



UNION

Religious Worlds of New York • *Curriculum Development Project*

Categories for Comparative World Religions

Teresa Davis, Archbishop McNicholas High School, Cincinnati, OH

Abstract

This lesson plan was created for a Senior (17-18 yrs) Comparative World Religions course at a co-ed Catholic high school. The textbook used for this course is [Exploring the Religions of Our World, by Nancy Clemmons, SNJM](#).

The book and the course compare and contrast diverse religions to Catholic Christianity, using four categories to illustrate the fundamentals of each faith: 1) Beliefs and Practices, 2) Sacred Time, 3) Sacred Place, and 4) Sacred Text/Story.

This lesson plan is for the Introduction to the course, which helps students understand and begin to use the shared vocabulary of these four categories. The lesson plan does not get into the details of each religion's Beliefs and Practices, Sacred Time, Sacred Place, or Sacred Story. Rather, it gives students a firm foundation in the categories we will review throughout Semester.

The Categories

Sacred Stories/Scriptures

Objective: Finding connection in storytelling.

The commonalities in each religion can be the entrance of connection, empathy, and understanding.

1. Listen to podcast from The Moth: <https://themoth.org/storytellers/shaykh-umar>
2. Listen to the podcast again and answer the following:

Reflection:

1. The Moth is a storytelling podcast; that is the entire format and purpose of the show. What story/stories stands out in your faith tradition that has helped shape your faith?
2. What is a story that is repeated in your family that reflects your family heritage, faith or customs?
3. What connects with you in Shakyh Dr. Muhammad Umar Al-Qadri? What in Islam connects with your faith tradition?

Belief and Practices

Some religions have short statements of identifications, others lengthy; some proclamations, some can only be determined by lived actions. What do you believe?

Review the “This I Believe” website. <https://thisibelieve.org/essays/featured/>

There are many categories under the ‘explore’ tab

Create an “I Believe...” essay, using the following guidelines for students:

Tell a story about your belief: Be specific. Take your belief out of the ether and ground it in the events that have shaped your core values. Consider moments when belief was formed or tested or changed. Think of your own experience, work, and family, and tell of the things you know that no one else does. Your story need not be heart-warming or gut-wrenching—it can even be funny—but it should be *real*. Make sure your story ties to the essence of your daily life philosophy and the shaping of your beliefs.

Be brief: Your statement should be between 500 and 600 words. **Name your belief:** If you can’t name it in a sentence or two, your essay might not be about belief. Also, rather than writing a list, consider focusing on one core belief.

Be positive: Write about what you do believe, not what you don’t believe. Avoid statements of religious dogma, preaching, or editorializing.

Be personal: Make your essay about you; speak in the first person. Avoid speaking in the editorial “we.” Tell a story from your own life; this is not an opinion piece about social ideals. Write in words and phrases that are comfortable for you to speak. We recommend you read your essay aloud to yourself several times, and each time edit it and simplify it until you find the words, tone, and story that truly echo your belief and the way you speak.

Sacred Time

Prayer is a common practice within religions of the world. As Catholic Christians we have prayer books, missals, daily readings. Forms of prayer include: Liturgy, rote prayer, vocal prayer, contemplation, nature, and meditation.

Objective: Finding connection with others in prayer

Hinduism is a culture, lifestyle and religion that at first glance is far removed from Catholic Christianity. The commonalities in each religion can lead to connection, empathy, and understanding.

Listen to the following podcast from Invisibilia:

<https://www.npr.org/programs/invisibilia/672922150/the-prayer>

Now, listen to the podcast again and answer the following:

Reflection:

1. You may not be Hindu, but that aside how do you connect to the first 4 minutes of the podcast? ASK YOURSELF...
What verses or rote prayers (if any) did you have to memorize at home or in school?
What kind of religious prayer time (if any) was prevalent in your family during your childhood?
2. Listen up to MINUTE 6. What part of you would alter who you are?
3. Listen up to MINUTE 12. Why would Ms. Sanzgiri choose that text / prayer to recite to regain her voice?
4. Write one paragraph reflection of the entire journey of Ms. Sanzgiri AND how it relates to a) your prayer life as a child; b) your growing in faith via your parents' religion; c) prayer life as you are today .

Sacred Place

Each World Religion has places of importance; geographic, for worship.

Read: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bodh_Gaya

What makes this space sacred? Why is it sacred? What are the sacred spaces for your faith tradition? What is a sacred space to you personally?