

- In our learning community we are discussing lots of stuff that is new to me. Some of it makes me wonder about big questions...
- What if I am playing a game or hanging out with a group of friends and one kid says something mean about another kid’s family or another kid’s religion?
  - What should I do when they are both my friends?
  - What can I do so both kids see that there are many ways to be a family and many ways to be religious, and that one kind of family or religion is not better or worse than another kind of family or religion?
  - I want to be friends with both, but I want both to be treated fairly.

# Resources for Chapter 1

## RESOURCES FOR CHAPTER I (1) ON UNDERSTANDING RESPECT

*Emily's Caring and Sharing* by Cindy Post Senning, Peggy Post & Leo Landry (2008).

*Frog and Toad are Friends* by Arnold Lobel (1979).

*Stone Soup* by Jon J. Muth (2003).

*Since We're Friends: An Autism Picture Book* by Celeste Shally & David Harrington (2007).

*Crow Boy* by Taro Yashima (1976).

*Oliver Button is a Sissy* by Tomie dePaola (1979).

## RESOURCES FOR CHAPTER I (2) ON EXPLORING AND EXPRESSING MY IDENTITY IN ART AND POETRY

*Honoring Our Ancestors: Stories and Pictures by Fourteen Artists* by Harriet Rohmer, Ed. (1999).

*Just Like Me: Stories and Self-Portraits by Fourteen Artists* by Harriet Rohmer, Ed. (1997).

*Reading, Writing, and Rising Up: Teaching about Social Justice and the Power of the Written Word* by Linda Christensen (2000).

National Gallery of Art website for lesson plans and student activities on the themes of *Who Am I?: Self-Portraits in Art and Writing*, [www.nga.gov/education/classroom/self\\_portraits/index.shtm](http://www.nga.gov/education/classroom/self_portraits/index.shtm)

Shel Silverstein <http://www.shelsilverstein.com>

Go to the “for teachers and parents” link or go to the “for kids” link.

Pat Mora <http://patmora.com/>

Click on “Children’s books and fun,” then click on “Ideas and curriculum activities.”

Poetry for Children Blogspot has links to many poets’ websites; many include classroom activities, <http://poetryforchildren.blogspot.com/2008/11/more-on-lbh-and-2009-ncte-poetry-award.html>

## RESOURCES FOR CHAPTER I (3) ABOUT TALKING STICKS AND NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBAL COMMUNITIES IN CLASSROOM CONTENT

*Teaching About Native Americans* by Karen D. Harvey, Lisa D. Harjo and Jane K. Jackson (1997, NCSS Bulletin 84).

## RESOURCES FOR CHAPTER 1 (4) ABOUT EXPANDING DEFINITIONS OF FAMILY

### Children's Literature Resources on the theme of family diversity:

*Black is Brown is Tan* by Arnold Adoff (2004).

*ABC: A Family Alphabet Book* by Bobbie Combs (2001).

*Black, White, Just Right!* by Marguerite W. Davol (1993).

*King and King* by Lisa de Haan (2002).

*Asha's Mums* by Rosamund Elwin & Michele Plause (2000).

*Molly's Family* by Nancy Garden (2004).

*Best Best Colors/Los Mejores Colores* by Eric Hoffman (1999).

*Felicia's Favorite Story* by Leslea Newman (2002).

*Heather has Two Mommies* by Leslea Newman (2000).

*The Family Book* by Todd Parr (2003).

*And Tango Makes Three* by Justin Richardson & Peter Parnell (2005).

*Rosie's Family: An Adoption Story* by Lori Rosove (1991).

*Mom and Mum Are Getting Married* by Ken Setterington (2004).

*Who's in a Family?* by Robert Skutch (1997).

*All Families Are Special* by Norma Simon (2003).

*Nine Candles* by Maria Testa (1996).

*The Duke Who Outlawed Jelly Beans and Other Stories* by Johnny Valentine (2004).

*Anna Day and the O-Ring* by Elaine Wickens (1994).

## **CHAPTER I (4) FURTHER RESOURCES DEPICTING DIVERSE FAMILIES IN PHOTOS AND INTERVIEWS**

*In Our Family: Portraits of all Kinds of Families* by Gigi Kaeser & Peggy Gillespie, with Curriculum Guide, (2003).

*Nothing to Hide: Mental Illness in the Family* by Jean J. Beard, Peggy Gillespie, Kay Redfield Jamison, Kenneth M.D. Duckworth & Gigi Kaeser (2002).

*Of Many Colors: Portraits of Multiracial Families* by Peggy Gillespie & Gigi Kaeser (1997).

*Love Makes a Family: Portraits of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Parents and Their Families* by Gigi Kaeser & Peggy Gillespie (1999).

## **CHAPTER I (4) FURTHER RESOURCES FOR TEACHER EDUCATION ON FAMILY DIVERSITY**

*Honoring Our Ancestors: Stories and Pictures by Fourteen Artists* by Harriet Rohmer, Ed. (1999).

*Other Kinds of Families: Embracing Diversity in Schools* by Tammy Turner-Vorbeck & Monica Miller Marsh (2008).





# CHAPTER II

## Big Questions with Many Answers

### GOALS FOR STUDENT LEARNING IN CHAPTER II: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6

#### BIG IDEAS FOR CHAPTER II

- There are many Big Questions and lots of ways of trying to answer them.
- Our beliefs sometimes provide answers to our Big Questions.
- Our beliefs sometimes grow out of what we learn from our families, from our experiences, and how we understand our experiences.
- Our beliefs may also develop out of spiritual curiosity, scientific investigation or other experiences.

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER II

- What are some of our Big Questions?
- What is a belief?

# Chapter II (Unit 1): A Garden of Questions and Answers about Beliefs

## **BIG IDEAS FOR II (1)**

Beliefs respond to some of our questions about the “big” issues of life, such as: *How was life created? Where did we come from? What is the meaning of life? What are our responsibilities to each other and to the world around us?*

Responses to these questions may develop out of curiosity about the world around us, scientific investigation or what we learn about them from our families, friends, religious teachers, or from our various experiences.

## **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR II (1)**

- What are some of the “Big Questions” that have led to our various beliefs?
- What are some of the different beliefs that different people have about some of the “Big Questions”?

## **NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR II (1)**

- English Language Arts: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 11
- Social Studies: 1, 3, 4, 5

## LESSON II (1): A GARDEN OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT BELIEFS

### **Rationale: Why teach this lesson?**

A big part of affirming children's diverse experiences and teaching children to be empathetic of one another's differences involves their understanding that people may have many different beliefs. Some beliefs are rooted in religious frameworks and some are not. This lesson helps students recognize the wide range of beliefs that they may notice among other children and in their communities. This wide range of beliefs contributes to the rich diversity of society. As such, it encourages critical inquiry and curiosity.

By using the metaphor of a garden, students can take note of the human experience of questioning and appreciate how some questions are answered through religious understandings, some are answered through scientific understandings and some are answered with both religious and scientific perspectives. A garden grows from many seeds into many species of plants and vegetables and uses many different nutrients in the soil. Thus, this is a powerful metaphor to help cultivate the garden of ideas in your learning community. Using this garden metaphor, students can picture this wide range of perspectives living in a big metaphorical garden of human experience with lots from which to choose. Moreover, they can learn that some questions go unanswered.

### **Think ahead:**

The students in your learning community may bring a wide range of perspectives to the act of questioning including scientific, religious, philosophical and more. This activity takes note of questioning and also of a range of diverse religious experiences. It does not cover every experience. One book or one lesson is never enough. This lesson can be used in connection with other lessons in this book.

It will be essential for the educator to affirm children who bring perspectives that may be unfamiliar to children from mainstream society or that may be unique within your learning community. When in doubt, it is useful to follow the Rules of Respect that you set up in Chapter One to serve as a guide. Consider the metaphor of a garden with many seeds, many species of plants and vegetables and many different nutrients in the soil as a way to help cultivate the garden of ideas in your learning community.

**Objectives for this lesson – Students will:**

- Think metaphorically with the garden as a metaphor for human diversity.
- Develop a “Community Garden Mural” with images of plants and written questions.
- Collectively brainstorm a list of Big Questions about life.
- Consider how to seek answers to Big Questions.
- Ponder whether or not all questions can be answered.
- Notice that some people bring religious perspectives to answering questions.
- Notice that some people bring scientific perspective to answering questions.
- Notice that some people bring both scientific and religious perspectives to their answers.
- Practice implementing your learning community’s Rules of Respect.

**Materials needed:**

- Books:
  - *Grandma’s Garden* by Mercer Mayer (2001).
  - *Faith* by Maya Ajmera, Magda Nakassis, & Cynthia Pon (2009).
  - *The Three Questions* by Jon J. Muth (2002).
- Chart paper and markers
- Roll of long craft paper
- Scissors and coloring materials such as markers, crayons or oil pastels

**Time needed:**

5–6 class meetings, 45 minutes each

**Setting the lesson:**

Welcome students into the new topic of “A garden of questions and answers about beliefs.” Ask students what they already know about gardens. Has anybody ever helped plant a garden? Harvest a garden? If yes, when and where? Has anybody ever visited a public garden, places like parks? What are some of the many different purposes of gardens? What are some of the many different plants that can be found in gardens?

**Procedure for the lesson:****Day 1 & 2:**

Read the book, *Grandma's Garden* by Mercer Mayer. Discuss the many different species of plants that go into Grandma's garden! Take note of the wide variety of vegetation that can grow in harmony and share the nutrients of Grandma's garden. This will serve as the foundation of the metaphor throughout the lesson.

After reading and discussing the story, lead an art activity to make a garden mural on long craft paper. Each student makes one item for the garden on a piece of construction paper by drawing, coloring and cutting out a vegetable, plant or flower. You may want to have a general description of the vegetables, plants or flowers that you are giving to the students. After students make their construction paper vegetable, plant or flower, they describe their plant, vegetable or flower to the class and then they bring it to the large Community Garden Mural to attach it to the "garden" with glue, staples or push-pins.

Lead the class in a discussion about the range of diversity in the garden. Notice that all the plants share the soil, sun and the water, but each has something different to offer including different colors, shapes, smells, sizes.

Have fun with the students, completing the garden with details such as sun, rain, soil, insects, various textures for dirt, etc.

**Day 3:**

Study the Community Garden Mural. Lead a discussion with questions and thoughts such as: How can a garden be like the many different questions in our learning community? If each plant, each vegetable and each flower had a question to ask, what would the garden look like and sound like?

Read aloud the book *The Three Questions* by Jon J. Muth. Scholastic Inc. (2002).

Discuss the book and how Nikolai asks, "When is the best time to do things? Who is the most important one? What is the right thing to do?"<sup>46</sup>

We all bring Big Questions to the world, but we answer them in different ways. Use chart paper to brainstorm some "really big questions" about life. Note the questions on chart paper. Start with Nikolai's questions:

- When is the best time to do things?
- Who is the most important one?
- What is the right thing to do?

---

<sup>46</sup> This material is reproduced in this curriculum with permission from Scholastic Inc.

Here are some other Big Questions that may arise:

- How did life begin?
- How are people different from other mammals?
- Why does anything exist?
- Where was I before I was born?
- What happens after people die?
- What am I supposed to do while I am alive?
- How can I be a good person?
- Why do bad things happen?

Also provide an anonymous message box for questions that students want to address but prefer to do so anonymously. For pre-writers, provide an opportunity to talk privately with educators about a range of issues and where they can then raise questions privately.

#### **Day 4:**

Revisit the list of questions from the previous class meeting. Invite students to think of one Big Question they would like to know more about. It can be from the chart paper list or it can be a new question.

Give each student a paper with a cartoon word bubble on it, so they can write their questions.

Each student writes their question in the word bubble (or dictates it to an adult) and cuts out the word bubble. Each student adds the word bubble to the garden mural.

Study the Community Garden Mural with the questions on it. Lead a discussion about the community garden of plants and questions. Think about the many factors that help plants grow: sun, water, atmosphere, insects and, for some plants, shade. Think about the many factors that help people answer questions.

#### **Day 5:**

Read aloud the book *Faith* by Maya Ajmera, Magda Nakassis, & Cynthia Pon (2009). Make a chart paper list of all the various religions represented in the book.

In a review of the book *Faith* for Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier, Inc. (2009), Margaret R. Tassia of Millersville University, Pennsylvania wrote:

This book explores through full-color photographs the many ways in which the world celebrates and practices religious belief, highlighting the common threads—praying and meditating, chants and songs, holy books, cleansing, holy places, holidays and festivals, important events, dress, food and drink and helping others. Spare text accompanies the pictures of children and identifies the specific religion and practices. Concluding notes for adults to share with youngsters provide more information on each one. The excellent photographs are clear and colorful and invite careful observation. A world map showing

the various homes of the children depicted is included. As stated in the book, “Faith highlights the common threads that bring people together in reverence and joy.”

Lead a discussion about the book *Faith* while studying the community garden of plants and questions.

**Closure for the lesson:**

Think again about the many factors that help plants grow: sun, water, atmosphere and insects, shade (for some plants), etc. Think about the many factors that help people answer questions. Notice that there may be some questions that are answered by religions, some by science, some by both religion and science and some that go unanswered.

**Assessment for the lesson:**

- Can students explain that our questions and answers are like a growing garden—that many different plants grow from different seeds and yet they can share the same soil, nutrients and atmosphere?
- Did students reveal self-knowledge about their own questions—that they do have Big Questions of their own?
- Can students apply basic skills of listening attentively, questioning respectfully, and participating thoughtfully?
- Do students see in perspective different points of view on where different questions come from and how religious beliefs may respond to some of these questions?

**Chapter II (1) Extensions**

1. Have students choose 1 or 2 questions that they did not write from the garden. Ask them to keep a journal and write their answers to the question(s) over the course of one school week (Monday-Friday). Invite those who would like to share the questions they chose and their answers and how they came up with the answer.
2. Have students research the geographical origin of a flower or vegetable that is in the garden.

# Chapter II (Unit 2): Stories Told about Beliefs

## **BIG IDEAS FOR II (2)**

- Sometimes people tell different stories as a way to answer their Big Questions.
- Some of these stories are religious and some are not.
- Some of these stories come from cultural traditions and some do not.

## **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR II (2)**

- How do religions organize different ways of believing and storytelling?
- What are some examples of ways of believing and storytelling?

## **NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR II (2)**

- English Language Arts: 1, 2, 3, 6, 11
- Social Studies: 1, 3, 5, 8

## LESSON II (2): STORIES TOLD ABOUT BELIEFS

### **Rationale: Why teach this lesson?**

We launched Lesson 1 of this chapter with an emphasis on questioning. All of Lesson 2 affirms students' curiosity with a focus on exploration rather than an effort to arrive at one "correct answer" to their Big Questions. By encouraging curiosity, uncovering interest in spiritual and religious beliefs and scientific investigation as modes of inquiry, very young students can learn that there are a range of beliefs that developed as responses to many people's curiosities and questions.

Children in a diverse society bring beliefs from their homes and their communities in a range of perspectives that may include religious, humanist, agnostic and atheist, among others. Developing understandings in the learning community about the different ways in which people develop answers to Big Questions helps to cultivate a sense of empathy for others and social responsibility for sharing and dialogue.

As discussed in Lesson 1, democratic dialogue is an essential component in this curriculum; it assumes an approach to learning where students are invited to question and explore a range of ideas, and a teaching style that honors students' voices and questioning. In democratic dialogue, the educator guides and facilitates discussion, inquiry and research that expand learning with a priority on inviting all voices and considering multiple points of view in the learning process.

This lesson is not about how to believe or what to believe. We honor all beliefs that children bring to their learning communities. Rather it is, first, about the Big Questions that are related to beliefs, and second, about the roots of beliefs in stories that convey those beliefs.

### **Think ahead:**

Children may be eager to share the beliefs that are held by their families. They may quote family dinner conversations, cite religious leaders from their faith communities, report on discussions they have overheard from adults, or from TV or radio, or have seen in movies and videos, and bring their own interpretation of these realities. Sometimes their views, or the views of their family or community members, may not be as respectful of other beliefs as the model you are creating in your learning environment. Use the strategies you developed in Chapter 1 to maintain an atmosphere of attentive listening, affirmation for diverse viewpoints, and to cultivate a sense of respect and trust where students are assured that there is a space for their story in this learning community.

This lesson illustrates one of the main reasons we provide the letter to parents and guardians in the front pages of this book. It is essential that the families and adult caregivers at a child's home understand that these lessons do not indoctrinate children's religious beliefs. On the contrary, this lesson guides children in sharing their own beliefs while they also learn about the differences among beliefs in a diverse society.

---

<sup>47</sup> NASA, [http://map.gsfc.nasa.gov/universe/bb\\_theory.html](http://map.gsfc.nasa.gov/universe/bb_theory.html)

Because this lesson will explore scientific as well as religious inquiry, when thinking ahead, educators may wish to become more familiar with the scientific evidence of the “big bang” cosmological model; to so do, visit the website of NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) for an overview of Big Bang theory and concepts.<sup>47</sup>

**Objectives for this lesson – Students will:**

- Compare a story based in scientific inquiry to a story based on religious or spiritual beliefs and traditions.
- Gain clarity on the scientific theory of the Big Bang that the universe started billions of years ago and continues to expand.
- Consider how different storytelling traditions influence different beliefs.
- Understand that science and religion do not have to be at odds with one another.

**Materials needed:**

- Black construction paper
- Chalk pastels or colored chalk
- Chart paper and markers
- Two books:
  - First
    - *Big Bang! The Tongue-Tickling Tale of a Speck That Became Spectacular* by Carolyn Cinami Decristofano (2005).
  - Second (select one)
    - *The Origin of Life on Earth: An African Creation Myth* by David A. Anderson (1991).
    - *Anansi the Spider: A Tale from the Ashanti* by Gerald McDermott (1972).
    - *In the Beginning: Creation Stories from Around the World* by Virginia Hamilton (1991).

**Time needed:**

2 class meetings, 45 minutes each

**Setting the lesson:**

Note the many Big Questions in the Community Garden Mural from Lesson II (1). Point out that a common question from which many other questions stem is the question of “How did the world begin?” or “How did life begin?” Explain that we will be reading a few stories that take different approaches to that Big Question. Emphasize that it is enriching to learn about many perspectives, no matter which perspective matches our own personal beliefs or the beliefs of our families.

**Procedure for the lesson:**

**Day 1:**

Read the book: *Big Bang! The Tongue-Tickling Tale of a Speck That Became Spectacular* by Carolyn Cinami Decristofano (2005). The book is reading level for grades 4–6, so if the students are in K–3, you may want to re-interpret the language, and narrate with your own words. The illustrations are engaging and useful. The main point is to give students a clear understanding of the scientific concept of the origin of the universe.

Discuss the scientific theory presented in the book. Make a chart paper list of questions that emerge from looking at the night sky: *Have you ever looked at the sky at night? What did you see? Tell me about it.*

Lead an art activity with black paper and colored chalk or chalk pastels. Encourage students to illustrate the drama of the big bang by experimenting with blending chalk colors on black paper.

One approach could involve each child working on 3 separate pieces of black paper – or folding their black paper into three portions – to illustrate their interpretation of the visual effects of the Big Bang event in three phases: before, during and after the Big Bang. The chalk makes a dramatic mark on the black paper so students can imagine what one may have seen before the Big Bang. Encourage students to blend colors and experiment with the atmospheric effects of colored chalk on black paper, as they imagine the dramatic events of scientific explanation of the origins of the universe.

**Day 2:**

For Kindergarten and early elementary: Read aloud *The Origin of Life on Earth: An African Creation Myth* or *Anansi the Spider: A Tale from the Ashanti*.

For grades 3 & 4: Select stories from the book *In the Beginning: Creation Stories from Around the World*.

Discuss the stories about how the world (or how the sun) began. Compare these stories to the Big Bang theory. Lead the discussion noting student’s responses with a chart paper in two columns:

SIMILARITIES .....DIFFERENCES.

Ask the students to consider these questions:

- What does the story we are reading today have in common with (or how is it similar to) the story *Big Bang! The Tongue-Tickling Tale of a Speck That Became Spectacular*?
- In what ways do the stories differ from one another?
- What questions do these stories answer?
- Was investigation or imagination used to answer Big Questions?
- How do these stories represent various people’s beliefs or belief systems?
- Do these stories continue to inform beliefs today?

**Closure for the lesson:**

Study the chart paper that lists similarities and differences of the stories. Give the marker to different students to come up to the chart paper to draw lines between the similarities and differences on each side of the chart. Encourage students to discuss the points of connection and the differences. Display the black paper chalk drawings as a reminder of the learning experience.

**Assessment for the lesson:**

- Can students explain the primary scientific concepts of the Big Bang theory?
- Can students interpret differences between scientific beliefs and religious beliefs?
- Did students apply basic skills of listening attentively to different stories?
- Can students interpret the differences in stories from different cultures and religious traditions?

**Chapter II (2) Extensions:**

Read aloud a selection of children's literature and illustrated myths demonstrating different view points about how life began.

- *One Hand Clapping: Zen Stories For All Ages* by Rafe Martin (1995).
- *Anansi the Spider: A Tale from the Ashanti* by Gerald McDermott (1972).
- *In the Beginning: Creation Stories from Around the World* by Virginia Hamilton (1991).
- *Krishna – The Cowherd Prince* by Soumya S. Ayer (2006).
- *The Origin of Life on Earth: An African Creation Myth* by David A. Anderson (1996).
- *Old Turtle and the Broken Truth* by Douglas Wood (2003).
- *Indian Children's Favourite Stories* by Rosemarie Somaiah & Ranjan Somaiah (2006).

**Teacher resources:**

- *Navajo Creation Myth: The Story of the Emergence* by Hasteen Klah (2008).
- *Primal Myths: Creation Myths Around the World* by Barbara C. Sproul (1979).

# Chapter II (Unit 3): Stories Told in Different Religions about Beliefs in a God or Gods

## **BIG IDEAS FOR II (3)**

- Some religions have answered Big Questions with stories that tell how life came from a god or gods.
- Some people believe in a god or gods and some do not.
- You may agree or disagree with the different answers to Big Questions, but you can still learn about what others believe.
- Different religions have different stories to convey their beliefs about a god or gods.
- Some people believe in stories that do not include a god or gods.
- Learning about each other's stories and beliefs about a god or gods helps us learn to be respectful of each other's beliefs.

## **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR II (3)**

- What are some of the different answers that various religions have about a god or gods?
- What stories do different religions tell about their god or gods?
- How do these different stories about different gods show you that different people can have different religious beliefs?
- What are some of these different beliefs about gods?
- Are there beliefs about religion that have no god(s)?

## **NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR II (3)**

- English Language Arts: 2, 4, 9
- Social Studies: 1, 3, 5

## **LESSON II (3): STORIES TOLD IN DIFFERENT RELIGIONS ABOUT BELIEFS IN A GOD OR GOD(S)**

### **Rationale: Why teach this lesson?**

The differences among religious and non-religious beliefs about the existence of and the nature of a god or god(s) lie at the heart of a great deal of human misunderstanding and conflict. It is important to engage young children in learning about different religious and non-religious beliefs in order to advance social harmony and democratic ideals. It is crucial for children and their parents and guardians to know that exploring these perspectives is very different from teaching them how or what to believe. This curriculum does not teach children what or how to believe. Rather, it teaches them to understand the existence of different beliefs and to respect each other's different beliefs. It also affirms children and their families in their own beliefs.

### **Think ahead:**

Communicate explicitly with children and their families. It bears repeating here that it is important that children and their parents and guardians understand clearly that exploring different beliefs is very different from teaching what or how to believe. As we already said, this curriculum does not teach children what or how to believe. Rather, it teaches students to understand differences and to respect the beliefs of others. It also affirms children and their families in their own beliefs.

You may notice worries or concerns from parents/guardians about addressing this topic. We encourage you to open a dialogue with those parents in a forum that includes your supervisor, showing them the specifics of the curriculum materials you are using and answering any questions they may have. You may have parents/guardians who do not want their children to participate in this learning module. It will be helpful to have a conversation and get the support of your supervisor as you begin this work.

### **Objectives for this lesson – Students will:**

- Learn and practice vocabulary for describing different beliefs.
- Understand that a wide range of beliefs exist in the diversely woven fabric of society.
- See and hear themselves and their beliefs affirmed in their classroom and depicted in the Community Garden Mural.

**Materials needed:**

Books:

- *What Is God?* by Etan Boritzer (1990).
- *The Little Book of Hindu Deities: From the Goddess of Wealth to the Sacred Cow* by Sanjay Patel (2006).
- *Kindness: A Treasury of Buddhist Wisdom for Children and Parents* by Sarah Conover (2000).
- *D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths* by Ingri d'Aulaire & Edgar Parin d'Aulaire (1992).
- *Humanism, What's That?: A Book for Curious Kids* by Helen Bennett (2005).
- Chart paper and markers
- Light blue paper cut into raindrop shapes
- Yellow, orange, red and green paper cut into leaf shapes
- Markers and crayons

**Time needed:**

3 class meetings, 30–45 minutes each

**Setting the lesson:**

Revisit the Community Garden Mural. Launch a brief discussion about the diversity of questions and answers found in the “garden” of your learning community. Ask the students: What do you appreciate about the questions in our garden? What do you appreciate about the answers you’ve seen or created in our garden? Remind students – and be explicit – that when we learn about others’ beliefs, we are not learning that one way is right or wrong, we are learning to respect each other’s viewpoints.

## Procedure for the lesson:

### Day 1:

Read aloud the book *What Is God?* Discuss the range of ways that different religions talk about the concept of god or god(s). While reading aloud and discussing with children, write words on chart paper that relate to the concept of god, gods, religions and beliefs.

Add to the Community Garden Mural from Lesson II (1). Make giant raindrop shapes. Add words from the chart paper that we learned from the book *What Is God?* so that each raindrop contains one of these words. (Some words might include: Jehovah, Jesus, Buddha, Allah, the Bible, the Torah, the Qur'an, the Sutras, and the Vedas).

Add the raindrops to the community mural to show how we learn from each other's ideas and beliefs.

### Days 2 and 3:

Choose stories from each of these books. Some of these books may need to be re-worded into early childhood language. The stories are captivating and compelling for even the youngest learners.

- *The Little Book of Hindu Deities: From the Goddess of Wealth to the Sacred Cow*
- *Kindness: A Treasury of Buddhist Wisdom for Children and Parents*
- *D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths*
- *Humanism, What's That?: A Book for Curious Kids* (This book highlights children's questions and discussions from a secular perspective regarding topics such as capital punishment, anti-Semitism, and bullying.)

Make a chart paper for the class with columns for different kinds of beliefs about a god or gods that include Earth-centered, Monotheistic, Atheistic, or Polytheistic. The chart may include Questioning as one of the columns. Match up the "big word" (monotheistic) with the more common words (one god) so students can grasp the Goals and Big Ideas for this unit and also see that we have vocabulary to try to help us explain such ideas. When working with younger students, consider adding to the chart after each story you introduce to the students.

Explain to students that these big words are used to try to help us understand various points of view. Try to brainstorm with students some of the different stories they have heard that include these different ways of believing about god(s). These can be stories they have learned in their own homes and religious practices, or from stories you have read to the class in children's literature, stories they have seen in movies, or stories they have learned from their friends.

<b>Beliefs about god or gods</b>	<b>Big words to name the belief</b>	<b>Stories we have heard that match this belief</b>
One god	Monotheistic	<i>Noah's Ark</i>
More than one god	Polytheistic	<i>The Little Book of Hindu Deities: From the Goddess of Wealth to the Sacred Cow</i> by Sanjay Patel  <i>D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths</i>
No god	Atheism	<i>Just Pretend: A Freethought Book for Children</i> by Dan Barker
Earth-centered	Animism, Shamanism	<i>Raven: A Trickster tale from the Pacific Northwest</i> by G. McDermott
Questioning	Agnosticism	<i>Humanism, What's That?: A Book for Curious Kids</i> by Helen Bennett

**Closure for the lesson:**

Add to the Community Garden Mural from Lesson II (1). Cut out leaf shapes. Add the words that describe beliefs (such as one god, more than one god, questioning) on each leaf. Add the leaves to the garden. The leaves may be falling from trees to land in the garden and “fertilize” the soil, or they may be growing from some students’ questions. Ask students if they would like to have a particular leaf or leaves attached to their “plant/flower” questions. The leaves may also be nestled into the soil in between the other plants.

Discuss how learning about different beliefs enriches our understandings of one another.

**Assessment for the lesson:**

- Can students explain that different people may have different beliefs about god or god(s), or that they may be questioning?
- Do students demonstrate empathy for diverse religious and non-religious perspectives in the learning community?
- Can students apply vocabulary to describe diverse perspectives on god or god(s)?

# Resources for Chapter 2

## RESOURCES FOR CHAPTER II (1) ON THE BIG QUESTIONS

*Faith* by Maya Ajmera, Magda Nakassis, & Cynthia Pon (2009).

*The Three Questions* by Jon J. Muth (2002).

## RESOURCES FOR CHAPTER II (1) ON GARDENING

*Grandma's Garden* by Mercer Mayer (2001).

## RESOURCES FOR CHAPTER II (2) THE ORIGIN OF THE UNIVERSE AND THE BEGINNING OF LIFE

*Big Bang! The Tongue-Tickling Tale of a Speck That Became Spectacular* by Carolyn Cinami DeCristofano (2005).

*The Origin of Life on Earth: An African Creation Myth* by David A. Anderson (1991).

*In the Beginning: Creation Stories from Around the World* by Virginia Hamilton (1991).

*Anansi the Spider: A Tale from the Ashanti* by Gerald McDermott (1972).

*One Hand Clapping: Zen Stories for All Ages* by Rafe Martin (1995).

*Krishna—The Cowherd Prince* by Soumya S. Ayer (2006).

*Old Turtle and the Broken Truth* by Douglas Wood (2003).

*Indian Children's Favourite Stories* by Rosemarie Somaiah & Ranjan Somaiah (2006).

NASA for an overview of Big Bang theory and concepts.

[http://map.gsfc.nasa.gov/universe/bb\\_theory.html](http://map.gsfc.nasa.gov/universe/bb_theory.html)

## CHAPTER II (2) TEACHER RESOURCES ON THE ORIGIN OF THE UNIVERSE AND THE BEGINNING OF LIFE

*Navajo Creation Myth: The Story of the Emergence* by Hasteen Klah (2008).

*Primal Myths: Creation Myths Around the World* by Barbara C. Sproul (1979).

## **RESOURCES FOR CHAPTER II (3) ON BELIEFS IN A GOD OR GODS**

*What Is God?* by Etan Boritzer (1990).

*The Little Book of Hindu Deities: From the Goddess of Wealth to the Sacred Cow* by Sanjay Patel (2006).

*Kindness: A Treasury of Buddhist Wisdom for Children and Parents* by Sarah Conover (2000).

*D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths* by Ingri d'Aulaire & Edgar Parin d'Aulaire (1992).

*Humanism, What's That?: A Book for Curious Kids* by Helen Bennett (2005).

## **CHAPTER II (3) TEACHER RESOURCES ON BELIEFS IN A GOD OR GODS**

*The Power of Myth* by Joseph Campbell (1991).

*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell (1972).



# CHAPTER III

## Common Understandings among Different Religions

### GOALS FOR STUDENT LEARNING IN CHAPTER III: 2, 3, 4, 5

#### BIG IDEAS FOR CHAPTER III

Many beliefs and religions share common ideals of what is important for human beings.

Common ideals include:

- Caring for my neighborhood and environment.
- Giving service to my neighborhood and environment.

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER III

- What are some of the common understandings and beliefs that religious groups have in common?
- How can we work together to take action and care for our neighborhood and environment?

# Chapter III (Unit 1): Beliefs about Caring for Each Other

## **BIG IDEAS FOR III (1)**

- Many people have shared ways of caring for, sharing with and helping each other, even if they have different beliefs.
- Many people have shared understandings about the responsibilities they have toward each other and toward their shared community, even if they have different beliefs.
- These common understandings are for the collective well-being of all people in the group or community.
- The well-being of all people in a group or community depends on their caring for each other: showing concern, helping, sharing, and rejecting selfishness.

## **ESSENTIAL QUESTION FOR III (1)**

- How do people learn about caring, sharing, and helping?

## **NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR III (1)**

- English Language Arts: 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 11, 12
- Social Studies: 3, 5, 6, 10

## LESSON III (1): EXPLORING BELIEFS ABOUT CARING AND SHARING WITH PEOPLE

### **Rationale: Why teach this lesson?**

The Golden Rule – treat your neighbor as you would like to be treated – is not unique to Christianity, Judaism, Islam or any other single religion. Instead, it’s shared by many religious traditions in the world – as well as non-religious philosophies. It is an important part of all communities and cultures. And, it is important for students to learn that people need to be as good to other people as they expect others to be good to them. This “rule” of mutual goodness has been taught for centuries. This knowledge will enable students to treat each other with compassion and empower them to work toward the common good in the future.

### **Think ahead:**

Many students will want to share stories of their own acts of goodness or kindness, or conversely, of experiences when goodness or kindness was lacking. Classroom discussion about goodness, kindness and/or learning strategies to choose caring behaviors requires the teacher to be alert and focus on potential learning experiences in their learning community.

While it is critical to honor all student voices and to affirm their understandings, it is important to structure time appropriately. Refer back to your classroom guidelines in Chapter 1 to organize and balance student commentary.

Furthermore, if students divulge information about dangerous or personal high-risk experiences that disclose or allude to abuse, it is critical to get assistance immediately for that child. Go to your supervisor for prompt intervention. Before beginning these lessons, you may want to review your school or district’s policies on reporting such matters. The classroom should never become a group therapy session. That work must be reserved for appropriate professionals such as social workers and licensed therapists.

Having said that, when students feel that the classroom is a safe place to share, the topics in this unit and throughout this curriculum will emerge in a natural way. As a teacher, rather than avoiding serious discussions, be well-informed about support structures to consult and help guide the discussion to empower students for future action.

**Objectives for this lesson – Students will:**

- Develop understandings of human goodness, kindness, and caring and what they mean in everyday life.
- Think about why we need guidelines to remind us of caring and sharing.
- Compare various “golden rules” and notice similarities and differences.
- Reflect on their daily life in acts of caring and sharing.

**Materials needed:**

- Tanenbaum’s Golden Rule poster. The poster contains a number of different religions’ versions of the Golden Rule. It is included in the “Days 2 & 3” section of this lesson or can be downloaded for free in several languages at <https://www.tanenbaum.org/resources/golden-rule> (on the right hand side of the web page).
- Markers
- Colored slips of paper (for the extension activity)

**Time needed:**

3 class meetings, 30–45 minutes each

**Setting the lesson:**

Welcome students to this new activity. Ask students how they would explain the following words: kindness, goodness, and caring. Post their comments on white board, chart paper or an overhead projector. Explain that many different groups of people expect kindness, goodness, and caring from everyone and that this is the topic for today’s lesson.

**Procedure for the lesson:****Day 1:**

To deepen understanding, follow up with questions and activities that help to understand “rules”:

- What is a rule in your family?
- Have you made any rules when you play with your friends?
- What are some of the rules in our learning community? (Encourage students to refer back to the class’s Rules of Respect.)
- Why do communities need rules?
- What are some of the rules in your community?

Consider various examples of community rules, such as: The Eightfold Path of Buddhism, The Ten Commandments (observed in Judaism, Islam and Christianity) or The Sermon on the Mount (in the New Testament). Also review your classroom Rules of Respect. Lead the children through a discussion on the similarities and differences between these various community “rules.”

Revisit the Community Garden Mural from Chapter 2. What are some of the rules of “caring” or “kindness” we need to follow to make a flourishing garden? Some comments may include:

- Look at each plant to see what it might need, such as water, or plant food, or space for sunlight or shade?

Others might be:

- Be sure to provide enough water for all plants in all parts of the garden. Too much or too little water can be harmful.
- Do not crowd plants; leave room for them to grow and flourish.
- Be sure all plants can get enough sunlight.
- If some plants need support, add structure to support them.
- Harvest the fruit, vegetables and flowers when they are ready.
- Keep predators out.

Discuss with children how these “rules” for growing a healthy garden can apply as well to a healthy human community. Look at each of the rules above, and apply it in some way to what the students feel they need in a learning community. All members of healthy communities need to learn rules and guidelines for the benefit of all.

### **Days 2 & 3:**

Read aloud each section from the Tanenbaum Golden Rule poster. If students are old enough to read, have students take turns reading aloud. If they are emerging readers, ask them to find any word they might recognize and invite them to place their finger on the word and read it aloud.

After reading each line, ask the student if they know what it means and ask them to give an example from everyday life. For example, if the student says, “be nice to everybody,” prompt them to illustrate an everyday experience.

- What does it mean to be nice to everybody in the lunch line?
- What does it mean to be nice to everybody – even the kids on the opposing kickball team?
- What does it mean to be nice to people in the school hallway, even if you do not know them?

Work your way through the entire poster with student-generated definitions, understandings, questions and storytelling. Ask students whether they have ever taken a stand because they wanted someone to be treated as well as they were being treated (i.e., the same as they were being treated in order to be fair). Ask them whether they have ever wished that someone would stand up for them. This portion of the lesson may take more than one class period to complete.

As an extension, you can have students write their goodness and/or kindness rules on colored slips of paper to share with other students in the school.

After working through the entire poster with this dynamic, student-based discussion, you might also work with the students to find words, phrases and ideas that are common to each religious belief about caring and sharing with people. Some examples include: “you;” “other(s);” “do;” “peace;” and “treat.” Circle those phrases on the chart paper or transparency, or post sticky-notes on the original poster. Whatever your method, utilize a graphic indicator of words so that the students visualize the words and ideas that are similar or share common understandings.

**Closure for the lesson:**

Make connections between the Golden Rule and students’ daily lives. Keep the poster or chart paper on display in your classroom or learning space for several weeks. Keep a tray nearby with post-it notes and pencils. Invite students to jot down (or draw an illustration of) ways in which they have lived the Golden Rule in their daily lives. They can stick those post-it notes to the big chart paper or Golden Rule poster close to the sentence that matches their own actions.

**Assessment for the lesson:**

- Can students explain the reason for having community rules and guidelines?
- Do students reveal self-knowledge about their own responsibilities toward each other?
- Can students interpret similarities and differences between various versions of the Golden Rule?
- Do students demonstrate empathy for others in their learning community actions and behaviors of caring and sharing?

**Chapter III (1) Extensions for group mural activity:**

- Each student draws a portrait of oneself engaged in a caring or sharing activity. Cut out the figure and add it to a large paper or bulletin board to demonstrate a community of caring and sharing.
- Have the goodness or kindness rules be a gift for students who visit the garden of questions and answers about beliefs!

**Chapter III (1) Extensions about our own learning to care:**

**Discussion Questions:**

- What are your responsibilities for caring and sharing at home?
- What are your responsibilities for caring and sharing in our classroom or learning community?
- How do we learn to care for one another?
- Do we have younger siblings, elders, or family pets to care for?
- How do we learn to share?
- Where did you learn what you are responsible for?
- Can you take on more things to be responsible for? Give an example. Do you need permission to do this?

### **Chapter III (1) Extensions with literature:**

- *Kindness: A Treasury of Buddhist Wisdom for Children and Parents* by Sarah Conover (2000).
- *Voices of Hope: Adolescents and the Tsunami* by UNICEF (2005).
- Parable of the “good Samaritan” from the Christian tradition (Christian New Testament in the King James version, Luke 10:29-37). The parable of the good Samaritan is followed by the Golden Rule. This is the story of a stranger, perhaps an “enemy” (someone from Samaria, which would be an “outsider” for people who told this story) who stops to care for someone from a different community. In the U.S., we have a “good Samaritan” law which supports people’s efforts to help strangers in distress.

### **Chapter III (1) Extensions with drama activities**

Collect students into small groups. Help students to think of, remember or imagine a time when it was difficult to care or share. Assign each group to develop and perform a short skit to demonstrate a real struggle with caring or sharing. Discuss each skit. You can even consider doing the skit two or three times with two or three different endings, depending on how the characters decide to care or share.

# Chapter III (Unit 2): Beliefs about Caring for the Environment

## BIG IDEAS FOR III (2)

- In addition to caring and sharing for people in the same community, many people also have common understandings about caring for the earth and the animals.
- Taking care of the earth and animals is called stewardship of the earth in some religious and non-religious traditions. Another word we can use is environmentalism.
- Ideas for supporting the environment can come from many sources, such as a specific religious tradition, or from drawing upon the beliefs of many Native American tribal nations and other indigenous peoples, or from scientific knowledge about what is needed to keep the earth and animals healthy and well-cared for.

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR III (2)

- How do we learn to take care of the environment?
- What can we learn from the beliefs about the environment held by many Native American tribal nations and other indigenous peoples that can help us better understand how to protect our environment?
- What can we learn from science that can help us better understand how to protect our environment?
- What are some religious stories about caring for the environment?
- What are the consequences of neglecting our responsibilities to the environment?

## NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR III (2)

- English Language Arts: 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 11
- Social Studies: 1, 3, 5, 8, 9

## LESSON III (2): EXPLORING BELIEFS ABOUT CARING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

### Rationale: Why teach this lesson?

When students realize that caring for the earth is a value that has been communicated through centuries of traditions, they can learn that their relationship to environmentalism extends far beyond their teacher's lessons or their family's perspective. They can learn that environmentalism is more than a passing trend in the news. It is a deeply held belief, sometimes a sacred belief, about one's relationship, and the relationships of all peoples, to the earth and its resources.

### Objectives for this lesson – Students will:

- Learn the values about caring for the environment espoused by many Native American beliefs.
- Consider the story of Noah's Ark from an environmental perspective.
- Compare the story of Noah's Ark to the native story of The Great Flood.
- Demonstrate their knowledge of harmful action and helpful actions for the environment.
- Work collaboratively in a proactive closure activity.

### Materials needed:

- The story of Noah's Ark (either from the Book of Genesis or a modern version of your choosing)
- The Great Flood from *One State-Many Nations*<sup>48</sup>

### Time needed:

3 class meetings, 30–45 minutes each

### Setting the lesson:

Explain to students that there are many Native American tribal beliefs about caring for the earth, and explain that these beliefs can help the students better understand how to care for the environment. Help students consider the concept of environmentalism and note that it is not a “new” concept. The notion of caring for the earth has been a tradition in many communities, in some cases for countless generations.

A good resource for educators to consult to learn more about some Native American traditions is the website *One State-Many Nations*, which includes lesson plans and videos.

Also, a book that is helpful to teachers is *Nature's Way: Native Wisdom for Living in Balance with the Earth* by Ed McGaa (2005). Ed McGaa's website is [www.edmcgaa.com](http://www.edmcgaa.com). He is a registered tribal member of the Oglala Sioux OST 15287 and was born on the Pine Ridge reservation. He received his Bachelor's degree from St. John's University and earned a law degree from the University of South Dakota. He has written several books on Native American topics and educators can use his work as a resource for their own understanding.

---

<sup>48</sup> *One State-Many Nations*, Native Americans of Ohio, sponsored by Public Broadcasting System and Northeastern Educational Television of Ohio, <http://westernreservepublicmedia.org/onestate/index.htm>

## **Procedure for the lesson:**

### **Day 1:**

Lead a group discussion that helps students learn about the connections among different systems of beliefs even though they may come from different sources, such as religious traditions or scientific investigation. Ask the students:

- What do we learn from various cultural traditions and storytelling about caring for the earth?
- What are some other ways that we learn about caring for the earth?
- Have we learned from science how to care for the earth?
- Do some people learn in their spiritual and religious communities to care for the earth?

After the discussion, read two different stories about floods and the earth's destruction and renewal:

Read the story of Noah's Ark. You can read the Noah's Ark story from the Book of Genesis or from one of the many children's books about Noah's Ark.

Read the story of The Great Flood. You can get the story of The Great Flood from *One State-Many Nations*.

Lead a discussion: What is the story of Noah's Ark teaching us? What is the story of The Great Flood teaching us?

### **Day 2:**

After reading the stories and the prior discussion, lead this next activity to help students understand the interconnectedness of all people and the environment. Begin the activity in a discussion circle. Record students' responses on chart paper. Ask students to contribute ideas to a list of ways in which the earth is being damaged. Help students generate ideas and assist them in making connections to their responsibilities in everyday life (such as driving cars too much, or using too much paper, or using disposable plastic water bottles). These examples can come from their story reading in class, or from discussions of those readings, or their own knowledge. You might consider assigning individual students or groups of students to research organizations that are actively addressing the environment. They can identify different approaches used by these organizations for trying to improve the environment.

### **Day 3:**

For the final activity, help students understand the interconnectedness of all people and the environment through the creation of a "circle web." Students form a large circle, facing the center. One student holds a large ball of twine, with one end firmly in hand. The student shouts one way in which the earth is being damaged (such as the examples listed on chart paper on Day 2). While shouting out this example, the student throws the twine ball across the room to another student, but holds onto the end of string. The student who catches the ball holds onto their section twine, shouts out another example of harm to the environment and throws the twine across the circle to another student.

This process continues until every student has held onto the new end of twine, then thrown the ball of twine across the circle while shouting out an example of harm to the environment. When this process is finished, all of the students will be holding an end of the twine, and the circle will be criss-crossed by a “web” of twine which represents the interconnected “web” of the many different ways in which we harm the environment.

*Note: When working with younger students, you can record their answers on post-it notes and give each student one. As you give out each post-it, a student picks up the end of the twine from another student and walks to another point to form the circle.*

At this point, the instructor and students can stand there, holding the ends of the web, and talk about how all of those examples had interconnected consequences. Now is the time to work on “reversing” this web of harm to the environment, with examples from their reading of stories in class, discussion of those stories, or personal knowledge.

Now it is possible to go around the circle, with each student saying some way that harm to the environment can be reversed. At that point, each student can drop the end of twine. This is repeated by every student in the circle, until everyone has said some way that the harm to the environment can be reversed – and all of the string is on a big heap on the floor. Encourage students to identify things that they can do (pick up plastic bottles and recycle them, etc.).

### **Closure:**

Make a list on chart paper of students’ ideas of ways they can help reverse harm to the environment and to care for the environment, at home and at school. Some of the ideas in the reversal exercise should come up again, reinforcing the concept that everyone can contribute and act on this value.

### **Assessment for the lesson:**

- Can students provide examples of their awareness of harmful actions and helpful actions for the environment?
- Do students demonstrate empathy for all living plants and animals on the earth?

**Chapter III (2) Extensions for exploring beliefs about caring for the environment:**

Visit the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences “Kids pages.”<sup>49</sup> There are a number of resources there for games and activities to teach how to “reduce, reuse, recycle.”

Visit the the teacher page of the Public Broadcasting Service<sup>50</sup> for a wide range of free classroom resources, including video and games online. The sections on social studies, science and the arts all include lessons about environmentalism. The website includes lessons for each developmental need listed as grade levels Pre-K, K–2, 3–5, 6–8 and 9–12.

**Chapter III (2) Extensions for exploring science and learning about climate change:**

Read aloud or form literature circles for students to read and learn from the following selections of children’s literature:

*Under the Weather: Stories About Climate Change* edited by Tony Bradman (2010). Ages 9–12.

*A Hot Planet Needs Cool Kids: Understanding Climate Change and What You Can Do About It* by Julie Hall (2007). Ages 9–12.

**Chapter III (2) Extensions for exploring animals and nature:**

Use the stories of the flood to examine the impact of the environment on animals. Identify different animals saved during the floods and compare their similarities and differences. Ask students to observe which animals are stronger and how they are weaker, their qualities and characteristics. Consider how their survival contributed to the broader community after the flood.

---

<sup>49</sup> National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, <http://kids.niehs.nih.gov/recycle.htm>

<sup>50</sup> Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), <http://www.pbs.org/teachers/>

# Chapter III (Unit 3): Beliefs about Caring for My Neighborhood and Serving My Community

## **BIG IDEAS FOR III (3)**

- I can make a difference in caring for the environment right in my own neighborhood.
- Taking care of my neighborhood can improve my community.

## **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR III (3)**

- What are some ways I can care for my neighborhood? What actions can I take?
- When I care for my neighborhood, how does it improve my community?

## **NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR III (3)**

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

## LESSON III (3): CARING FOR MY NEIGHBORHOOD AND MY COMMUNITY

### **Rationale: Why teach this lesson?**

When students learn that the spaces around them where they learn, live, work and play are valuable assets for the whole community, they learn that they have a responsibility to make it as healthful and as good a place as possible. While “neighborhood” can be defined in many ways, it is essential for youngsters to grasp the concept as encompassing both the places and the people of their community. Taking action to contribute to one’s neighborhood develops the individual’s sense of responsibility and adds to the community’s collective efforts.

### **Objectives for this lesson – Students will:**

- Understand the concept of neighborhood responsibility.
- Engage in a community cleanup project that has visible results.
- Process their understandings through mural-making.

### **Materials needed:**

- Trash bags, gloves, buckets and water, whatever is needed to clean up a paved neighborhood area. Participants should also dress appropriately for a cleanup task.
- Chalk for every child. If possible, use sidewalk chalk (large chalk for drawing outdoors).

### **Time needed:**

- 2 hours for the cleanup
- 45 minutes for the chalk mural activity

### **Setting the lesson:**

This lesson involves engaging students in cleaning up some paved area in the immediate neighborhood, such as a sidewalk, driveway, parking area, etc. Educators/facilitators need to guide a discussion in which students identify paved areas that need cleaning and reach consensus on why and where they should focus attention. Educators/facilitators will need to develop a process to engage the support of people in the community for the cleanup, and this engagement can itself be a community lesson for the students. Planning for the cleanup can be accompanied by a math lesson on measurement. (How many inches is the space we plan to clean? How many feet?)

Include a discussion to help students understand their shared responsibilities for public spaces. You might tie this into the discussion in Chapter II on why people create rules. Introduce the students to the laws and penalties for littering or destroying property.

Students decide in advance who will be directly responsible for different aspects of the cleanup, appropriate dress to wear at cleanup outdoors, cleanup materials that are needed, and how they want the area to look when it has been cleaned. This is also a great opportunity to invite parents/guardians and neighborhood vendors to partner with the students and the school in this learning activity.

Choose a project after cleanup, either to make a mural on paper or an outside sidewalk chalk mural in the newly cleaned space. If you choose the latter, seek permission from owners or neighbors to allow the children to draw their mural in public space.

**Procedure for the lesson:**

After the cleanup has been completed, students can list words and pictures on chart paper that will communicate neighborhood cleanup messages. They can then either draw a mural on paper, or on a public space that has been agreed upon in advance, that illustrates neighborhood cleanup messages or why students care about keeping their neighborhood clean.

**Closure for the lesson:**

Discuss the completed mural and make a plan for the next cleanup site or the next neighborhood community project.

**Assessment for the lesson:**

- Can students explain their understanding of neighborhood responsibility?
- Can students apply the basic skills of planning and cooperation?

**Chapter III (3) Extensions:**

Below, there are several links from Youth Service America that provide ways to engage youth in community and neighborhood service:

- Youth Service America (YSA) <http://ysa.org/> seeks to improve communities by increasing the number and diversity of young people, ages 5-25, serving in important roles. Founded in 1986, YSA is an international nonprofit resource center that partners with thousands of organizations in more than 100 countries to expand the impact of the youth service movement with families, communities, schools, corporations, and governments.

**How to Engage Children in Service: Ages 5-6**

Source: Youth Service America

[http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref\\_How\\_Engage\\_Children/](http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_How_Engage_Children/)

**How to Engage Children in Service: Ages 6 to 9**

Source: Youth Service America

[http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref\\_How\\_Engage\\_Service/](http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_How_Engage_Service/)

**100 Ways to Make a Difference in Your Community:**

Source: Youth Service America

<http://www.ysa.org/resources>

Young people are serving their communities at record numbers. Each year, approximately 13 million teens give 2.4 billion hours of service back to their communities. Here are 40 ideas for how your students of different ages, and their families, can make a difference (visit the link above for YSA's remaining 60 ideas):<sup>51</sup>

1. Help teach a younger child to read.
2. Help cook and/or serve a meal at a homeless shelter.
3. Gather clothing from your neighbors and donate it to a local shelter.
4. Make "I Care" kits with combs, toothbrushes, shampoo, etc. for the homeless.
5. Pack and hand out food at a local food bank.
6. Adopt a "grand friend" and write them letters and visit them.
7. Visit senior citizens at a nursing home.
8. Rake leaves, shovel snow, clean gutters, or wash windows for a senior citizen.
9. Pick up groceries or medicine for an elderly person.
10. Go for a walk with a senior citizen in your community.
11. Deliver meals to homebound individuals.
12. Hold an afternoon dance for your local nursing home.
13. Teach a senior friend how to use a computer and the Internet.
14. Invite local police officers to present a drug awareness or safety program.
15. Tutor a student that needs help learning English or another subject.
16. Organize a canned goods drive.
17. Clean up a vacant lot or park.
18. Organize a campaign to raise money to purchase and install playground equipment.
19. Plant flowers in public areas that could use some color, with permission.
20. Volunteer to help at a Special Olympics event.
21. Set up a buddy system for kids with special needs in your community.
22. Raise money for Braille books for visually impaired people.
23. Read books or the newspaper on tape for visually impaired people.

---

<sup>51</sup> This material is reproduced in this curriculum with permission from Youth Service America (YSA).

24. Bring toys to children in the cancer ward of a hospital.
25. Contact your local political representative about key issues.
26. Register people to vote.
27. Organize a public issues forum for your neighborhood.
28. Plant a garden or tree where the whole neighborhood can enjoy it, with permission
29. Set up a recycling system for your home.
30. Organize a carpooling campaign in your neighborhood.
31. Adopt an acre of a rainforest.
32. Clean up trash along a river, beach, or in a park.
33. Create a habitat for wildlife.
34. Create a campaign to encourage biking and walking.
35. Test the health of the water in your local lakes, rivers, and streams.
36. Contact your local volunteer center for opportunities to serve.
37. Volunteer at your local animal shelter.
38. Help build a home with Habitat for Humanity.
39. Walk a neighbor's dog or pet sit while they are on vacation.
40. Send a letter to one of America's veterans or overseas soldiers.

# Resources for Chapter 3

## RESOURCES FOR CHAPTER III (1) ON CARING FOR EACH OTHER

Tanenbaum's Golden Rule poster.

<https://www.tanenbaum.org/resources/golden-rule>.

Tanenbaum's Shared Visions project.

<https://www.tanenbaum.org/resources/shared-visions>

*Kindness: A Treasury of Buddhist Wisdom for Children and Parents* by Sarah Conover (2000).

*Voices of Hope: Adolescents and the Tsunami* by UNICEF (2005).

Parable of the "Good Samaritan" from the Christian tradition (Christian New Testament in the King James version, Luke 10:29-37).

## RESOURCES FOR CHAPTER III (2) ON CARING ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT

*Nature's Way: Native Wisdom for Living in Balance with the Earth* by Ed McGaa (2005). (The author's website provides further resources on Native Americans: [www.edmcgaa.com](http://www.edmcgaa.com).)

The story of Noah's Ark from the Book of Genesis (or from a children's book).

The story of The Great Flood from *One State-Many Nations*. <http://westernreservepublicmedia.org/onestate/lp3flood.htm> (*One State-Many Nations* includes lesson plans and videos on many other Native American topics: <http://westernreservepublicmedia.org/onestate/index.htm>)

*National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences* "Kids pages." <http://kids.niehs.nih.gov/recycle.htm>

PBS teachers' page for free classroom resources including video and games. <http://www.pbs.org/teachers/>

## **RESOURCES FOR CHAPTER III (3) ON EXPLORING SCIENCE AND LEARNING ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE**

*Under the Weather: Stories About Climate Change* edited by Tony Bradman (2010). Ages 9–12.

*A Hot Planet Needs Cool Kids: Understanding Climate Change and What You Can Do About It* by Julie Hall (2007). Ages 9-12.

## **RESOURCES FOR CHAPTER III (3) ON COMMUNITY SERVICE**

Youth Service America provides ways to engage youth in community service.

How to Engage Children in Service: Ages 5-6

[http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref\\_How\\_Engage\\_Children/](http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_How_Engage_Children/)

How to Engage Children in Service: Ages 6 to 9

[http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref\\_How\\_Engage\\_Service/](http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_How_Engage_Service/)

100 Ways to Make a Difference in Your Community

[http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref\\_100\\_Ways\\_Make/](http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_100_Ways_Make/)



# CHAPTER IV

## Rituals and Traditions

### GOALS FOR STUDENT LEARNING IN CHAPTER IV: 2, 3, 4, 5

#### BIG IDEAS FOR CHAPTER IV

- Many communities share common understandings of their cultural, religious and historical traditions.
- Many communities practice rituals that are drawn from a variety of cultural, religious and historical traditions.
- A community's rituals and traditions may change over time and in different geographical locations.

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTION FOR CHAPTER IV

- What are rituals and traditions?

# Chapter IV (Unit 1): Learning about Rituals and Traditions

## **BIG IDEAS FOR IV (1)**

- Many rituals and traditions are based upon stories about a community's history.
- Some rituals or traditions are ways of revisiting or reenacting a community's history.
- Some rituals help to organize one's religious worship.
- Some rituals remind people of their religious, spiritual or secular beliefs.

## **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR IV (1)**

- How do we learn our own family and community rituals?
- How do we learn our own family and community traditions?
- How do rituals and traditions help us to participate in a shared community?
- How do we learn about the rituals and traditions of other communities?

## **NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR IV (1)**

- English Language Arts: 4, 9, 11, 12
- Social Studies: 1, 3, 4, 5

## LESSON IV (1): LEARNING ABOUT RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

### **Rationale: Why teach this lesson?**

Since rituals and traditions are part of daily life (in schools, in families, in faith communities), children are often unaware that they are practicing rituals and following traditions. Becoming aware of one's own rituals and traditions – as well as each other's – affirms students' experiences and expands their understandings of the ways they participate in various communities.

### **Think ahead:**

Some rituals and traditions are religious and some are not. The students in your learning community may follow various rituals and traditions, both religious and secular. Students may disagree with each other about identifying what qualifies as a ritual and what qualifies as a tradition, and these differences of view should be welcomed. The facilitator needs to shape the conversation in such a way as to welcome many voices and many experiences.

The distinction between particular rituals and traditions is not always obvious. Thus, while it is important for students to explore both, the more important point is for the students to learn to recognize that these practices and customs exist, and to understand that there are many different types of traditions and rituals that people recognize in their communities.

### **Objectives for this lesson – Students will:**

- Recognize rituals and traditions in their shared learning community.
- Recognize, name, and share rituals and traditions from their families and communities.

### **Materials needed:**

- Chart paper and markers

### **Time needed:**

2 class meetings, 30–45 minutes each

### **Setting the lesson:**

This lesson has two parts: (1) Defining and becoming familiar with rituals and traditions by naming and locating them in their shared learning community, and (2) sharing rituals and traditions from family life and/or faith communities.

## **Procedure for the lesson:**

### **Day 1:**

Write the words “RITUAL” and “TRADITION” on the chart paper. Ask students: What do you know about these words? Can you give an example of a ritual? Can you give an example of a tradition? Write their responses on the chart paper under the respective words.

To guide your discussion, we have provided a definition and some examples. For simplicity with younger students, we can offer the idea of rituals as being repeated practices in which they engage, while defining traditions as group practices.

**RITUALS:** While rituals are often defined as religious, for the purposes of a broader discussion of communities, ritual can also be defined as any customary observance or activity or practice that has special meaning attached. The meanings attached to rituals can be personal, or originate with family, community, culture, or religion. Some rituals are passed from one generation to another. Rituals can help to shape how traditions are practiced.

Ask students if they have noticed any rituals in their learning communities. Some examples may include:

- Sitting in a circle for story-time
- Becoming quiet when the teacher raises her/his hand
- Raising one’s hand to speak, or passing the talking stick (see Chapter 1)

**TRADITIONS:** Information, beliefs, and/or customs that are transmitted from generation to generation, by word of mouth, example, or instruction. Traditions are transmitted by families and by other social institutions such as religious groups, clubs, sports teams, etc. Often, traditions include rituals.

Ask students if they have noticed any traditions in their learning communities. Some examples using the above context may include:

- Acknowledging and celebrating birthdays (You may ask, “What is the difference between tradition and ritual?” In this case, the tradition is the ongoing acknowledgement by the children of each other’s birthdays, whereas a ritual associated with this tradition would involve a child’s blowing out the candles on the cake, and trying to get them out in one breath while making a wish.)
- Schools close for Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s, regardless of whether or not students celebrate those holidays.
- School closes during the summer months.

### **Day 2:**

Review the students’ ideas from the chart paper for Day 1 concerning Rituals and Traditions. Make a new chart paper that says FAMILY RITUALS and FAMILY TRADITIONS.

Ask students to identify family rituals (such as holding hands to cross the street, prayer before meals, story-time before bed and/or homework-time after dinner, etc.)

Ask students to identify family traditions (such as the kinds of meals that are served for Thanksgiving or other special celebratory meals, house-chores, soccer games, and/or attending faith services).

Ask students to draw his/her favorite ritual or tradition. Bring students back together in a group circle and ask them to share the drawings of their favorite ritual or tradition with each other.

**Closure for the lesson:**

Sit in a circle to answer the questions: What similarities do you notice in each other's family rituals? What differences do you notice in each other's family rituals? What similarities do you notice in each other's family traditions? What differences do you notice in each other's family traditions? Make a point to notice that traditions and rituals can be either religious or secular.

**Assessment for the lesson:**

- Can students explain the concepts of ritual and tradition?
- Do students demonstrate understanding of vocabulary words by providing examples of ritual and tradition in their learning communities and in their families?
- Do students reveal self-knowledge about their own rituals and the meanings they attach to those rituals?
- Can students interpret differences in theirs and others' family rituals and traditions?

# Chapter IV (Unit 2): Rituals and Traditions about Sacred Spaces

## **BIG IDEAS FOR IV (2)**

- Some beliefs are rooted in stories about specific locations that have special religious meaning for a community. These are thought of as “sacred spaces.”
- Some sacred spaces are places where people can experience together their shared beliefs and/or their shared history.
- Some sacred spaces identify locations for worship and/or for community gathering.

## **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR IV (2)**

- How do we learn to respect sacred spaces?
- Are some sacred spaces religious and other sacred spaces secular or spiritual?
- Are some sacred spaces special to many of us, whether or not we are religious?

## **NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR IV (2)**

- English Language Arts: 2, 3, 6, 9, 12
- Social Studies: 1, 3, 5, 7

## LESSON IV (2): LEARNING ABOUT SACRED SPACES

### **Rationale: Why teach this lesson?**

The FBI Hate Crimes Report of 2009 tells us that almost 18% of the reported religion-based hate crimes occurred in churches, synagogues or temples. We also know that a significant number of hate crimes are committed by people under the age of 20. In 2010, there was a great deal of controversy over the Park 51 Cultural Center in New York City as many people believed the area around Ground Zero to be sacred (for more information on this, please refer to our materials at [www.tanenbaum.org/programs/education/turning-park51-teachable-moment-curriculum-guide-and-fact-sheets](http://www.tanenbaum.org/programs/education/turning-park51-teachable-moment-curriculum-guide-and-fact-sheets)). Honoring sacred spaces has led to profound healing experiences in both religious and civic societies. For example, visiting the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC, often referred to simply as “The Wall,” has provided education, comfort, closure and reflection to many people in the nation who lost family members during the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.

Taking a stance to protect or control sacred spaces has also been the source of global and enduring conflict. The example of the Old City of Jerusalem in the Middle East is probably well-known to students in the U.S., but almost every continent and cultural group has struggled over land and access to sites that they considered sacred.

When very young students can start to consider what it means to share space and honor others’ space, we can equip them with the empathy, activism and mutual respect required to see conflict from multiple perspectives and to participate in conflict resolution. Some concrete experiences in understanding “special space” and “sacred space” can pave the way for these insights.

### **Think ahead:**

Building a special space is an activity that can work well either indoors or outdoors. Depending on your available space, the weather and resources, choose the site that makes sense for you as the educator, where you can provide materials for students to make the space their own, and where you can manage the group process appropriately. The objectives of this lesson include learning how to share resources. Revisit your classroom guidelines about respect.

### **Objectives for this lesson – Students will:**

- Explore the notion of special spaces and sacred spaces.
- See the value of a space from another person’s point of view.
- Develop empathy for each other’s beliefs about sacred spaces.
- Build a special space with a team of peers and develop community guidelines about how the space is used.

Share resources for building space with other teams that are also building spaces.

**Materials needed:**

- Miscellaneous materials to build or design a special space: Large empty cardboard boxes, milk crates, laundry baskets, chairs, rope, sheets, towels, blankets and other found objects.

**Time needed:**

3 class meetings, 45 minutes each

**Setting the lesson:**

Explore a space that will work for you as an educator. Is the classroom the best spot? The cafeteria? Do you have a gymnasium? A playground? Read through the lesson and select your work area thoughtfully.

**Procedure for the lesson:****Day 1:**

Gather the students in the area where they will be constructing their special places. Lead a discussion about spaces that are considered sacred by some people for various purposes: religious worship, memorials, and more. It will be helpful to create a working definition of the word “sacred” as it may have different meaning for different students. Invite students to share their stories about sacred or special places that they know about or have heard about. Lead the discussion into other special spaces such as tree houses, forts, a special meadow, a beach, a stream, a park playground. For younger students, you may want to have pictures available of spaces that some people consider sacred (houses of worship, cemeteries, memorials, temples, parks, tree houses, etc.)

Explain that they will be working with a team to create, cultivate or build some special places for themselves during the next day. They will need to think about what will make these places special for themselves and for their peers.

Discussion may include:

- What are some names for different places of worship?
- What are some traditional ways of showing respect when visiting a place of worship (attire, etc)?
- Do all religions worship indoors?
- Literature about Sacred Spaces:
  - *House of Worship: Sacred Spaces in America* by Dominique Browning (2006).

**Day 2:**

Help the large group divide into 3 or 4 small working groups. Each working group will be developing a special space together, with the result that there will be 3 or 4 special spaces. Show the students all the materials that are available to build their special space. Ask them to help design strategies for sharing the resources. Ask them: Would it be fair to let one group take all the boxes and rope? Why or why not? How should we proceed to divide up the materials so that each group has something to make their place special?

Depending on your schedule and space, give students a reasonable amount of time to design their spaces. Encourage them to play and enjoy the spaces.

Ask the students in each of the groups to determine what the purpose of their special space will be.

Ask each group to give their space a name.

Ask them to develop guidelines or rules for their space. Do not give too many prompts. Just ask them to develop guidelines and observe what happens.

Notice how many rules get developed about exclusion and if any rules are developed about inclusion. Notice if there are rules about boundaries and borders or special use. Try to be neutral about your interaction with their rules and ask them to explain why and how they developed their guidelines.

### **Day 3:**

Review the events of Days 1 and 2. Give students time to enjoy the spaces they have created. After students have had plenty of time to enjoy the space and agree upon their guidelines, bring them back into the large group circle. Ask them if it would be okay for the groups to get re-assigned so that group 1 is now in group 2's space, and group 2 is now in group 3's space, etc.

Facilitate a discussion (which will most likely be quite lively!) about what is fair and unfair about assigning a special space and then following rules or disregarding rules about other people's use of that special space. Continue the discussion. Help students learn from one another's perspectives. Help them imagine what it might be like for somebody's neighborhood to be taken over by an outside developer or a new highway project. Help them imagine what it might be like to have one's ancestral land confiscated. Help them imagine what it would be like to be forced to use somebody else's space and somebody else's rules. Reassure them that they do not really have to be forced into leaving their own special place to go to another's space in this learning community. But it would be great fun to learn more about each other's space.

### **Closure for the lesson:**

Allow plenty of time for students to visit one another's special spaces. Allow time for them to linger. If your space allows, try to have the structures in place for at least one more class meeting or recess time. Have students make notes on the spaces they visit and what they appreciated about each other's special space.

### **Assessment for the lesson:**

- Can students explain the notion of special spaces and sacred spaces?
- Do students see the space in perspective, from another person's point of view?
- Are students demonstrating empathy for others' beliefs about sacred spaces?
- Did students apply basic skills of classroom guidelines to share resources?

# Chapter IV (Unit 3): Rituals and Traditions about Prayer and Meditation

## **BIG IDEAS FOR IV (3)**

- Traditions, beliefs and culture influence ritual practices.
- Some ritual practices include prayer, meditation and affirmations.
- Prayer, meditation and affirmations connect many people to their beliefs.
- Rituals help people stay involved in/with their beliefs through prayer, meditation, and other forms of affirmation.
- Rituals help preserve the practice of prayer and mediation through generations.
- Learning about each other's ritual practices helps us to be more respectful of each other.

## **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR IV (3)**

- Are all forms of prayer, meditation and affirmation religious?
- Do all religious groups use prayer for worship?
- Do all religious groups pray the same way?
- What are some ways of praying and meditating that differ for various religious groups?
- Is prayer different from meditation?

## **NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR IV (3)**

- English Language Arts: 1, 2, 3, 9, 11
- Social Studies: 1, 3, 4, 5, 10

## LESSON IV (3): PRAYER, MEDITATION AND AFFIRMATION PRACTICES

### Rationale: Why teach this lesson?

When young children become familiar with the range of ritual practices in which families engage (e.g. prayer, meditation and affirmation) they can learn to appreciate and respect the diversity in their inter-religious neighborhood. This kind of concrete understanding generates respectful interaction and teaches children to question and reject intolerant attitudes and to cultivate a more cooperative and collaborative democratic society.

The hope is that when children understand this diversity early in life, as they mature, they will be able to grasp the importance of freedom of religious exercise as beneficial to all members of society.

Think ahead: It is critical to communicate with children and their families about the lessons in this chapter, to reiterate that when we learn about the practices of others, we are not teaching children what or how to believe. Instead, we are teaching children that in a democratic society, there are many ways of believing and acting on those beliefs. It is also essential that all students feel included, whether their family practices are religious, secular or a combination of some religious and some secular practices. Children will not learn respect for each other's beliefs, rituals, or traditions if they feel that their beliefs, rituals, or traditions are not affirmed and respected in their learning community.

### Objectives for this lesson – Students will:

- Learn about the power of words.
- Discuss how words are used in rituals such as affirmation, prayer and meditation.
- Notice similarities and differences in these practices across different religious, spiritual, and secular groups.

### Materials needed:

- Books:
  - *The Little Engine that Could* by Watty Piper (1978).
  - *I Think, I Am!: Teaching Kids the Power of Affirmations* by Louise L. Hay, Kristina Tracy (2008).
- Chart paper and markers
- Sticky Notes
- Stickers

### Time needed:

3 class meetings, 45 minutes each

### Setting the lesson:

Discuss the words prayer, meditation and affirmation.

## **Procedure for the lesson:**

### **Day 1:**

Gather in a seated circle for story time. Read the classic children's book *The Little Engine that Could* by Watty Piper. For older students consider a more age appropriate book.

Lead a discussion about the power of words related to achieving difficult tasks. Ask students, What words did the Little Engine use to help himself accomplish a difficult task? Ask students to help you write the words "I think I can" on big chart paper.

Lead a choo-choo train activity in which students line up and create a human train to chug around the room chanting "I think I can!" Students may want to take turns acting as the engine, caboose and other train cars. While students are still in "train car formation," lead an exercise in imagination with students to consider what would have happened to the Little Engine if she had said "There's no way I can do that!" or "I hate trying this!" Discuss the possibilities of the train not succeeding and the consequences. End the exercise by returning to the choo-choo train moving around the room chanting "I think I can!"

Return to the seated circle and discuss the power of words. What happens when we tell ourselves something out loud or silently in our minds? Explain that the positive thinking words that the Little Engine chanted can be called an affirmation.

Write the word AFFIRMATION on the chart paper under the Little Engine's quote: "I think I can." Explain that affirmations can be used in many ways. They are often used to add to our efforts and to provide strength in the face of difficulty.

Ask the children whether there are times when they need to use affirmations. For example, sometimes if someone is a little bit afraid of the dark or scared in a new situation, one might say to oneself, "I am strong and capable; there is nothing to be afraid of." If you say it over and over, does it make you feel more in control? Ask students to contribute their ideas about affirmations. Document students' responses on chart paper. End the activity with all students chanting "I think I can!"

### **Day 2:**

Gather in a seated circle for story time. Read the children's book *I Think, I Am!: Teaching Kids the Power of Affirmations*. Notice how this book uses the word "affirmation" that we learned in the story from the previous story-time, *The Little Engine that Could*.

Before reading today's book *I Think, I Am!: Teaching Kids the Power of Affirmations*, put a pile of tiny, skinny sticky-notes near you in the seated circle so that all kids can see the pile of sticky notes and also see the storybook.

Explain that you want students to come up and take a sticky-note whenever you read a page that reminds them of something from their own life. If that page reminds them of a time when they could have used an affirmation, then invite them to please post a sticky-note with their name or initials on the page before you turn the page. Some pages may have 20 sticky notes and some may have no notes.

This activity will encourage reflective and attentive listening. It may also encourage using lots of sticky notes, but that's just part of the fun! Some children may want to put a sticky note on every page, and if that is the case, you can accept their enthusiasm by pointing out that the book has so many examples from which to learn! Some children may feel shy about participating and you can encourage individuals accordingly.

In addition to the active listening, this sticky-note procedure also helps students see that they are not alone in their struggles and fears. Point out to the class that all these sticky notes demonstrate that many people find ways to feel better about themselves and to find strength for challenges in daily life.

Note that some of the students' affirmations may be religious and involve prayer. It is important that students have a safe space to share and appreciate each other's affirmations, whether those affirmations are personal, religious, spiritual, or secular. This will be the focus for Day 3.

Meanwhile, during Day 2, it is important that students be asked to name their own affirmations and not feel directed to take on somebody else's words or affirmations. There may be some students who will be able to identify an affirmation but not want to use it or "own" it for him or herself. It is important to accept such responses. This is also a good time to reference the Rules of Respect the class has created, as well as the goodness and kindness rules they shared with other students.

### **Day 3:**

Consider other ways in which some people use the power of words to encourage themselves or to affirm themselves, for example, through prayer and meditation. Explain that to learn more about one another and to continue to develop respect for differences in our learning community, it will be helpful to learn how some people use the power of words in different ways. Write the words affirmation, prayer and meditation on chart paper.

Facilitate a discussion by inviting students to help define prayer and meditation by sharing anything they know about the words. These words are often used in religious practices, so students who do not have religious backgrounds might not be familiar with them, but they can draw upon their new knowledge of affirmation to learn about these practices. However, it should be noted that these terms are not used exclusively in religious contexts.

Students will bring their personal experiences and beliefs to the discussion about how to define prayer and meditation. Include every student's ideas, based either on what they have directly experienced or what they have observed among others. It may be useful to also consult some dictionary definitions to add to the discussion. In the dictionary definitions below, the term "prayer" is defined religiously ("by addressing God") while the term "meditate" includes both religious and secular understandings of "thinking deeply."

Dictionary definitions from Apple computer Dictionary applications:

- Prayer: a solemn request for help or expression of thanks addressed to God or an object of worship
- Meditate: think deeply or focus one's mind for a period of time, in silence or with the aid of chanting, for religious or spiritual purposes or as a method of relaxation.
  - Meditate on/upon: think deeply or carefully about (something), e.g., "He went off to meditate on the new idea."

After the discussion about the definitions of prayer and meditation, give students sticky-notes or tiny stickers. Invite them to come up to the chart paper and place a sticky under any of four words: affirmation, prayer, meditation or none, for which they have personal experience or in which their family members engage in practice.

### **Closure for the lesson:**

Work in small groups to consider these questions. Given what we have learned in our lessons, you are invited to share in smaller talking groups any information from your personal experience that could help us to explore these questions. What have you observed about:

- When do some people pray or meditate?
- Why do some people pray or meditate?
- What are some different ways in which people pray or meditate?

### **In your smaller talking groups, notice and discuss:**

- Some practices, like affirmations, prayer and meditation answer questions for some people.
- Some practices soothe people in distress.
- Some practices remember loved ones whom one misses.
- Some practices give people strength and courage in difficult times.
- Some practices use words.
- Some practices use silence.

Regroup the students in the story-time circle. Emphasize that the reason we learn about each other's practices is to enrich our understanding of our learning community and to prevent misunderstandings that sometimes lead to conflict. When we understand more about one another's differences we can be more respectful, harkening back to our first lesson in Chapter 1.

### **Assessment for the lesson:**

- Do students demonstrate empathy for one another's different religious and/or secular beliefs and practices?
- Can students interpret differences in ways in which people pray, meditate and use affirmations?
- Can students identify how they are or could be respectful of differences in the ways that people pray, meditate or find affirmation?

# Chapter IV (Unit 4): Rituals and Traditions about Renewal: Letting Go of Old Ways and Starting Fresh

## **BIG IDEAS FOR IV (4)**

- There are many different rituals and traditions about renewal, letting go of old ways and starting fresh related to the earth's seasonal change.
- Some rituals and traditions from different groups share common traits.
- Rituals about renewal help people to think about a “fresh start.”
- Some rituals and traditions about renewal coincide with the spring season or planting season depending on the geographical region.

## **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR IV (4)**

- Why do people feel the need to start fresh?
- What are the ways in which religious groups mark renewal?
- What do rituals and traditions teach us about how people started fresh in the past?
- When are there times when people wish they could start fresh?
- What are some activities that people do with their families and friends in the spring?

## **NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR IV (4)**

- English Language Arts: 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 12
- Social Studies: 1, 2, 3, 5, 9

## LESSON IV (4): RENEWAL AND STARTING FRESH

The information and activity in Chapter IV (4) have been adapted from Patty Bode's book *Cultural Connections through Art* (1993). (Out of print.)

### **Rationale: Why teach this lesson?**

During the spring season in the United States, many students are exposed to the symbols, images and commercial products associated with the Christian tradition of Easter. To a lesser extent, during the spring some students may also be exposed to the Jewish tradition of Passover. These two religious holidays, especially Easter, have come to be viewed as “the norm” in U.S. society, while many other experiences related to spring celebrations are ignored, underrepresented or misrepresented. The common, underlying themes of renewal and starting fresh that undergird these two religious holidays, as well as many other traditions from both secular practices and other religious groups, are rarely explored by teachers and students.

Because the Christian tradition of Easter is predominantly visible in media including cartoons, movies, and TV and print commercials and in public spaces such as grocery stores, restaurants and shopping malls, and even on the White House lawn, it is worthwhile for students of all religious and secular backgrounds to be affirmed in their own experiences and to be able to share their experiences with each other. One way to affirm all students is to consider this time of year, and talk about why many different religions and traditions mark fresh beginnings that they celebrate with games, laughter and joy. While some religious observance also includes solemn remembrance, many stories also include joyous celebration. Rather than eradicate religious expressions, such classroom consideration can include the traditions of students who celebrate Easter (religiously or secularly) and can also encompass all students' experiences.

This specific lesson provides a window into a tradition that is less widely-known in mainstream US society: the Hindu celebration of Holi. At the end of this lesson, there are extensions to engage with other springtime activities, such as the symbol of the egg, the tree of life and the planting of seeds.

**Think ahead:**

While the art activity described below is inspired by one specific religious tradition that is common in India and other regions with large Hindu populations, it is essential that students do not see this particular festival as a completely unique phenomenon. Take care to make the cultural connections mentioned here, noting the many festivals across the globe that include practical jokes and trickster antics as a part of their spring traditions. Encourage your students to share April Fool's Day anecdotes. Also discuss fun-filled memories of splashing water at families and friends in a wide range of contexts. Find ways for each child to feel connected and included.

Perhaps you can provide stories, videos and photographs of Holi celebrations. In presenting Holi, it is important to emphasize that Holi celebrates the fertility and new life of springtime and that the rituals and practices of Holi are related to spring. It will be helpful later in the discussion to talk about "spring" and "renewal" rituals in other religious traditions (Easter egg hunts, the parsley on the Passover Seder plate and the Orthodox Jewish tradition of completely cleaning the house before Passover begins).

**Objectives for this lesson - Students will:**

- Discuss and increase their knowledge of holidays in spring. Discuss knowledge of symbols or traditions related to spring holidays.
- Notice that some symbols are shared in a range of religious, secular and cultural practices (eggs, trees, seeds and water-spraying).
- Learn about a tradition associated with the holiday of Holi, practiced in parts of India and other world regions where this Hindu tradition has migrated.
- Appreciate the human need for joking, laughter and renewal.
- Make a human figure out of oak tag.

**Materials needed:**

- The chapter on SPRING in the book *Children Just Like Me: Celebrations!* by Barnabas Kindersley (1997). See page 18 about Holi in India.
- *April Fool! Watch Out at School* by Diane deGroat (2009).
- *Holi* by Uma Krishnaswami (from the series, Rookie Read-About Holidays) (2003).
- World map
- Oak tag paper, (or old manila folders can be re-used). One manila folder provides enough oak tag for each student to have one piece of oak tag approximately 8” x 10” and four pieces approximately 2” x 10”.
- Paper fasteners
- Paint and paint supplies

**Time needed:**

4 class meetings, 45 minutes each

**Setting the lesson:**

Whatever the origin of April Fools’ Day, there are many customs throughout the world that involve games, jokes, and silliness to chase away winter and bring in a new, fresh season.

For example, on Songkran, the Thai New Year, people throw water on each other until they are thoroughly drenched and convulsed with laughter. This is done in conjunction with paying respect to elders and bathing statues of Buddha with perfumed water. Hungarians, Czechs, and Slovaks celebrate by spraying people with perfume, a reminder of the scents of spring. Some games that are played in France and Spain involve one person dressing up as a shaggy bear to represent winter and then being chased away by young people. In an old Croatian custom, one young person dresses up in green leaves and branches as “Green George” and goes door to door with others, singing songs of spring. Some people in Colombia have a spring custom of filling eggshells with colored powder or water to throw at one another during spring celebrations.

Other fun-filled traditions of showering one another can be seen in India, which has no cultural connection to Western April Fool’s day, yet involves a great deal of fun and prankster antics. The celebration of Holi is a tradition that has evolved to include spraying neighbors and friends with water squirters, water balloons, garden hoses and on occasion even firehoses. The action is a symbol and celebration of fertility and the new life of springtime. The hoses, balloons and squirters are filled with colored water (usually red or saffron). In some areas colored powder is thrown.

**Procedure for the lesson:**

Read the chapter on spring in the book *Children Just Like Me: Celebrations!*

**Day 1:**

Introduce a discussion of springtime by helping students notice the events of spring that occur in your geographic region. These may include nature's events such as weather patterns, animal migration and reproduction as well as human interaction with nature, like gardening and major crop planting. These events may also include civic events such as city street cleaning, parks re-opening and neighborhood gatherings. They may additionally include secular, religious and cultural ceremonies and celebrations.

Draw from student experiences. Listen to their stories, or for older children, collect their writing about spring and share their experiences in small groups.

After introducing the discussion of spring or small group sharing, read the book *April Fool! Watch Out at School*. Listen to and/or write memories of April Fool's Day. Share again in small groups.

**Day 2 and 3: The story of Holi and making human figures**

Recall the story and memories of April Fool's Day and prepare for a different set of rituals and traditions related to springtime.

Find India on a map. Put a push-pin or a sticky-note on the image of India and put another one on the region where your learning community is located. Talk about distance and cultural connections. Read the book *Holi*. Explain that instead you will be making small human figures out of oak tag and splatter painting your figures! Remind students that this tradition associated with the Hindu holiday of Holi is used as a symbol and celebration of fertility and the new life of springtime.

Demonstrate human figure cut outs. Give each student one piece of oak tag approximately 8" x 10" and four pieces approximately 2" x 10". The piece that is 8" x 10" will serve as the head and torso, and the four long pieces (approx. 2" x 10") will serve as arms as legs. Students draw the head and torso and cut out, then draw the arms and legs and cut out. Attach with paper fasteners so the extremities can move. If paper fasteners are not available, simply attach with glue (in this case they will not be moveable). Students draw, color and glue scraps of paper and/or fabric to give the human figure facial features, clothing and personality!

#### **Day 4: Prepare to splatter paint**

The work area should be thoroughly protected with newspaper or plastic tablecloths and students' clothing must be protected with smocks. Splatter paintings are an all-time favorite activity with students of all ages! Students will approach it with enthusiasm, so it is good to do a little advance training. Before students splatter paint their figures begin the practice session by splattering plain water onto plain newsprint (or in good weather use a protected place outdoors).

After some fun with free movement and expressive splattering, teach students how to control their splattering. After wetting the brush, clasp it in the non-dominant hand (right-handed students hold the brush in the left hand and vice versa) and lightly tap the brush with the two fingers of the other hand (the dominant hand). This creates a sense of control of the splatter technique. Experiment with many brushes: narrow, wide, even toothbrushes. After students have mastered the control technique, introduce paint. Practice on the newsprint.

After lots of "practice" splatter painting, it is time to splatter paint one's oak tag human figure. If outdoor space is available and weather permits, do this outdoors. If not, prepare the space accordingly with newspaper protection. Each student may splatter paint their figure in the spirit of the Holi celebration. Depending on the age of the students, you can do this all at once or in small groups in a special "paint-splattering corner." Also depending on your learning community boundaries you can consider allowing students to ask one another if they can splatter one another's oak tag figure similar to spraying water on one's family and neighbors during Holi in India.

#### **Clean up preparation:**

Keep it light hearted. The key to having plenty of laughter for both students and teacher is to have lots of buckets of sudsy water ready with old hand towels, bath towels or paper towels for quick and easy clean up. Students can wash their hands and dry quickly and you can use the towels, etc., for quickly wiping up spills. Keep a special bucket off to the side for dirty paintbrushes. Make it a paint-brush-only bucket for organized, end of activity wash-up.

#### **Closure for the lesson:**

These figures make an animated display! Hang a clothesline in the classroom or hallway and use paper clips or clothespins to clasp each figure to the clothesline. The display will serve as a lasting memory of all the fun of paint-splattering as well a reminder to use laughter to chase away winter and to start fresh in the spring.

**Assessment for the lesson:**

Can students explain the similarity and differences among various springtime traditions?

Did students apply basic skills of listening attentively, questioning respectfully, and participating thoughtfully?

Do students see in perspective different points of view?

**Chapter IV (4) Extensions for learning about renewal and starting fresh:**

Work with students to research and make a list of many holidays, observances and traditions that involve commemorating seasonal renewal and a fresh start. Consider some of the celebrations to identify similarities and differences, and to find cross-cultural connections.

Discuss ways in which students in your learning community may want to let go of old ways and start fresh. For example, some possibilities may include: leaving academic failures in the past while studying for successful future achievements, forgiving oneself for mistakes made in a soccer game and planning to practice for the next game, spring cleaning the classroom or household to refresh and reorganize the space, or apologizing to a friend for hurtful situations while making plans to engage in friendship building activities.

Here is a list of religious and secular traditions that emphasize themes of renewal, by letting go of old ways and starting out with a fresh new beginning. Older students might want to select and research one of the traditions from this list to compare the ways in which different traditions emphasize cleaning out the past, starting with something new.

*Renewal: Letting go of old ways and starting fresh.*

- Ramadan in the Islamic tradition.
- Easter and resurrection in the Christian tradition.
- Passover in the Jewish tradition.
- Holi in the Hindu tradition.

*New Year:*

- Muharram: The Islamic New Year
- Rosh Hashanah: The Jewish New Year
- Diwali: Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism
- Samhain: The Celtic New Year
- Lunar New Year: Traditional China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand

## CHAPTER IV (UNIT 4): EXTENSION ACTIVITY FOR EXPLORING THE TREE OF LIFE

- The image of the tree as a symbol of new life is depicted in many traditions across the globe and through the ages. This common image provides a window into other cultures, traditions and religious practices, which can be studied, compared and contrasted.
- Ancient Aztec paintings portray the Tree of Middle Place, which was believed to hold vital elements.
- In Norse mythology, Yggdrasil, the World tree, connects the worlds of heaven and earth.
- Some early Christian paintings depict the crucified Christ figure hanging on a blossoming tree to symbolize the belief in eternal life.
- Elaborate trees decorated with natural and religious imagery are woven in the molas of Panama's Cuna Indian of the San Blas islands and in regions of Mexico ornate ceramic candelabras depict various interpretations of the Tree of Life.
- The maypole of northern Europe originated in the earth religion custom of cutting a May Tree that was decorated to be the center of rituals paying homage to the tree gods.
- The Chinese festival of Ch'ing Ming is a time dedicated to tree planting.
- Israel also has a tree-planting festival, Hamishah Osar Bish'vat.
- In India, during Kalpa Vriksha people visit a specially decorated young tree to make wishes.
- People in the United States recognize the non-religious civic holiday of Arbor Day by planting trees and thinking about the importance of trees in the ecological balance of the environment. The date is set at different times according to the most auspicious time for planting in various geographical regions.

Many activities in your learning community can be engaged in to learn about these cross-cultural connections, interreligious understandings and civic recognitions of trees in our world. Some possibilities may include:

- Visit trees in your neighborhood and learn how to identify various species.
- Go outdoors with sketch paper and pastels to illustrate trees in the landscape or cityscape.
- Coordinate a field trip with your local Parks Department to show students the varieties of types of trees in their parks and/or neighborhood.
- Note any civic efforts in your community to plant trees as part of the effort to make the environment more sustainable.

- Each student may create a “Tree of Life” by stuffing some found branches into a cardboard tube (from a paper towel roll). Decorate the tree of life with lively paint colors and hang small objects from the branches. The objects can be small toys or small paper cut-outs of symbols and shapes that represent each student’s experiences with recognizing the spring season. These symbols may be drawn from religious practices, secular experiences or stories and myths.
- Ask students to try to identify the biggest tree in their neighborhood, or which tree they think is the oldest in their neighborhood.
- Ask older students to research information about the age of redwood trees in California. Ask them to imagine what was happening in history when these very old trees were first seedlings and then young trees.

#### **CHAPTER IV (4) EXTENSION ACTIVITY FOR EXPLORING SYMBOLS OF SEEDS AND PLANTING**

The significance of planting can be seen in many of the festivals and rituals associated with spring. Some events focus on the importance of trees, others focus on the activity of planting specific crops, and still others acknowledge the anticipation and waiting that follow the act of planting. Some examples include:

- In Mozambique, the Blessing of the Seeds, which has become a Christian ritual, although it is deeply rooted in African traditions that originated centuries before Christianity.
- The Iranian celebration of Naw Ruz, where the symbolic ritual of scattering seeds in a bowl of water welcomes the New Year at the Spring Equinox.
- In the festival of San Khuda in Sierra Leone, songs and parades mark the seed-sowing season and bring in the New Year.

You can engage in many activities to guide your learners in understanding these rituals related to seeds and planting, such as the following:

- Students may collect seeds from their lunches, such as from oranges and apples. You may be able to collect seeds from local garden stores or farmers’ markets as well.
- Plant seeds in clear plastic cups in the classroom, so students can witness the process of growth. (This activity can be coordinated with science lessons and environmental lessons.)
- In another activity, students create a collage of seeds on paper, using craft glue to fasten seeds to the page. First students draw a horizontal line from end to end of the page. This line will represent the surface of the earth. Students glue the seeds below the surface line. Then they may draw roots shooting downward out of the seeds and stems shooting upward. Encourage them to be imaginative and add plants, insects, animals and layers of soil.

# Chapter IV (Unit 5): Rituals and Traditions about Harvest: Collecting Resources

## **BIG IDEAS FOR IV (5)**

- There are many different rituals and traditions about harvest. Some are religious and some are secular.
- Most rituals and traditions about harvest coincide with the autumn season depending on the geographical region.
- Some harvest rituals and traditions include collecting food and other resources before the onset of winter, when food is no longer growing.
- Rituals and traditions about harvest stem from taking care of people's need for food and reassurance that they will be cared for during the winter.
- Some rituals and traditions from different religious groups share some common traits.

## **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR IV (5)**

- What harvest traditions emphasize collecting just enough resources and leaving some for others?
- What do harvest traditions teach us about sharing resources throughout the year, and in times of crisis?
- Does harvest season occur at the same time of year in all regions of the U.S. or all geographical regions of the world?
- Why do we still have harvest rituals and traditions in industrialized nations, even though the availability of food in grocery stores has changed our relationship to the harvest and to winter?

## **NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR IV (5)**

- English Language Arts: 1, 3, 6, 9, 12
- Social Studies: 1, 2, 3, 5

## LESSON IV (5) LEARNING ABOUT HARVEST

The information and activities in Chapter IV (5) have been adapted from Patty Bode's book *Cultural Connections through Art*, Amherst, Massachusetts: Amherst Educational Publishing (1993). (Out of print.)

### **Rationale: Why teach this lesson?**

Studying the work of the harvest and displaying the fruits of the labor may seem to be an antiquated theme to U.S. youth of today, who are accustomed to most food coming from supermarkets in a variety of cartoon-decorated packages. Yet, as the environmental movement reveals the need to reconsider the origins of our food and the essential role of community sustained agriculture, this topic emerges as a contemporary social justice issue.

Factors about how food is grown, harvested and transported, as well as the implications about who has access to fresh, nutritious produce, meats and grains are central concerns in environmental justice efforts and human rights campaigns, as well as in community organizing in both urban and rural settings. Furthermore, when a classroom recognizes the ways in which the harvest is celebrated across cultural traditions and religious beliefs, students can understand the common human need for sustenance through adequate food sources. They can also understand how some religious stories have been shaped by the importance of having reliable access to food when food is no longer growing. Moreover, understanding harvest celebrations across a broad spectrum of world regions highlights some profound similarities among diverse groups.

A world map will also help students understand that the winter months in the northern hemisphere match summer months in the southern hemisphere, and vice versa. They will also understand that winter does not take place at the Equator and that summer is very short at the Arctic and Antarctic poles. This provides an opportunity for science lessons for older students.

**Think ahead:**

Students will bring a wide range of experiences and levels of awareness about the harvest and the sources of the food we eat everyday. Some students will bring a great deal to the discussion in Setting the Lesson below. They will each learn from one another's perspectives and see value in their peers' different points of view.

Teachers may be surprised to learn the diversity of perspectives around how students experience family mealtime. Some students will report that they have regular dinner time gatherings with their families that follow rituals of helping to prepare food from scratch – or from microwaveable packages – setting the table, having family prayer, family discussions and cleaning up dishes. Other students' experiences with meals may be self-directed and involve grabbing a to-go meal and eating in front of the TV. Many other variations on mealtime and the harvest of food will be revealed.

Keep in mind that sensitive issues around students not eating, malnutrition, homelessness or not eating regularly may come up. If such a situation is revealed in the discussion, make sure you follow your school's protocol for reporting such matters.

**Objectives for this lesson – Students will:**

- Heighten awareness of the source of the food they eat everyday.
- Express gratitude for adequate food and empathy for those in need.
- Learn about the variety of ways in which the harvest is celebrated in some religious traditions and some secular festivities.
- Think about their favorite fruits and vegetables, and differences among their peers.
- Make a fruit or vegetable out of papier mâché for a collective harvest display.

**Materials needed:**

- Newspaper
- Masking tape
- Pipe cleaners
- Papier mâché paste
- Tempera or acrylic paints

**Time needed:**

5 class meetings, 45 minutes each

**Setting the lesson:**

Collect posters and images of still life paintings that depict a display of fruit, vegetables and the results of a hunt. Fill the classroom with images from a range of artists who represent an array of geographic and cultural origins. Try to have posters and images from different countries and geographic regions, representing cultures that are northern and southern.

Prepare to discuss how displaying the harvest in a decorative way is a common practice in many cultures.

- During the Jewish festival of Sukkot, families build a sukka, (also spelled sukkah) or booth outdoors in a garden or porch, and decorate it with fruits and flowers on the outside and with fruits and wheat stalks inside. The sukka serves as a reminder of the huts that the Jews lived in during their wanderings in the desert.
- In the English tradition of the Harvest Home, churches and homes are decorated with flowers, fruits and vegetables, and sheaves of golden wheat.
- An important part of the African American celebration of Kwanzaa is the display of fruits and vegetables on the Kwanzaa table to symbolize the fruits of the community's work.
- Another display of the harvest occurs in Portugal's colorful Festa Tabuleiros or Festival of the Trays. The central event of this festival is a parade so elaborate that the holiday is celebrated only once every three years. The trays are actually giant headdresses carrying layer upon layer of bread and flowers. They are worn by young women who parade in long lines to create a spectacular sight. The parade ends with a feast of communal thanks and charity.
- The United States tradition of Thanksgiving celebrates family and harvest.

## **Procedure for the lesson:**

### **Day 1:**

Write the word HARVEST on chart paper. Discuss the verb or action of harvesting crops from a farm or garden and also the noun that refers to the crops.

Ask students about the ways in which we see the harvest displayed. Discuss the many ways and reasons for displaying the harvest. Ask students to think of occasions when they have seen fruit, vegetables and flowers displayed and to recall the significance of these events.

For many students, their primary experience with viewing a harvest display will be in a suburban supermarket produce section or in an urban bodega. Others may have visited farmers' markets or have stopped by a rural farm stand to purchase corn on the cob in the summer and early fall. Many will have visited salad bars in fast food restaurants or school cafeterias. Help students brainstorm the many ways they may have seen the bounty from the harvest displayed, including some common experiences such as a buffet of dishes at a potluck supper, for example. It is critically important that you validate all the ways that students have seen the harvest of food displayed.

After the discussion, start to make the collective harvest display. Explain that each student will make his or her favorite fruit or vegetable to create a collective harvest display. (Note: If you don't have a class assistant, this activity is a great opportunity to invite parents or guardians to join you in the activity. Another set of hands can't hurt!)

#### *Step 1: Shape the fruits and vegetables*

Each student will get one single page of newspaper and crumble it up and shape it into a selected fruit or vegetable. Very young students may find it easiest to shape it into a ball. Older students may be more skilled at manipulating and twisting the newspaper into elongated shapes for bananas, eggplants, or ovals, or even into tiny balls for grapes. Encourage students to think of a variety of crops harvested around the world and to consider some of their personal favorites, or perhaps think of one they wish they could try to taste in the future. Ask students to work together to make a variety of fruits and vegetables that, taken together, will be a large harvest display for their entire learning community.

#### *Step 2: Masking tape*

Students wrap one or two pieces of masking tape around the newspaper shape to hold its form. No more than two pieces should be used; masking tape resists papier mâché paste, so a lot of the newspaper surface should remain exposed and not covered up by masking tape. It is wise to pre-cut pieces of masking tape for your students and to stick a few pieces on each work-table, as it is sometimes difficult for students to hold onto their newspaper shape and simultaneously cut, tape, and stick it. Encourage students to work collaboratively with buddies and come up with shared newspaper forms.

#### *Step 3: Add stems*

Pipe cleaners make useful stems. Students should make the stem a little longer than they actually want the stem to appear in order to leave space for attaching the pipe cleaner to the newspaper fruit/vegetable with masking tape. Also, the end of the stem needs enough space to bend in a loop for display.

Use a permanent marker to put each student's name – or the names of student buddies – on the pieces of masking tape, so you can store their work for the following class meeting. Putting their name(s) on the stem is useful so that the name does not get covered by papier mâché.

### **Days 2, 3 & 4:**

#### *Step 4: Papier Mâché*

#### Papier Mâché Preparation

*Work Area:* Cover work area with newspaper.

*Newspaper Scraps:* Use paper cutter to cut newspaper into long strips and/or small squares. The size of your students' objects should help guide the size of the newspaper scraps. Place a box of newspaper cuttings at each work table.

*Paste:* Many pastes work. Wallpaper paste can be purchased at hardware stores, or flour can be mixed with water until it reaches an adequate paste consistency. However, there are several commercially prepared papier mâché powders that can be purchased to mix with water. These products are exceptionally affordable and clean-up remarkably well. They can be found in most school supply catalogs. Place a small dish of paste, such as a margarine tub or bowl, in each work area.

*Layering:* This project is best with 2 or 3 layers. It is best to apply one or two layers and allow it to dry over night and then apply one or two more layers the following day. Teach kids to dip paper in paste and then to use two fingers to drip the excess paste into the bowl by sliding the newspaper scrap through the two fingers. If you want to make the very last layer extra smooth, instead of layering newspaper scraps you can apply strips of brown paper towels that are common in most school sink areas.

#### *Step 5: Drying*

Place the fruits/vegetables on wax paper or, if possible, on a wire rack or clothesline to allow air to reach the bottom of the objects. The paste will usually dry within 24–48 hours if objects are placed in a reasonably ventilated area and turned to a new side from time to time.

#### *Step 6: Painting*

After the final layer is dry, paint the fruits/vegetables with acrylic paint or tempera paint.

#### *Closure for the lesson (during days 3 & 4):*

While the papier mâché fruits and vegetables are drying, lead a discussion about why the hunger of some people in a community is a social responsibility for others in the community. Help students investigate resources that exist to help those who are hungry, such as social services, community food banks, community soup kitchens, faith communities' free-lunch programs and community farms, etc. Discover ways in which your learning community can contribute to solutions for solving local community problems of hunger that assist those in need. Guide students in organizing a food drive, volunteering at a local soup kitchen, or providing some other community service.

Bear in mind that some students' families may be recipients of the local service, and so asking students to donate food from home is not always appropriate. Alternatively, baking some bread at school and walking to the nearby soup kitchen to deliver the loaves can be very meaningful, while providing all students a means to participate in the community service.

Display the papier mâché fruits/vegetables. The display may be directly related to the study of a particular culture's tradition of harvest or it may combine allusions to various cultural harvest traditions. The fruits and vegetables may be displayed in bowls, baskets, or pots, or they may be strung on a wire or clothesline-like string in the classroom or hallway.

**Assessment for the lesson:**

- Do students reveal self-knowledge about the sources of the food they eat everyday?
- Can students apply basic construction skills to a small sculpture of a fruit/vegetable?
- Can students see in perspective the relationships among different traditions of harvest celebrations?
- Do students understand that there are people in a community who are hungry, and display empathy for those who are hungry?

**Chapter IV (5) Extensions for teaching about the harvest:**

Here are some ideas to take this theme further:

- A study of the artists whose harvest paintings have been placed around the room.
- Painting a harvest landscape.
- A study of apples or other crops of the season.
- Study Thanksgiving from various viewpoints: *Who has enough food? Who does not?* Study the viewpoint of Native Americans on the consequences of colonization on indigenous populations. Some Native Americans consider Thanksgiving to be a National Day of Mourning.<sup>52</sup>
- Engage in service learning projects involving food banks, soup kitchens, etc.
- Study Sukkot: building a hut and remembering in the Jewish tradition.
- Study Kwanzaa: Mazao – displays of the harvest in African American heritage. (Cultural but not religious).
- Read the book: *Itse Selu: Cherokee Harvest Festival* by Daniel Pennington (1994).
- Read the book: *Whale Snow / Uqsruagnaq* by Debby Dahl Edwardson (2005).

---

<sup>52</sup> Pilgrim Hall Museum, <http://www.pilgrimhall.org/daymourn.htm>

# Chapter IV (Unit 6): Rituals and Traditions about Light: Hopefulness and Waiting

## **BIG IDEAS FOR IV (6)**

- There are many different religious rituals and traditions about light, hopefulness and waiting.
- The cycle of darkness and light in nature (day and night, summer and winter) influences many different rituals and traditions.
- Some religious rituals teach about patience during the waiting (of night, of winter) and hopefulness for better future (of day, of summer).

## **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR IV (6)**

- What are the ways in which different religions use light in their rituals and traditions?
- How do religions remind people about being hopeful in dark times?
- What are some of the stories about light, hopefulness and waiting that are part of religious traditions?

## **NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR IV (6)**

- English Language Arts: 1, 2, 4, 6, 9
- Social Studies: 1, 3, 5, 8

## **LESSON IV (6): RITUALS AND TRADITIONS ABOUT LIGHT: HOPEFULNESS AND WAITING**

The information and activities in Chapter IV (6) have been adapted from Patty Bode's book *Cultural Connections through Art*, Amherst, MA: Amherst Educational Publishing (1993). (Out of print).

### **Rationale: Why teach this lesson?**

There is a perennial question in public schools about how to teach or how not to teach about the winter holidays, which coincide around the winter solstice, and include the Christian Christmas, the Jewish Chanukah, and the African American Kwanzaa. Some people believe that any mention of religious holidays in public school violates separation of church and state, although this is not accurate. Other people believe that winter is the time for Christmas carols, Christmas trees, Santa Claus and red felt stockings, without including winter rituals that are not Christian. These alternatives illustrate extreme ends of the spectrum of possible practices, and each extreme end presents problems.

There are models of teaching that address the issue in a fair-minded and student-centered approach, which also comport with the Constitution and the way it has been interpreted by the courts. The critical point is to learn more each season through your students, their families and your own research. To ignore or prohibit discussion, research, reading and learning about the holidays is to neglect students' needs and to deprive them of a core element of their education. More importantly, ignoring children's experiences causes educators to miss out on an opportunity to learn more about the lives of their students in a deep and meaningful way, as members of a family, a religious community (or not), and a cultural community. By embracing the winter solstice as a common ground for different religious rituals and modes of celebration, opportunities for engaging pedagogy and curriculum can be created.

**Think ahead:**

Many subject area standards can be met by addressing the winter solstice and religious and cultural events that coincide with that time of year. However, because the holiday of Christmas has been the “norm” in U.S. society, it is critical to make space for student experiences to be affirmed outside that mainstream perspective. Educators are cautioned against trying to make all religious and cultural experiences “match” or fit the mold of Christmas. There are some similarities across religious groups, as well as many differences. Everything from school calendars, shopping events and entertainment schedules have been shaped by the mainstream adaptation to the needs of those who celebrate Christmas.

An effective way to make meaningful cultural connections with students, without honoring one student’s tradition more than another’s, is to focus on the human experience of light and darkness (day and night, summer and winter).

In science and math, students explore the astronomy and scientific context of the relationship between the sun and the earth and the lightness and darkness of our days and our seasons. They also learn that northern and southern hemispheres are experiencing different “seasons” during the year.

In social studies, students focus on the importance of ritual, custom and tradition related to the common daily and seasonal experience of light and dark.

In English Language Arts, they might have read creation myths about how the sun came to earth as well as researched and written about their own family traditions as compared to a classmate’s tradition.

In art class, students might have seen symbols of religion and culture, images of the sun, the use of candles and candle holders in art history throughout the world and across regions and time periods.

All students have experienced the long days of summer and the long nights of winter, and they share the “waiting” for summer when the winter nights seem longest. This is the common experience that teachers and facilitators can focus on in looking at the winter solstice celebrations.

**Objectives for this lesson – Students will:**

- Make connections between the earth’s cycles of darkness and light and the human need to celebrate light.
- Appreciate the range of diverse experiences that their peers have based on their various winter-based rituals and traditions.
- Notice how candles can be used to mark special occasions.
- Create a candle holder out of an egg carton with paper candles adorned with symbols that are based on each family’s or community’s traditions.

**Materials needed:**

- Old cardboard egg cartons (not plastic or Styrofoam egg cartons)
- Paint
- Glue
- Rectangles of paper measuring approximately 3” x 6” (all colors), scraps of yellow and orange tissue paper approximately 1” x 1 & 1/2.”
- Books: Choose several books from a collection of children’s literature about winter solstice and other holidays. Use examples of religious celebrations as well as secular celebrations that mark the change from the darker months of the year to longer days of light.
  - *Celebrate the Winter Holidays: Sensational Activities & Helpful Background Information That Help Kids Learn About & Appreciate Five Important Holidays* by Elaine Israel (2001).
  - *Celebrations Of Light: A Year of Holidays Around the World* by Nancy Luenn (1998).
  - Chapter on winter of the book *Children Just Like Me: Celebrations!* by Barnabas Kindersley (1997).
  - *The Shortest Day: Celebrating the Winter Solstice* by Wendy Pfeffer (2003).
  - *The Winter Solstice* by Ellen B. Jackson (1994).
  - *The Return of the Light: Twelve Tales from Around the World for Winter Solstice* by Carolyn McVickar Edwards (2005).
  - *Light The Lights! A Story About Celebrating Hanukkah And Christmas* by Margaret Moorman (1999).
  - *Latkes and Applesauce: A Hannukah Story* by Fran Manushkin (2007).
  - *Raven: A Trickster Tale from the Pacific Northwest* by Gerald McDermott (1993).
  - *Arrow to the Sun: A Pueblo Indian Tale* by Gerald McDermott (1974).
  - *My First Ramadan* by Karen Katz (2007) [Note to educators: Ramadan is on a rotating lunar calendar and does not always fall near winter solstice and is not related to solstice. Rather, it is a lunar determined date].
  - *Lighting a Lamp: A Diwali Story (Festival Time)* by Jonny Zucker (2004).

**Time needed:**

4 class meetings – or more – depending on choices of children’s literature, 45 minutes each

**Setting the lesson:**

Discuss the associations with the winter season and the characteristics of the weather and the patterns of lightness and darkness appropriate to your geographical region. Help students think about the importance of light to humans. For instance, humans do not see in the dark, although some animals do see in the dark. Help students imagine what it would be like to live before electricity, portable batteries and solar panels provided light through lamps, flash lights, or street lights. Imagine the urge to make light with fire and think about how human beings might have first developed candles and candle holders as functional and decorative components of daily life. Facilitate a discussion about traditions or unique days when candles are used in our contemporary society to mark a special occasion.

**Procedure for the lesson:****Day 1: Exploring children’s literature**

Divide students into small literature circles or groups. Provide each small group with one to two children’s literature selections on the theme of winter, light, solstice and holidays.

For very young children, provide “reading buddies” from an older-age classroom. Each small group will read one or two books and discuss:

- What is familiar to me in this story? Are there experiences that remind me of my family’s traditions?
- What is new to me in this story? Are there experiences about which I hope to learn more?
- What are the ways in which different religions and different traditions use light in their winter rituals?
- How do religions remind people about being hopeful in dark times?
- What are some of the stories about light, hopefulness and waiting that are part of religious traditions?

Regroup into the full class. Discuss the questions and write students’ comments on chart paper to emphasize that each student’s perspective is valuable in this learning community. Listen to stories that students tell about traditions from their homes, neighborhoods and faith communities.

Discussion may include:

- Hanukkah menorah
- Diwali diva lamp
- Kwanzaa Kinara (Cultural but not religious)
- Ramadan, Eid & the sighting of the moon
- Christmas lights (outdoors, in windows, on Christmas tree)

**Day 2: Making the candle holder**

Each student will cut an egg carton down the center, so that they have two rows of six egg-carton-cups. The lid and flaps of the egg carton should be trimmed away so that there is only the row of egg-cups. Students flip egg-cups over, upside down, and puncture the top of each egg carton cup with scissors. The paper candles will later be placed in these holes. If students want more than six candles in their piece, they can simply add more egg-cups from another carton.

Decorate the egg carton using a variety of mediums: watercolor, tempera paint, markers, oil pastel, glitter, etc. Students should decorate their piece to represent the traditions that they celebrate in their families and communities.

### **Day 3:**

*Make the flame:*

Students use yellow and orange colored tissue paper cut into approximately 1" & ½" squares. Students hold the tissue with one corner up (diamond shape) and twist the bottom corner to make it "flame-like." Make enough "flames" from twisted paper for each candle and set aside.

*Make the paper candles with tissue paper "flame" sticking out:*

Students should use rectangles of paper approximately 3" x 6" to make the candles. The paper can be any color, and can even be rectangles of wrapping paper or other decorative papers. Lay the 3" x 6" rectangle on table. Put a dab of glue on one of the "flames" and glue 1 ½" in from the side on the 3" side of the rectangle, and down only slightly, ¼ to ½". Roll the paper rectangle into a tiny, tight cylinder and add a touch of glue on the end to keep the paper candle together. The "flame" should be sticking out of the top!

### **Day 4:**

*Add candles to candleholders:*

Students place the paper candles into their candleholders that have been crafted from egg cartons. Students return to their small group literature circles to discuss the similarities and differences between the stories they read and their own experiences with lighting candles on special occasions.

### **Closure for the lesson:**

Display every student's candleholder in a prominent place. Go for a "candle walk" as a learning community to view and appreciate the display and comment on each student's work. Provide each student with time to say a few words about the candleholder he or she made.

### **Assessment for the lesson:**

- Did students make connections between the earth's cycles of darkness and light and the human need to celebrate light?
- Can students interpret differences in experiences that their peers have based on their various traditions?
- Can students explain how candles are used to mark special occasions?
- Did students apply basic skills to create a candle holder related to their family's or community's traditions?

### **Chapter IV (6) Extensions:**

- Studying and making sun images.
- Exploring the phenomenon of light and scientific properties of shadow through shadow puppets.
- Learning about the lunar cycle and its relation to the earth and its seasons. Included is a lesson on the lunar cycle from Tanenbaum's *Interreligious Understanding Guidebook: Changing Seasons, Changing World*.

# Lunar Cycle

## INTRODUCTION – SETTING THE FOUNDATION

### Objectives:

- Children will learn about the lunar cycle through a continuing class activity and its relation to the earth and its seasons.
- Children will make connections between the earth’s rotation and the seasons.
- Children will notice the change of the “moon’s” appearance as it revolves around the globe, reflecting a light source.
- Children will create a moon journal.

### Grades:

K-4

### Time needed:

1 class meeting, 45 minutes

### Materials needed:

- For teacher demonstration: Lamp (no shade), Globe, Small ball, Information sheet on festivals (included).
- For class activity, Over-size Wall Calendar (To make the calendar, divide several sheets of posterboard into sections appropriate for a month (30-31)/two weeks (14). Make sure each section is large enough for a piece of paper.)
- Paper
- Pencils
- “Draw what the moon looks like tonight” sheet
- Main Moon phases (turn to overhead)

### Procedure for the lesson

#### *Anticipatory Set/Hook/Do-Now*

Ask students if they know any holidays that fall on the same date every year. Examples may include Christmas (Dec 25), New Year (Jan 1), Kwanzaa (Dec 26–Jan 1), Halloween (Oct 31st), Summer Solstice (June 21), or students’ birthdays.

Now ask students if they know of any holidays that fall on different dates each year. Examples may include Thanksgiving (the fourth Thursday of November in the United States), Eid Al-Fitr (Muslim), Hanukkah (Jewish), Diwali (Hindu), or Chinese New Year (East and South-East Asia).

#### *Review of Previously Learned Material/Connect to Prior Knowledge*

Explain to students that many cultures have their own calendars, which are partly or completely based on the movements of the moon. Some examples include the Islamic calendar, the Jewish calendar, the Hindu calendar, the Chinese calendar, etc.

In addition, the moon plays a central role in some harvest festivals (example – the Green Corn festival in North America, the Harvest Moon Festival in East and South-East Asia). Information sheets on these festivals follow for your reference.

Explain that today the children will learn about the relationship between the Earth, the Sun and the Moon.

### **Mini-lesson**

- Have the students form a circle around the lamp, the globe and the small ball placed at the center of the room. Turn out the lights. Turn on the lamp and have a volunteer hold the ball, which will represent the moon. Explain that the lamp represents the sun.
- Place the globe a short distance from the lamp and the ball/moon held by the student a short distance from the globe. Ask the students to observe the shadows.
- Explain how the rotation of the Earth works, and rotate the globe around the static lamp, asking the students to notice what light is like in their part of the world at different times. Explain that the seasons are caused by the Earth's tilt and the Earth's revolution around the sun.
- Ask students: What does the moon look like?
- Explain that the moon itself is not actually changing shape, but rather, it is a reflection of its position in relation to the sun and the Earth. Have the moon student revolve around the earth, stopping in different places along the way.
- Each time the student stops, ask the class what the moon looks like at each point. The students should notice a pattern as the moon travels around the earth.

Questions can include:

*How much of the moon is dark?*

*How much of the moon is lit?*

*How does it change shape?*

*Is there any time the moon is completely lit?*

*What do you notice as the moon revolves around the Earth?*

### **Guided Practice**

1. Regroup as a class and show the “Main Moon Phases” overhead. Ask if students recognize the moon looking these ways, and if they saw parallels with the demonstration.
2. Explain that as a class, you are going to keep a moon journal, where each day for the next few weeks, a volunteer is going to take home a “Draw the Moon” handout and draw the moon for that night. Then, it will be posted on that day's class calendar.

# Teacher Information Sheet on the Moon

## Day/Night

- Caused by Earth's rotation on its axis ("spin").
- One Earth rotation takes 24 hours, therefore we have 24-hour days: roughly 12 hours of darkness when we are facing away from the sun and 12 hours of light when we are facing the sun directly.
- Earth spins counterclockwise, thus the sun appears to rise in the East and set in the West.

## Observing the Same Face of the Moon from Earth

- We always see the same face of the Moon when looking from Earth.
- On any given night/day, every place on the Earth sees the same face of the Moon.
- This occurs because the Moon spins on its axis once for every time it revolves around the Earth (28.5 days).

## Phases of the Moon

- Every 28 days, we see a complete cycle of Moon phases: new moon, waxing crescent, first quarter, waxing gibbous, full, waning gibbous, third quarter, waning crescent.
- Thus, the Moon changes in appearance gradually each night.
- Phases are caused by the relative position of the Moon with respect to the Earth and Sun.
- The Moon's relative position changes as it revolves around the Earth.
- Waxing means increasing in size. A waxing phase appears to be lit on the right side.
- Waning means decreasing in size. A waning phase appears to be lit on the left side.
- One half of the Moon is always facing the sun and therefore one half is always lit.
- Because the Moon's position relative to the Earth is the same on any given day regardless of where one might be on Earth, the same phase of the Moon is visible from everywhere on Earth for any given night/day.
- Because the Moon revolves around the Earth in a counterclockwise direction, the Moon rises later each day (approximately 1 hour).
- The Moon rises in the east and sets in the west because the Earth rotates in a counterclockwise direction.
- The Moon is in the sky for roughly 12 hours in a 24-hour period. Therefore, if the full moon rises at 6 PM, it will set at 6 AM.
- The Full Moon rises at sunset and the new moon rises at sunrise. Based on the position of the Moon in its orbit around the Earth, it is possible to determine the approximate rise time of each phase.

## Eclipses

### *Solar eclipses:*

- The sun is blocked (eclipsed) by the Moon, thus the Moon is between the Earth and Sun.
- In this position, the Moon is in a new phase.
- Totality lasts only a few minutes.
- The shadow that is cast on Earth covers a relatively small area, and so can be seen from only a few places on Earth.
- Can occur twice per (Earth) year — when the Moon, Earth and Sun are aligned and in the same plane.

### *Lunar eclipses:*

- The Earth is between the Sun and the Moon and casts a shadow on the Moon, thus causing it to appear grey, black, or red.
- In this position, the Moon is in a full phase.
- Totality lasts a few hours.
- Lunar eclipses can be seen from any place on the Earth that is experiencing night at the time of eclipse.
- Can occur twice per (Earth) year — when the Moon, Earth, and Sun are in the same plane.

## Seasons

- Seasons are caused by the tilt of the Earth (23.5°) and the Earth's revolution around the Sun. Even though the Earth's orbit around the Sun is slightly elliptical, the distance of the Earth from the Sun IS NOT the cause of the seasons. In fact, the Earth is closest to the Sun while the Northern Hemisphere is experiencing winter.
- In the Northern Hemisphere, the Sun appears lower in the sky during the winter (is at its lowest noontime angular height on December 21), and higher in the sky during the summer (is at its highest noontime angular height on June 21).
- In winter, the Sun appears to rise in the southeast and set in the southwest, and the day length is at its shortest. In summer, the Sun appears to rise in the northeast and set in the northwest, and the day length is at its longest.
- In winter, the Sun's rays are less direct.
- In summer, the Sun's rays are more direct.
- Seasons are reversed in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres.
- The Sun is never directly overhead (at a 90° angular height) at any latitude further north than the Tropic of Cancer (23.5°N), or further South than the Tropic of Capricorn (23.5°S). Within the tropics (23.5°S–23.5°N) the sun is directly overhead two times each year.

# Phases of the Moon



new moon



new crescent



first quarter



waxing gibbous



full moon



waning gibbous



last quarter



old crescent

# Lunar Cycle

(EXCERPTED FROM QA INTERNATIONAL)

What does the moon look like tonight?

Draw a picture of the moon!

# Resources for Chapter 4

## RESOURCES FOR CHAPTER IV (2) ON RITUALS AND TRADITIONS ABOUT SACRED SPACES

*House of Worship: Sacred Spaces in America* by Dominique Browning (2006).

## RESOURCES FOR CHAPTER IV (3) ON RITUALS AND TRADITIONS ABOUT PRAYER AND MEDITATION

*The Little Engine that Could* by Watty Piper (1978).

*I Think, I Am!: Teaching Kids the Power of Affirmations* by Louise L. Hay, Kristina Tracy (2008).

## RESOURCES FOR CHAPTER IV (4) ON RITUALS AND TRADITIONS ABOUT RENEWAL

*Children Just Like Me: Celebrations!* by Anabel Kindersley & Barnabas Kindersley (1997).

See the chapter on spring and page 18 about Holi in India.

*April Fool! Watch Out at School* by Diane deGroat (2009).

*Holi* by Uma Krishnaswami (from the series, Rookie Read-About Holidays) (2003).

## RESOURCES FOR CHAPTER IV (5) ON RITUALS AND TRADITIONS ABOUT HARVEST

*Itse Selu: Cherokee Harvest Festival* by Daniel Pennington (1994).

*Whale Snow / Uqsruagnaq* by Debby Dahl Edwardson (2005).

Pilgrim Hall Museum for information on Thanksgiving as the National Day of Mourning for Native Americans. <http://www.pilgrimhall.org/daymourn.htm>

## RESOURCES FOR CHAPTER IV (6) ON RITUALS AND TRADITIONS ABOUT LIGHT

*Celebrate the Winter Holidays: Sensational Activities & Helpful Background Information That Help Kids Learn About & Appreciate Five Important Holidays* by Elaine Israel (2001).

*Celebrations Of Light: A Year of Holidays Around the World* by Nancy Luenn (1998).

Chapter on winter of the book *Children Just Like Me: Celebrations!* by Anabel Kindersley & Barnabas Kindersley (1997).

*The Shortest Day: Celebrating the Winter Solstice* by Wendy Pfeffer (2003).

*The Winter Solstice* by Ellen B. Jackson (1994).

*The Return of the Light: Twelve Tales from Around the World for Winter Solstice* by Carolyn McVickar Edwards (2005).

*Light The Lights! A Story About Celebrating Hanukkah And Christmas* by Margaret Moorman (1999).

*Latkes and Applesauce: A Hannukah Story* by Fran Manushkin (2007).

*Raven: A Trickster Tale from the Pacific Northwest* by Gerald McDermott (1993).

*Arrow to the Sun: A Pueblo Indian Tale* by Gerald McDermott (1974).

*My First Ramadan* by Karen Katz (2007)

*Lighting a Lamp: A Diwali Story (Festival Time)* by Jonny Zucker (2004).





# 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).

# 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.



# Resources for Chapter 5

## RESOURCES FOR CHAPTER V (1) ON DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RELIGIOUS GROUPS

*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)

## CHAPTER V (1) TEACHER RESOURCES ON DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RELIGIOUS GROUPS

*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).

## RESOURCES FOR CHAPTER V (2) ON LEARNING FROM RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES

*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). The book’s website includes a teacher’s guide. [http://www.charlesbridge.com/client/client\\_pages/after\\_gandhi/gandhi\\_home.html](http://www.charlesbridge.com/client/client_pages/after_gandhi/gandhi_home.html)

United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989)

*For Every Child* by Caroline Castle (2001).

Not In Our Town (NIOT) provides curriculum materials to combat intolerance and religious conflict. <http://www.niot.org/> (go to “Not In Our School”)

PBS created a film about the events in Montana that inspired the Not In Our Town movement. <http://www.pbs.org/niot/about/niot1.html>



*“Religions in My Neighborhood* is an outstanding and much-needed resource for educating young children about religious differences and commonalities. In far too many American classrooms, religious diversity is the ignored diversity. This failure to take religion seriously contributes to prejudice, discrimination and division in what is now the most religiously diverse society in the world. Using the inspiring, creative lessons contained in this curriculum, educators can provide a sound foundation for religious literacy while simultaneously building understanding and respect among students of many faiths and beliefs.”

**Charles C. Haynes, Director**  
*Religious Freedom Education Project at the Newseum*

“In our increasingly multicultural society that still struggles to talk about religious diversity, this new curriculum resource by Tanenbaum could not be more timely. *Religions in My Neighborhood* is invaluable for teaching children not only about religious diversity, but also about why valuing religious and other differences enriches our lives and our world. Packed with background information and activities, and aligned with learning standards and an impressive model for teaching, this is a resource that we all should read and use today.”

**Kevin Kumashiro, President**  
*National Association for Multicultural Education*

“You are an elementary school teacher. You know your students are working to make sense of the religious diversity in their classroom, their community and the world. How can you help them feel comfortable noticing and talking about religious differences, grow up to embrace diversity and work against intolerance? *Religions in My Neighborhood* is a highly accessible curriculum that can be adapted to a wide range of settings. Teachers can select lessons appropriate to their setting or adopt the curriculum whole cloth. A great resource!”

**Benjamin Mardell, Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education**  
*Lesley University*

**Mona Abo-Zena, Post-Doctoral Research Fellow**  
*Technical Education Research Center*

“Tanenbaum’s newest curriculum – *Religions in My Neighborhood* – once again breaks through the barriers that perpetuate stereotypes and bullying. Effectively crafted, this curriculum is a ready-resource for after-school educators and full-time teachers committed to helping children grow up without hate. A must-have for every elementary school educator, this ground-breaking tool provides new ways of teaching academics, respect for all in our multicultural society and an accessible resource for teaching about religion, without promoting or denigrating any belief in the process.”

**Jack Lund, President and CEO**  
*YMCA of Greater New York*



ISBN: 978-0-9851610-2-6

Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding  
Education Program  
254 W. 31st St., 7th Floor  
New York, NY 10001  
212.967.7707  
education@tanenbaum.org

[www.tanenbaum.org](http://www.tanenbaum.org)