



*Religious Worlds of New York* • *Curriculum Development Project*

## Oral Histories of Religious Lives

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### Abstract:

This project is intended to help students understand the concept of lived religion and the diversity of religious practice. Along with a partner, the students will select an interview subject from a religious tradition other than their own, if they have one. The students will then interview the subject focusing on the role of religion in the individual's life. After reflecting on the interview, the students will produce a three to four minute video telling the person's story of lived religion.

This culminating assignment is designed for a ninth grade social science Global Perspectives class. The students will have already studied several of the religious traditions in some depth from a cultural studies perspective and they will also have developed some familiarity with a few other traditions.

### Guiding Questions:

1. What is the role of religion in a person's life?
2. In what way does a person's religion shape his or her perspective and worldview?
3. How does understanding another's religious views and practice shape your understanding of current world events? of humanity?

### Implementation:

**1. Introduction:** Introduce the students to the project by showing the video, [Listening is an Act of Love](#) from *StoryCorps*. This video does not relate directly to the concept of living religion. Rather, it is an excellent way to introduce the idea of retelling a person's story in video. Follow the video with a discussion of how to retell a person's story in a video.

**2. Selecting the subject:** Each interview team will select a person eighteen years or older to interview whose religious beliefs are different than their own.

**3. Researching the religion:** Students will get to know the religion by looking for facts, beliefs, stories, etc., they are currently unfamiliar with that add to their understanding of the religion of their interview subject.

**4. Significant Text:** The interview team will ask their interview subject for a selection that is important to him or her. This could be a scripture, a prayer, a religious narrative, a song, etc. The key idea is that the selection is significant to the individual. The interview team will read and annotate the the selection with the purpose of familiarizing themselves with the text and brainstorming how the selection can be incorporated into the interview process.

**5. Generate interview questions:** The interview team will next develop a list of preliminary interview questions. If the students are not experienced in interviewing, there are many good resources available on the internet, for example, this handout from [East Midlands Oral History Archive](#). The interview questions should flow logically from one to the next. The students should consider what they learned about the religion in the research and from reading the significant text.

**6. Conducting the interview:** If the interview subject is comfortable with it, the team should record the interview so that they can refer to it later. They may also want to use portions of the recording in their video final product. Otherwise, and in addition to the audio or video recording, they should take notes with pen and paper while conducting the interview.

**7. Excerpted Transcript:** Soon after the interview is completed, the team will reflect on what they learned and what was meaningful to them about the living religion of the subject and how it impacts the subject's life. The team will select and transcribe two to three excerpts of the interview in support of the guiding questions.

**8. Telling the Story:** The team must now decide how to tell the person's living religion story. Some points to consider are: How will they tell the subject's story without taking ownership of the story? What is important to convey so that the audience can understand his or her story? How can they respect his or her story? What are the important elements to include? What can be left out without changing the person's story? These are all important questions to consider? To help with the organizational aspect of the story, here is a [storyboard temple from Education World](#).

**9. Exhibition Video:** The team will share the subjects personal and unique stories of living out his or her beliefs in a three to four minute video. The exhibit video should speak for itself. A viewer should walk away with an understanding of the person's unique story and relationship to his or her religion. Some examples of exhibit videos are: PowerPoint with voiceover or music, animated video, edited version of the interview, etc.

**\*Attached below is the assignment sheet for students**

***For information about the Religious Worlds of New York  
summer institute for teachers, and more resources to enrich your teaching  
on religious diversity, see: [www.religiousworldsnyc.org](http://www.religiousworldsnyc.org).***

# Living Religion: An Oral History



## Guiding Questions:

- What is the role of religion in a person's life?
- In what way does a person's religion shape his or her perspective and worldview?
- How does understanding another's religious views and practice shape your understanding of current world events? of humanity?

**Step One: Interview Subject:** Along with your interview partner, select a person eighteen years or older to interview whose religious beliefs are new to both of you.

**Step Two: Begin researching the religion:** Get to know the religion by looking for facts, beliefs, stories you are currently unfamiliar with--in other words, don't spend time researching aspects we have already covered as a class.

**Step Three: Significant Text:** Ask your interview subject for a selection of significant text that is important to him or her. This could be a scripture, a prayer, a religious narrative, a song, etc. The key idea is that the selection is significant to the individual. Read and annotate the selection along with your interview partner with the purpose of familiarizing yourselves with the text and brainstorming how the selection can be incorporated into the interview process.

**Step Four: Generate interview questions:** Your interview questions should flow logically from one to the next. Consider what you learned about the religion in your research and from reading the significant text: what questions do you have related to the religion and your subject's practice and beliefs? Minimum of 15 questions required.



**Step Five: Conduct the interview:** If your subject is comfortable with it, record the interview so that you can refer to it later. Otherwise - and in addition to the audio or video recording - take notes with pen and paper while conducting the interview.

NOTE: Some of the most valuable conversation comes from questions that arise organically. Do not feel like you have to stick too closely to your set interview questions. If you become interested in a particular response, ask appropriate response questions.

