



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE
Humanities

UNION

Religious Worlds of New York • Curriculum Development Project

Many Forms, One God: Introducing Hinduism to Elementary Students

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Abstract

This project will introduce Hinduism to fourth graders in an independent school just south of Boston. It will be part of an existing unit that originally focused on “Three Faiths” (Judaism, Christianity, Islam). Students will have learned already the “basics” of these three faiths, and will continue in the same manner to learn about the basics of Hinduism through videos, books, a site visit, and guest speakers. After having learned the “basics” of these four faiths, students will choose just one that they would like to explore more deeply. Through various art projects, students will share what they have learned with their classmates.

Curriculum

1. Start with a “viewpoint” activity

Project an image onto the smartboard of the American flag. Have students jot down two words that come to mind when they see the image, either a reaction or an emotion (be clear that they are not *describing* the image). Go around the room and have each student share one of their words, and then ask them what they noticed (there were many different responses, despite the fact that everyone was looking at the same image).

2. Media Engagement

Ask students to keep this in mind as they watch the video [What is Hinduism?](#) (This is from the video series *Understanding World Religions*, which gives whirlwind overviews of various religions; aimed at grades 4-7.) Before watching the video, remind students of the “big questions” they should keep in mind (a similar set of questions is used for each of the faiths we study):

- What do Hindus believe about god/the divine?
- How do Hindus worship?
- How do beliefs affect daily living?
- How are Hindu beliefs represented in art?
- What ideas does Hinduism share with other faiths we’ve studied?

After the video, ask students if they can make a connection to the viewpoint activity we did beforehand. Lead them to connect the activity to Hinduism's "serial monotheism."

Begin to fill in the grid (see handout) to help them record the basics of Hinduism. At this stage (students will be 9 or 10 years old), the concreteness of the grid is necessary in order for them to then move on to slightly more abstract understandings of "lived religions."

3. Site Visit

This will be the fourth site visit students will experience (previously having been to a synagogue, Eastern Orthodox church, and mosque). At each site, students will use the observation grid (see handout) to record their observations while at the site. Possible sites to visit in the Boston area:

Sri Lakshmi Temple*, 117 Waverly Street, Ashland, MA 01721, (508) 881-5775;
a "grand" temple, traditional architecture

Ganesh Hindu Temple, 48 Edson Street, Dorchester, MA 02124, (617) 298-7309;
this is much a modest temple in a residential house

It would be nice to visit both temples so students could see some of the diversity within Hinduism.

Students will have had some preparation for what they will see (the in-class video), and ideally we would have a representative from the temple to give a guided tour. Topics on which to focus students' attention: the importance of "seeing" in Hinduism and the concept of Darsan; the multi-sensory aspect of the temple (sight, smell, sound, etc.); the idea of the divine as many-in-one.

Students should have some time to explore the temple site on their own, noting their observations and making sketches. Back in the classroom, students will share their observations in small groups, and then report out to the class. We will chart our observations and discuss how they might help us understand the "big questions" we came up with, and list any lingering questions we might have.

4. Independent Study and Final Presentation

After students have learned the basics of the four faith traditions we study (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism), and have experienced at least one site visit for each, they will select one of the faiths on which they will do independent research. This research will focus on one example/strand of how this faith is practiced today, with an emphasis on the traditional art forms that are present in the faith (see handout). Their final project will be to share what they learned with their classmates through a self-selected final project. We will brainstorm as a class some ideas of the form their project might take (eg, stop-motion animation video, Kenynote presentation, poster, interview, etc.).

When students present their final projects to the class, they will end by sharing three "big ideas" they think it important for their classmates to take away; their classmates will write these ideas down in their notebooks. I will then create a final "quiz" based on these "big ideas," and students will be able to use their notes to complete it.

*Several videos of the Sri Lakshmi Temple are available on Youtube, which could be used either in lieu of a site visit, or to supplement a visit, and the Temple's website has many galleries of pictures:

- [Pandurangan Aarathi -Aashada Ekadasi - 2013 @ Sri Lakshmi Temple, Ashland, MA \(Boston\)](#)
- [Yash Ravish, Sri Kamalambike, Sri, Dikshitar, Navratri 2014, SriLakshmi Temple, Ashland, MA](#)
- [pictures of Holi](#)
- [architecture and symbolism of the Temple](#)

Flag image for viewpoint activity.



	Hinduism
god	
signs / symbols	
institutions / places of worship	
texts	
rules/laws	
beliefs / philosophies	
leaders / important figures	
celebrations / rituals	
<i>word bank</i>	

During our visit to the sacred space, record your observations in the chart below.

Sight	Sound
Smell	Touch
Thoughts/feelings	

Final Independent Project Planning Sheet

In one sentence, describe what project you would like to do:

Project due date:

Days until due date: _____

Materials needed for project:

Completed	Steps for Project Completion	Projected due date
<input type="checkbox"/>		

Resources

- What is Hinduism?, from the *Understanding World Religions* video series
- The Fantastic Adventures of Krishna, by Demi (students will have seen other books by Demi about religious figures from the other religions we're learning about as well)
- Krishna Steals the Butter and Other Stories: Hinduism, by Anita Ganeri (students will have seen similar books by Ganeri)
- What You Will See Inside a Hindu Temple, by Dr. Mehendra Jania PhD (students will have seen other books from this series exploring religious spaces from different faiths)
- Hinduism (Your Faith), by Harriet Brundle
- Pictorial Ramayana, by Swami Raghaveshanand
- Ganesha's Sweet Tooth, by Emily Haynes
- Elephant Prince: The Story of Ganesh, by Amy Noves
- Amma, Tell Me About... (Ganesha; Hanuman; Holi; Diwali; etc.), series by Bhakti Mathur
- What Do You Believe? (Big Questions), by DK
- A Faith Like Mine, by Laura Buller
- Timelines of Hinduism, from the Pluralism Project website, <http://pluralism.org/timelines/tradition/hinduism/>

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.