



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

## **Defining “Religion” in Global Popular Culture and Current Events**

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### **Abstract**

The course is a Multicultural-Studies elective featuring cross-cultural learning experiences through the six units of study on global society, geography, environment, education, economy, and politics. The class will investigate the cultures of Spanish-speaking populations, Chinese-speaking populations, and Arabic-speaking populations in order to gain perspective on global religious diversity. Initially developed for junior and seniors having taken World History and Civics and Economics prerequisites.

### **About the Course**

This assignment was designed for a semester-long Multicultural Studies elective course in a public school. Multicultural Studies is an interdisciplinary course that investigates world cultures through thematic perspectives providing students with an understanding of the uniqueness of different cultures as compared to their own cultural identity. In comparison to the culture of the United States, the course will investigate the cultures of three other world language populations (Spanish-speaking populations, Chinese-speaking populations, and Arabic-speaking populations). The course features cross-cultural learning experiences through the six units of study on global society, geography, environment, education, economy, and politics. Issues such as human rights, gender issues, resource problems and conflicts will be investigated by students through an intercultural lens. Multicultural Studies provides students the ability to comprehend the significance and degree to which cultures are becoming increasingly interconnected and how this connectivity affects their potential impact as 21<sup>st</sup> century global citizens.

While the study of religion does not make up a significant portion of the course, this is one aspect that is currently being developed to fit within the current scope of the course. Religion will be a ‘sub unit’ under the Global Geography unit of the course (Unit 2). The students should enter the course with a working knowledge of world religions. Prerequisites for the class include: World History and Civics and Economics. The course is open to juniors and seniors only.

## About the Assignment

At the beginning of the Unit (prior to distributing the assignment), students will be broken into groups to come up with a definition for 'religion'. Each group will then share out their responses and the class will come up with a definition that reflects their discussion. This definition will be placed on the board throughout the sub unit in which students will continually come back and defend or challenge their definition.

The summative assignment on our definition of religion: Current Events are an important part of the study of culture and are required weekly. Students have a very clear understanding, at this point in the semester, how to search for good articles, summarize its content and ask thoughtful questions. In an effort to integrate lived religion into a limited time frame, students will explore the meaning of 'religion' and the daily religious experiences through current events. The "mini-project" will be assigned after students have reviewed the three "Bs" of religion: beliefs, behaviors and sense of belonging. The religions of study are concentrated in the Spanish-, Chinese- and Arabic-speaking regions as those are the focus of the course: Buddhism, Islam, Christianity (Catholic and Protestant), Taoism as well as Confucius philosophy.

Attached is the assignment sheet that will be distributed to students in addition to resources to help guide struggling 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).***

## COURSE OBJECTIVES: UNIT 2 GEOGRAPHY

This unit focuses on the study of 'human geography', exploring population, movement, religion, political structures, economy as well as human interaction with the physical environment. Objectives relevant to the assignment:

- Students will be able to identify the main religions of the Spanish-speaking cultures and describe the relationship between religion and culture.
- Students will be able to identify the main religions of Chinese-speaking cultures and describe each one.
- Students will be able to describe the relationship between religion and Chinese culture.
- Students will be able to explain the basic tenets of Islam.

**Course:** Multicultural Studies      *A Study of Lived Religion: Current Event Religious Fieldwork*

### Essential Questions:

- What is religion?
- What are the main religions of the Spanish-, Chinese- and Arabic speaking worlds?
- How has religion affected the culture in each of these regions?

**Time Allotment:** 80 minute class period

*Day 1: Introduce assignment, example, presentation sign-up*

*Day 2 and 3 (and homework): Research articles*

*Day 4: Put together presentations & begin presentations*

*Day 5: Present and Define 'Religion'*

### Materials Needed:

- Computers/cell phones/piece of technology
- Large poster post-it paper
- Markers, scissors, glue
- Post-it Notes

Assignment: Students will break into groups (4-5 students) to complete the assignment. Your job will be to search the internet, magazines, newspapers, etc. to find 4-5 articles that illustrate religion in our regions of study. Ask yourself, what is religion? What religions are practiced in our Chinese-, Spanish-, and Arabic-speaking regions? How do these religions influence how people live their daily lives? Think back to our iceberg discussion at the beginning of the semester.

### Guidelines:

1. Articles should be within an appropriate and relevant time frame. If you find an outdated article, try to find a follow-up that discusses where we are at today!
2. Article must be from an appropriate source—NOT Wikipedia!

Product: Groups are to create a visual presentation to present their findings. Each group will be given a sheet of large 'post-it' paper, glue scissors and markers. On your papers, you should include the following:

- Images of lived religion from your articles + significance of each image
- Key terms associated with religion
- Brief 1-2 sentence summary of each article
- How do differences in the religion throughout the region create different life experiences?
- Identification of any controversies associated with practice or everyday lived experience.

Are you finished? First, signal the teacher to check and discuss your work! Then, I will ask your group to place your poster around the classroom.

Engage: Gallery Crawl! Students will participate in a gallery crawl to investigate findings of lived religion throughout the world. Students will be given 'post-it' notes to write down their thoughts and questions about the posters they visit. Groups will have a few minutes to read through post-it notes before preparing for the larger class discussion.

### Wrap-up Class Discussion:

1. What questions came up in your fieldwork?
2. How is religion reflected in cultural beliefs and practices?
3. Are these practices and experiences considered 'religious'? Why or why not?
4. Who gets to decide what is considered 'religious'?
5. How do these practices and experiences compare to what we have learned through the study of doctrines and beliefs?
6. So, how would you define 'religion'? Does this reinforce or challenge our class definition of religion at the beginning of the unit?

### **GUIDE FOR TEACHER:**

#### *Questions to help guide struggling students:*

- How is religion reflected in Chinese business practices?
- How is religion reflected in Arabic pop culture? (Starbucks incident in Saudi Arabia or The 99, women's soccer team, feminist movements)
- How is religion expressed in ceremonies or festivals?
- How is religion reflected in art (ie. Paintings, sculptures, dances, music, architecture, etc)
- Increase in atheism? Article references 'how people think about death, how they teach their kids, and even how they vote' – find examples!

*Below is a collection of some resources that could be used for the assignment (link imbedded in the text). Since you are working with current events, you will want to change out the list every few months or so. Also, you will want to vet the articles before allowing students to really dig into the material. Some sources may be inaccurate.*

#### RELIGION:

1. [The World's Newest Major Religion: No Religion](#)
2. Confused by how to pray? [Watch some examples](#)

#### CHINESE-SPEAKING:

3. [Chinese business & religion](#)
4. [Xinjiang Seethes Under Chinese Crackdown](#)
5. [Chinese Uighurs defy Ramadan ban](#)

#### ARABIC-SPEAKING:

6. [Afghanistan's women's soccer team got a one-of-a-kind uniform upgrade](#)
7. [Kuwaiti cartoonist battles IS death threats, US bigots](#)
8. [The Struggle for Jihad](#)
9. [Islam takes Hip Hop to another dimension in West Africa](#)
10. [In Nigeria, Christianity and Islam combine](#)

#### SPANISH-SPEAKING:

11. [Is Latin America Losing Its Catholic Identity?](#)
12. [In Latin America, Jewish communities are booming](#)
13. [Why has Pentecostalism grown so dramatically in Latin America?](#)
14. [Dance and religion](#)
15. [Carnival celebrations](#) (to be used as starting point)
16. [Carnival and Catholicism](#)
17. [Islam thrives in communist Cuba](#)
18. [Cuban Hip Hop Group Orishas Reunite With Ode to Island](#)

## **OTHER NEWS SOURCES:**

\*INCLUDES LINKS

### **AFRICA**

- [BBC: Africa](#)
- [Yahoo News: Africa](#)
- [Al Jazeera: Africa](#)
- [All Africa](#)
- [The Guardian](#) (Nigeria)
- [Times Live](#) (South Africa)

### **ASIA**

- [BBC: Asia](#)
- [ABC - China News](#)
- [Yahoo News: Asia](#)
- [Al Jazeera: Asia-Pacific](#)
- [Al Jazeera: Asia-Central & South](#)
- [China Business News](#)
- [China Daily](#)
- [The Chosunilbo](#) (South Korea)
- [Dawn](#) (India)
- [English News](#)
- [News Central Asia](#)
- [Hindustan Times](#) (India)
- [Japan Times](#)
- [The Times of India](#)

### **LATIN AMERICA**

- [BBC: Latin America](#)
- [Yahoo News: Latin America](#)
- [Buenos Aires Herald](#) (Argentina)
- [Rio Times](#) (Brazil)

### **THE MIDDLE EAST**

- [ABC - Syria News](#)
- [BBC: Mid-East](#)
- [Yahoo News: Middle East](#)
- [Al Jazeera: Middle East](#)
- [Al Masry Al Youm](#) (Egypt)
- [Al Arabiya News](#) (United Arab Emirates)
- [The Daily Star](#) (Lebanon)
- [Debka file](#) (Israel)
- [Gulf Daily News](#) (Bahrain)
- [Gulf News](#) (United Arab Emirates)
- [Haaretz](#) (Israel)
- [The Jordan Times](#)
- [The Media Line](#) (Middle East)
- [Oman Observer](#)
- [Today's Zaman](#) (Turkey)

### **WORLD NEWS**

- [Foreign Policy](#)
- [Global Post](#)
- [Short News](#)
- [UPI News](#)
- [World News](#)
- [World Newspapers](#)

# **AP HUMAN GEOGRAPHY: Creating a Cultural Scrapbook**

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## **ABOUT THE COURSE**

Advanced Placement Human Geography is a semester-long course at a public school that focuses on the distribution, processes, and effects of human populations on the planet. Major units of study include the nature of geography, population, migration, culture, language, religion, ethnicity, political organization of space, agriculture and rural land use, industrialization and economic development, and cities and urbanization. Students will use spatial concepts and landscape analysis to examine human social organization and its environmental consequences. They will also learn about the methods and tools geographers use in their science and practice.

Students must remember that this is a college-level course requiring them to read an average of at least 15-20 pages per night, participate in online and class discussions, perform extensive outside research for various projects, and be tested on content not necessarily covered in class. If any student needs extra help with the workload and expectations, he or she is encouraged to discuss this with me as soon as possible.

The students should enter the course with a working knowledge of world religions. Prerequisites for the class include: World History. The course is open to sophomores, juniors and seniors.

\*Note: The study of religion is not a huge emphasis in this course. Doctrines and beliefs will be reviewed but religion is taught within the context a broader unit on culture that includes many other aspects such as folk and pop culture, identity and language. In this course, we spend approximately 2-3 days on religion.

## **ABOUT THE ASSIGNMENT**

One of the best ways to learn about culture is to experience it. This unit-long assignment, about 2-3 weeks, will allow students the opportunity to explore culture inside and outside of the classroom. Student's experiences will then be assembled in a scrapbook that they will share with their classmates as the conclusion of the unit. This is an individual assignment and will be completed the day before the unit test.

Attached is the assignment sheet that will be distributed to students in addition to resources to help guide struggling students.

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES: UNIT 3 CULTURE**

- Explain the concept of culture and identify cultural traits.
- Explain how geographers assess the spatial and place dimensions of cultural groups in the past and present.
- Explain how globalization is influencing cultural interactions and change.
- Explain cultural patterns and landscapes as they vary by place and region.
- Explain the diffusion of culture and cultural traits through time and space.
- Compare and contrast ethnic and universalizing religions and their geographic patterns.
- Explain how culture is expressed in landscapes and how land and resource use represents cultural identity.
- Compare and contrast popular and folk culture and the geographic patterns associated with each.

**Description:** One of the best ways to learn about culture is to experience it. Over the course of the unit you will be exploring different cultures both in and outside of class. Your experiences will be collected in a creatively-designed scrapbook.

Project Logistics:

1. This is an individual project but feel free to go on some of the cultural visits with a partner or a parent! But, you must write your own reflection.
2. You must complete and provide evidence for at least one square in each category to receive your full grade.
3. You must earn at least 100 points for an A, 80 points for a B, 70 points for a C, 60 points for a D.
4. Any square completed without evidence will be considered not completed. All narrative evidence MUST be typed.
5. I am allowed to ask for further evidence if I feel that one (or more) of your experiences is questionable!
6. Each square must involve a different culture. (Example: Watching a religious documentary and interviewing a follower must involve 2 different religions. You may NOT complete any square based on your own denomination.)

**The Product:** Creating a Cultural Scrapbook!

**Directions:** In order to receive full credit on your Cultural Scrapbook Project, you must create a scrapbook that is organized in the following manner:

**Page 1: Cover Page**

**Page 2: Table of Contents!** Please order your scrapbook by similar sections

**Body of Scrapbook:** You should place some type of divider between your sections (religion, language, identity, etc.) Organize it based on your Table of Contents. Feel free to be creative with your dividers! You are experiencing culture and scrapbooks are an illustration of your experiences!

**Last Page of the Scrapbook:** The last page should contain a **TYPED** statement that reads *as follows*:

*I attest that all work contained within this Binder is my own work and completed by my own hand. I understand that if any part of this Portfolio is found to be plagiarized, I will receive a **zero** for the entire Portfolio. I also understand that if I did not include the required evidence for a section, that entire section will be graded as incomplete.*

**Sign and date this statement in BLUE INK.**

**Remember!** A scrapbook is a collection of memorabilia that include pictures, printed media, artwork and your own personal thoughts and reflections! Have fun experiencing culture! Be creative in your presentation!

## CULTURAL SCRAPBOOK PROJECT

Category	Experience	Product	Point
<b>Religion</b>	Watch a documentary on religion	Title of documentary, parent signature, and paragraph reflection.	5 points
	Interview a religious follower	Prepared interview questions, reflection, picture with person	10 points
	Interview a religious leader	Prepared interview question, reflection and picture with person.	15 points
	Attend a religious service	Bulletin from service, reflection and a picture of you at that service	25 points
<b>Language</b>	Watch a foreign film with subtitles (must be outside of school)	Title of film, parent signature and a reflection paragraph	5 points
	Create a list of “must-know” phrases for surviving in a foreign country. Then translate!	Choose a country, choose a list of questions, translations, reflection paragraph	10 points
	Read a story translated from a different language	Summary of story and brief reflection	15 points
	Recite a poem or sing (or rap) a verse from a foreign language	Copy of poem or song verse, recitation to teacher	25 points
<b>Identity</b>	Watch a documentary or find a commercial that discusses gender, gendered spaces or sexuality	Title of documentary/commercial, parent signature and reflection	5 points
	“I am” Poem	Poem	10 points
	Eat at an authentic ethnic restaurant.	Menu, picture and reflection	15 points
	Cook a meal from a recipe book	Title of recipe book, recipe, picture of you cooking and a sample (if you wish)	25 points
<b>Culture</b>	Watch a documentary about a Folk Culture	Title, Parent signature, reflection	5 points
	Watch a Bollywood film from the pop culture hearth of India!	Title, Parent signature, reflection	10 points
	Interview someone from a folk culture	Prepared interview question and reflection	15 points
	Attend a festival or museum of a folk culture	Picture, ticket/artifact and reflection	25 points

**Remember!** You do not need to complete all of these activities! This is meant to be a fun and experiential project! Not one that completely stresses you out! Choose the assignments you can manage!

**Due Date:** End of the Unit. Please turn in on the day of the test. Projects will not be accepted after this date.