



Religious Worlds of New York • Curriculum Development Project

Hindu and Buddhist Worlds of New York

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Abstract

How are Hinduism and Buddhism variously lived out by New Yorkers? To answer this question, students must look beyond their “World Religions” textbook and engage with the city as classroom, through site visits and interviews with local adherents of Hinduism and Buddhism. Conducted in conjunction with our in-class introductions to the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, site visits/interviews will expose students to the real religiosity of Hindu and Buddhist New Yorkers. The visits will also inspire each student to research one specific facet of Hindu and/or Buddhist practice or thought. Research will culminate in a 5-7 minute presentation in which each student will share her ethnographic artifacts (pertinent details from her site visit), research findings, and insights with her classmates. Ultimately, students will understand that Hinduism and Buddhism are internally diverse, lived traditions that provide practical, ritual/devotional, and philosophical vehicles for meaning making in our contemporary context.

This multi-step project was created in 2017 to be the fall semester capstone for a required, 10th grade World Religions course at an independent, Catholic, all-girls’ school in New York City.

Project Timeline

During the **World Religion Intro Unit (Weeks 1-2)**, the teacher will design in-class activities and homework assignments to help students hone necessary skills for site visits and interviews:

- Step 1: Drawing from Generation Global’s “Essentials of Dialogue” (Ch. 1), in-class activities help students recognize diverse viewpoints and practice empathic listening.
- Step 2: Invite students to define “religion,” providing some insight in-class to ongoing academic disagreements about the term.
- Step 3: Hone students’ ethnographic observation skills with brief excursions in the school building and/or surrounding neighborhood. Students will document both expected and unexpected examples of “religion.”
 - For helpful field research guidelines, see Nalika Gajaweera & Andrew Johnson’s [“Studying Faith”](#) (on the website of USC’s Center for Religion and Civic Culture) as well as resources on the NEH “Religious Worlds of New York” institute’s [“Sacred Gotham”](#) page.

- Step 4: Have students brainstorm potential interview questions and practice asking response questions (questions that stem from what the interviewee has just said), drawing once more from “Essentials of Dialogue” guidelines and activities (Ch. 2). Ask students to practice on one another.
- Step 5: Give students a full list of recommended sites and vetted Hindu and Buddhist representatives. Students must visit at least one site, though two contrasting sites would be ideal. During their visits, students will hopefully have the chance to speak with one or more people at the site. Advise students to set up their site visits as early as possible. Offer one or two potential dates in September / October when a chaperoned site visit may occur.
 - NOTE: If a student absolutely cannot arrange for a site visit, that student may be given an alternative assignment, using online videos, literature, and art to gain a nuanced view of lived Hinduism and/or Buddhism.
- Step 6: Compile, with student input, some guidelines for religious site visit etiquette.
 - Check with your contact at the site, as well as their website, for specific expectations about dress, photography, note-taking, visit timing, transportation, group size, etc. This guide to “[Visiting Sacred Spaces](#)” (produced for PBS’s God in America series) may be helpful.

Before the end of the **Classroom Units on Hinduism and Buddhism (Weeks 3-6)**, students must complete their site visits / interviews:

- Step 7: Each student will visit a site and turn in observations, interview notes, and at least one original photo of them at the site.
- Step 8: Students will then briefly reflect on their site visits in small groups to help them recognize the diversity of site experiences, determine areas of particular interest, and form questions for further study.
- Step 9: Each student will propose three possible topics, inspired by their site visit, which they would like to research and present. To ensure depth of exploration, topics should relate to one, specific practice or concept from Hinduism, Buddhism, or both traditions. Each student will submit her preferences to the teacher, who will assign final topics from among the stated preferences to ensure that no two students present on identical topics.

During the **Library Research and Presentation Preparation Period (Weeks 7-8)**, students will:

- Step 10: Conduct further research on their topic, with help from the school Librarian. To supplement library research, students may choose to conduct at least one further interview, site visit, or museum visit.
- Step 11: Receive presentation coaching from the school’s Public Speaking specialist.
- Step 12: Each student will prepare a polished, 5-7 minute presentation on her narrow topic. Presentations should incorporate relevant ethnographic evidence (images/anecdotes from the site visit & interviews), research data, and the student’s analytical insights into the deeper meanings of her topic.

To encourage student learning throughout the **Presentations (Weeks 9-10)**, the teacher might:

- Ask each student presenter to create an exit ticket for her peers.
- Have students informally evaluate one another's presentations.
- Conclude presentations with a student-driven discussion of the diversity of experiences and practices presented by their peers. What surprised students throughout the process? How have their views of Hinduism and Buddhism changed? Can the students articulate interreligious and intra-religious similarities and dissimilarities that were not evident in the textbook descriptions of Hinduism and Buddhism? Did the process provide students with new insights into their own religious or spiritual context?

Project Resources

The teacher is encouraged to give students the following handouts:

- A list of recommended Hindu and Buddhist sites and organizations in your local community (see below for my list for New York City)
- Preliminary guidelines for religious site visit etiquette
- Presentation topic proposal form
- Library research worksheet (with prompts to help students vet & annotate their sources)
- Presentation rubric

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.

Recommended Hindu and Buddhist Sites and Organizations

To learn more about Hinduism and Buddhism as they are lived out in New York City, you must visit *at least one* of the below religious sites/organizations no later than Tuesday, October 10. You may complete this assignment either by making your own arrangements with any of the below sites or by joining at least one of Ms. André's chaperoned trips in September and early October (specifics TBD).

Hindu Sites:

Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York

Description: NYC branch of India's Ramakrishna order; Jnana yoga / Philosophical focus (Vedanta), with open lectures on Tuesdays & Fridays at 8pm and Sundays at 11am

Website: <https://www.ramakrishna.org/>

Address: 17 E 94th St, New York, NY 10128

Phone: (212) 534-9445

- Contact: Barry Zelikovsky, Secretary of the R-V Center: rvcenternewyork@gmail.com
- Possible topics: symbolism of the logo, philosophy of Vedanta, role of the Swami, role of women, the lack of deities / icons / murti in the space, the use of incense...

Ganesh Temple

Description: Hindu Temple Society of North America; Bhakti yoga / Devotional focus. Includes a sanctuary with statues (murti) of many deities, featuring Ganesh. No photography permitted in sanctuary; must remove shoes and wear modest dress. A canteen and gift shop are located in the basement. Temple Hours: Weekdays 8am-9pm, Weekends 7:30am-9pm

Website: <https://nyganeshtemple.org/> Yelp: <https://www.yelp.com/biz/ganesh-temple-flushing>

Address: 45-57 Browne St., Flushing, NY 11355

Phone: (718) 460-8484 ext. 112

- Contact: Ram Mohan, Hindu Temple Society of North America Board Member
- Possible topics: coconut breaking (its symbolism), iconography & devotion, specific deities and their symbolism & attributes, rituals & puja (at temple and/or at home), food offerings, festivals, female leadership, religion & pop culture (gift shop)...

The Bhakti Center

Description, from their website: “THE BHAKTI CENTER is a six-story nonprofit cultural arts center on New York’s Lower East Side, devoted to sharing the timeless culture and practices of Bhakti-yoga. We draw our inspiration and guidance from the life and teachings of Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, who first brought the culture of Bhakti to the Western world.” Dualistic Hinduism.

- The 3rd Floor of the Bhakti Center includes a Temple of Sri Radha Muralidhara (Radha & Krishna). The Bhakti Center also hosts Thursday night Kirtan (7-9pm) and other open talks and workshops

Website: <http://bhakticenter.org>

Address: 25 1st Avenue, New York, NY 10003

General Email: info@bhakticenter.org

Phone: (212) 533-4842

- Contact: Kaustubha Das, Senior Educator: thebhakticenter@gmail.com
- Possible topics: ISKON & Hindu Dualism / Krishna Devotion, chanting / singing (Kirtan), yoga (physical postures / asanas) & wellness in the West, meditation, religion & marketing...

Sadhana: Coalition of Progressive Hindus

Description: A progressive Hindu social justice organization; Karma yoga / Service focus. Affiliated with the nation’s first sanctuary Hindu Temple, in Jamaica, Queens. Leads beach clean ups in Jamaica Bay, Queens, usually the first Saturday of every month, April to November. See website for other Sadhana causes.

Website: <http://www.sadhana.org>

Address: Sadhana Coalition of Progressive Hindus, 361 Warren Street, Brooklyn, NY11201

Phone: (917) 518-2441

- Contact: Davanie Singhroy & Sunita Viswanath: info@sadhana.org
- Possible topics: Karma yoga / faith-in-action, gender equity, #notinmyname and the fight for progressive Hinduism (given Hindu nationalism and violence against Muslims and Dalits in India), Hindu interfaith engagement, religion & science...

Aeilushi Mistry

Description: A Teaching Artist / Traditional Dancer from Gujarat, India; Bhakti yoga focus, through dance. In 2015, she was awarded a fellowship in folk/traditional arts from the New York Foundation for the Arts. Possible for interview.

Website: <http://aeilushi.wixsite.com/aeilushi>

Email: aeilushi@gmail.com

Phone: (917) 860-0142

- Possible topics: Bhakti yoga / devotion to specific deities, Aarti floating lamp ceremony, the role of Ganga (the Ganges) and other sacred rivers, traditional sacred dance of India, storytelling through movement, Hinduism in India and the US...

Buddhist Sites:

Chogyesa Zen Temple of New York, a.k.a. Korea Buddhism Jogei Temple of America, Inc.

Description: Korean Zen center, located in its current UWS space since 2003. Includes ornate spaces for ritual as well as a library, meditation room, and garden. Bowing, chanting, and sitting meditation practices are open to the public daily at 6am & 11am, in the Ji-Jang Boral Hall (Lower Level). See information about evening and weekend practices here:

http://www.nychogyesa.org/chogyesa_programs_weekly.html

Website: <http://www.nychogyesa.org/>

Address: 42 W 96th Street #4, New York, NY 10025

Phone: (212) 665-3641

- Contact: Master Do Am, Abbot of the Center
- Possible topics: Korean Zen Buddhism, donations in honor of deceased loved ones, chanting, bowing, seated meditation practice, Buddhist iconography (especially of bodhisattvas and ancestral teachers), practicing Zen sitting & another religion, annual ceremonies (i.e. Buddha's Birthday), special Buddhist rites of passage / ceremonies
http://www.nychogyesa.org/chogyesa_programs_special.html , Kong-an Interviews...

Ordinary Mind Zendo

Description: Founded in 1996 by Barry Magid, a Dharma heir of Charlotte Joko Beck, this Zendo has a psychological focus, with special attention to the needs of American students who might incorporate Zen into daily life. Open for daily zazen (seated meditation) Tues-Thurs 8-8:45am; Mon, Tues, Thurs 6-7pm; Wed & Fri 7-8pm; Sat 10am-12pm

Website: <https://www.ordinarymind.com/>

Address: 107 West 74th Street Apt BR, New York, NY 10023

Phone: (917) 608-3348

- Email Contact: contact@ordinarymind.com
- Possible topics: American Zen (via Japan), Charlotte Joko Beck, lay Buddhism, psychology & religion, precepts, koans, sesshin, kirtan (walking meditation), Dharma talks, calligraphy, use of chimes/bells in meditation...

Village Zendo: True Expression Temple

Description, from their website: "The Village Zendo is a community of people who come together to practice in the Soto Zen tradition. We offer zazen (sitting meditation), one-on-one instruction with a teacher, dharma talks, chanting services, retreats, workshops and study groups... The Village Zendo is committed to authentically continuing the Zen tradition while keeping it contemporary and relevant to today's world." Beginning Instruction offered Monday evenings, 6:30pm-8:30pm. See website for more info, as well as upcoming talks.

Website: <https://villagezendo.org/>

Address: 588 Broadway, Suite 1108, New York, NY 10012

Phone: (212) 340-4656

- Contact: Sensei Shinryu Thomson. General email: info@villagezendo.org
- Possible topics: Zen Buddhist sutras and texts, robes & other Buddhist religious wardrobe, head shaving, hierarchy & teachers in Zen transmission, chanting, blending of East & West...

New York Buddhist Church

Description, from their website: “NYBC is a temple of Jodoshinshu True Pure Land School Buddhism, whose head temple is in Kyoto, Japan... serving the New York community since 1938.” Weekly events include Buddhist chanting and meditation, Japanese Howakai, and Soh Daiko Drumming. See their website for a schedule of events:

<http://www.newyorkbuddhistchurch.org/content.html?page=1>

Website: <http://www.newyorkbuddhistchurch.org/>

Address: 3310332 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10025

Phone: (212) 678-0305

- Contact: Rev. Earl Ikeda, at the above number
- Possible topics: Shin Buddhism, history of Buddhism in Japan, the Three Pure Land Sutras, chanting, meditation, Howakai, drumming...

Buddhist Council of New York

Description, from their website: “The Buddhist Council of New York, founded in 1985, is an association of Buddhist Temples and organizations whose mission is to foster dialogue, cooperation, and unity within the Buddhist community in the New York City area, as well as to organize events.” Check their website for more information, including a link to NY Buddhist centers: <http://buddhistcouncilny.org/sanghas/>

Website: <http://buddhistcouncilny.org/>

Phone: (646) 797-7982

- Contact: Rev. Dr. T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki, tknakagaki@gmail.com
- Possible topics: Diversity of Buddhist communities in New York City, dialogue (inter- and intra-faith), calligraphy, 9/11 WTC Memorial Floating Lanterns, Buddhist swastika...

Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association (DDMBA) and the Ch’an Meditation Center

Description, from their website: “DDMBA is a U.S. based non-profit organization committed to serving humanity by working to relieve human suffering. Its founder and spiritual leader is the renowned teacher of Chan Buddhism, Master Sheng Yen...”

Website: <http://www.ddmba.org/>

Address: 90-56 Corona Avenue, Elmhurst, NY 11373

Phone: (718) 592-6593

- Contact: Sylvie Sun; general email: ddmbaus@yahoo.com
- Possible topics: International dialogues on peace building, cultivating peace within, etc... See also Buddhist Global Relief, a service organization (Sylvia Sun is on the board)- <https://www.buddhistglobalrelief.org/index.php/en/>

Sites of Broader Interest (to supplement site visits):

- **Rubin Museum**, which specializes in the art and ideas of the Himalayas:
 - <http://rubinmuseum.org/>
 - 150 W. 17th Street, New York, NY 10011
 - (212) 620-5000; info@rubinmuseum.org
- **Met Museum**, which has permanent collections of Asian art:
 - <http://www.metmuseum.org/>
 - 1000 5th Avenue, New York, NY 10028
- **Jain Center of America:**
 - <http://www.nyjaincenter.org/>
 - 43-22 Ithaca Street, Queens, NY 11373
 - (718) 478-9141