



**INTERFAITH**  
CENTER OF NEW YORK



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE  
**Humanities**

**UNION**

*Religious Worlds of New York • Curriculum Development Project*

# Religious Studies Unit

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## **Abstract:**

This unit explores a number of faith traditions (focusing on Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism and Islam), what they teach, how they interact, and how they influence the lives of their followers. The unit begins by asking the question of whether or not we can even study religion in a public school before focusing on some key themes that different religions have in common. The middle of the unit consists of a field trip to two religious sites in Flushing, Queens as well as a panel of speakers that both help students to see how religion influences the lives of its followers and manifests in the world. The unit then ends with students doing independent research to create a 20 minute lesson that they teach to a small group of their classmates.

This unit is designed for a 6th grade global history class. The student population I work with are primarily students of color whose families are from the Dominican Republic. Many of my students read below grade level but this unit is based at the end of the year when students will have already developed stronger reading skills as well as individual research and presentation practice.

## **Essential Questions:**

- What are the different elements that many faith traditions have in common?
- What are the different elements that are unique in each faith tradition?
- How do the different faith traditions answer deep and meaningful questions about life and how to live?
- How does being a member of a faith affect someone's life?
- How can we teach other students about important practices in a faith tradition?

## **Materials Included Here:**

- Full Unit Map
- Presentation and Student Materials, for First Day Discussion of Religion in Public Schools
- Guidelines and Student Materials, for Interview Project

# Full Unit Map

Duration: 17 days

Dates: June 1 – 26

Day	Daily Learning Target	Student Work Product
Wk 1 June 1 Day 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can we learn about religion in a public school?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Worksheet on 1st amendment and station materials</li> <li>Final Quiz on whether certain actions are constitutional or unconstitutional.</li> </ul>
Wk 1 June 2 Day 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When and where did these religions start?</li> <li>What is the religious makeup of the United States, of our community?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Map analysis sheet with reflection questions.</li> </ul>
Wk 1 June 3 Day 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who are important figures in the different faith traditions?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Worksheet analyzing the key decision points in each of the stories and what can be learned for the decisions that were made.</li> </ul>
Wk 1 June 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clerical Day</li> </ul>	
Wk 1 June 5 Day 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>According to the faith traditions we are studying: What does it mean to be a good person? Why should we do that?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student analysis and interpretation of the scriptures of each faith around being a good person followed by final reflection on student's own beliefs.</li> </ul>
Wk 2 June 8 Day 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>According to the faith traditions we are studying: What happens when we die?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student analysis and interpretation of the scriptures of each faith around being a life after death followed by final reflection on how these beliefs would change the way you act.</li> </ul>
Wk 2 June 9 Day 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What do these religions hold to be sacred? Why?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student analysis and interpretation of the scriptures of each faith around being a good person followed by final reflection on student's own beliefs on what is sacred.</li> </ul>
Wk 2 June 10 Day 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Case Study</a>: The House on 6th Street from the Pluralism Project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>mini-socratic seminar discussion on case study where students complete a tracking sheet on their partners as well as a final reflection.</li> </ul>
Wk 2 June 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clerical Day</li> </ul>	
Wk 2 June 12 Day 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do religious traditions create sacred spaces in their communities?</li> <li>Site visit to two places of worship in Flushing NY.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Observation worksheet tracking what students experience with their senses and what it makes them think and wonder.</li> <li>Comparison between the two different sites.</li> </ul>
Wk 3 June 15 Day 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How does religious belief affect the way that people live their lives?</li> <li>Panel of speakers (can include parents)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Taking notes of speaker responses to their questions.</li> <li>Reflection writing on the role of religion in the lives of the speakers and in their own lives.</li> </ul>
Wk 3 June 16 Day 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do research on religion background</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete a research sheet on the key facts on the religion such as the dates it started, main geographic areas and a key figure or belief.</li> </ul>
Wk 3 June 17 Day 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete presentation based on research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete the google slides presentation using the research that they did the previous day and based on the model provided.</li> </ul>
Wk 3 June 18 Day 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do research based on religious practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do internet research on an important practice from that faith and find a text that can be used for other students to read in order to learn about this practice.</li> </ul>
Wk 3 June 19 Day 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Start Worksheet based on research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students use the research to start working on their worksheet, adding in the do now question, text and discussion questions.</li> </ul>
Wk 4 June 22 Day 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete lesson materials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students finish preparing their materials and if finished then practice or create a plan for their lesson.</li> </ul>

Wk 4 June 23 Day 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students teach a lesson to a small group of their peers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students complete a student grade worksheet while teachers grade their work.</li> <li>• Students complete an evaluation worksheet on their teachers.</li> </ul>
Wk 4 June 24 Day 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students teach a lesson to a small group of their peers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students complete a student grade worksheet while teachers grade their work.</li> <li>• Students complete an evaluation worksheet on their teachers.</li> </ul>
Wk 4 June 25 Day 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• End of year reflections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final reflections</li> <li>• End of year survey</li> <li>• Toasts</li> <li>• End of year game</li> </ul>
Last Day of School - Field Day!!		

Unit Overview	<p>This unit explores a number of faith traditions (focusing specifically on Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism and Islam), what they teach, how they interact and how they influence the lives of their followers. The unit begins by asking the question of whether or not we can even study religion in a public school before focusing on some key themes that different religions have in common. The middle of the unit consists of a field trip to two religious sites in Flushing Queens as well as a panel of speaks that both help students to see how religion influences the lives of its followers and manifests in the world. The unit then ends with students doing independent research to create a 20 minute lesson that they teach to a small group of their classmates.</p>
Essential Questions	<p>List the essential questions of this unit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the different elements that many faith traditions have in common?</li> <li>• What are the different elements that are unique in each faith tradition?</li> <li>• How do the different faith traditions answer deep and meaningful questions about life and how to live?</li> <li>• How does being a member of a faith affect someone's life?</li> <li>• How can we teach other students about important practices in a faith tradition?</li> </ul>
Next Generation Standards	<p><b>Reading:</b>  S1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly/implicitly and make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.  S2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.  S7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats.</p> <p><b>Writing:</b>  S1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.  S2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.  S6: Conduct research based on focused questions to demonstrate understanding of the subject under investigation. S7: Gather relevant information from multiple sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information in writing while avoiding plagiarism</p> <p><b>Speaking:</b>  S1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners; express ideas clearly and persuasively, and build on those of others.  S2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats (including visual, quantitative, and oral).  S5: Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.</p>

Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Constitution: The first amendment and how it applies to the teaching about religion in school.</li> <li>● Background Information on 5 Faith Traditions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Beginning location and geographic spread</li> <li>○ Major figures</li> <li>○ Beliefs around morality, death and the sacred.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Sacred Architecture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Visual representations of faith and the sacred.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Lived experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The different ways that religion can affect the lives of its adherents.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Skills	<p><b>Reading:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Understanding the meaning in religious texts.</li> <li>● Understanding maps and data of religious demographics</li> </ul> <p><b>Writing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Developing lesson plans and materials</li> </ul> <p><b>Speaking and Listening</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Discussing a case study</li> <li>● Teaching a lesson.</li> </ul>
Assessment	<p><b>Formative: Case Study Discussion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Read and analyze a case study from the pluralism website.</li> <li>● Discuss in small groups what the solution should be and why.</li> <li>● Write a reflection on the process and what the individual student believes should be done in this situation and how it might relate to their lives.</li> </ul> <p><b>Performance Task: Teaching a Lesson</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Students choose one of the 5 faiths that we studied (or for stronger students a selection of faiths that had not been studied) to do internet research on the background of the religion and an important practice its followers carry out.</li> <li>● Students create a google slides presentation as well as a worksheet for other students to complete.</li> <li>● Students then present a 20 minute lesson to a group of 5-6 students, grading their worksheet at the end while students evaluate the teacher.</li> </ul>	Scaffolds/ Extensions	<p><b>Scaffolds:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Student choice in the different texts with leveled texts for weaker readers. Students then do not have to read about every religion each day.</li> <li>● Providing students will prescreened internet resources in order to support their research.</li> </ul> <p><b>Extensions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Additional texts at a higher reading level for higher level students.</li> <li>● Choice of religions that have not been studied and require more background research to understand.</li> </ul>
		Texts Resources	<p><b>Main Texts:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <a href="#">House on 6th Street Case Study</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Independent Reading Texts:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Selection of YA books with religious themes that students can read during independent reading time. Examples of such books <a href="#">here</a>.</li> </ul>

***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).***

**Day One of the Unit:  
Religion in Public Schools**

# Do Now – True or False?

1. It is legal for students to start class with prayers in public school.
2. Public schools can force students to say the pledge of allegiance.
3. Student religious clubs are not allowed to meet on school property.
4. Public school teachers can preach their religion in the classroom.

# The 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

# Schools and the Constitution

- Public schools (and charters) get their money from the government
- This means they have to respect what the constitution says about religion.



# Stations

## Instructions:

1. There are 4 stations. Each one about a different topic of religion in school.
2. Answer the related questions on your worksheet.
3. Pay attention because we are going to have a quiz afterward!

# Constitutional or Unconstitutional?

1. A school doesn't allow a prayer club to meet after school because it is a religious group.
2. An atheist student refuses to say the pledge of allegiance because it says "under God."
3. A teacher starts every class with a short prayer.
4. A teacher tells their students that his/her religion is the truth and everyone should believe it.

# Constitutional or Unconstitutional?

5. A teacher says prayers alone in the break between classes.
6. A school offers a class that teaches about religion, but does not put one above the others.
7. A student comes to school wearing a shirt that says “Jesus is the TRUTH!”.
8. A teacher comes to school wearing a shirt that says “Jesus is the TRUTH!”.

# Quiz Answers:

1. Unconstitutional
2. Constitutional
3. Unconstitutional
4. Unconstitutional
5. Constitutional
6. Constitutional
7. Constitutional
8. Unconstitutional

## Day 1 - Religion in Public Schools

**Do Now:** True or False

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_

**Notes:**

What does the first amendment say about religion (in your own words)?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Do public and charter schools have to follow what the first amendment says about religion? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Station 1: Saying the Pledge of Allegiance

How does this relate to religion in schools? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Can a student be forced to say the pledge of Allegiance? \_\_\_\_\_ Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Station 2: Prayer in Schools

Did the Regent's Prayer violate the constitution? \_\_\_\_\_ Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

What is the Lemon Test? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Station 3: Religion and After School Clubs

Why did the "Good News Club" sue the school? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What did the Supreme Court decide? \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

**Station 4: Teachers Expressing their Religious Beliefs**

What did Joelle Silver do that the school threatened to fire her? \_\_\_\_\_

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Do you think that her actions were going against what the constitution says about religion? Why or why not?

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**Quiz: Is it Constitutional?**

Circle the correct response:

- 1.    Constitutional        Unconstitutional
- 2.    Constitutional        Unconstitutional
- 3.    Constitutional        Unconstitutional
- 4.    Constitutional        Unconstitutional
- 5.    Constitutional        Unconstitutional
- 6.    Constitutional        Unconstitutional
- 7.    Constitutional        Unconstitutional
- 8.    Constitutional        Unconstitutional

**Reflection Question:**

What are things that your teacher can and can't do when teaching about religion this trimester?

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## Station 1 - Saying the Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was first said in school in 1892 and was then used by public schools around the nation. The Pledge now reads:

*I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.*

The Pledge of Allegiance has been legally challenged on a number of occasions, often because of the phrase **“one Nation under God”**. More recently in 2006, a Florida court ruled that a 1942 state law requiring students to stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance violates the First and Fourteenth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution. As a result of that decision, a Florida school district was ordered to pay \$32,500 to a student who chose not to say the pledge and was insulted and called "unpatriotic" by a teacher.



In the US today, all states except five (Hawaii, Idaho, Oklahoma, Vermont and Wyoming) require the pledge as part of the school day but students are not required to participate.

## Station 2 - Prayer in Schools

The issue of school prayer has been hotly debated in the United States since the early 1900s. For most of US history, schools in many areas of the country started class with a prayer or Bible reading.

A serious issue arose in 1955, and when the New York Board of Regents developed a prayer recommended (but not required) for its school districts which became known as the “Regents Prayer”. This was challenged in court and the Supreme Court decided that the use of an official state-school prayer stood in violation of the First Amendment because it was the government promoting a religion.



The Supreme Court's then decided (in *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 1971) a ruling that established the Lemon test for religious activities within schools. The Lemon test states that in order to be constitutional under the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment any activity sponsored by a public school must meet three criteria:

1. Have a secular (non-religious) purpose
2. Must neither support nor obstruct religion
3. Must not create too many confusing connections between government and religion

### Station 3: Religion and After School Clubs

In 2001 a case was brought to the Supreme Court by a bible study group that was not allowed to meet afterschool. The group argued that they were being discriminated against.

In a 6-3 decision the Supreme Court said a New York public school district must let the Good News Club hold after-school meetings for grade-school children to pray and study the Bible.

The Court found that excluding the club was unconstitutional based on the club's views. However, the court ruled that letting the meeting take place would not be an unconstitutional government endorsement of religion.

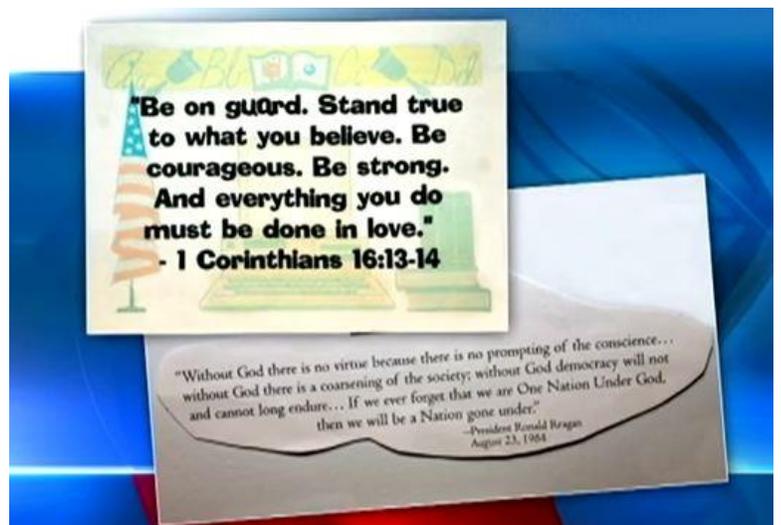
The Constitution's First Amendment protects free speech and the free exercise of religion, but it also stops government establishment of religion.



### Station 4: Teachers Expressing their Religious Beliefs

A Christian high school teacher in Cheektowaga, N.Y., is suing her employer after district officials told her to take personal signs and religious items out of her classroom.

Joelle Silver had four small posters in her room with psalm verses on them, a poster with a religious quotation from Ronald Reagan, a drawing that the district said is reference to the crucifixion, a poster that had a Bible verse superimposed on the American flag and school books, among other items. The letter Silver received instructed her to take the items down and warned that failing to do so could lead to her being fired from the school.



The school superintendent says the materials were found to be inappropriate and the district determined they needed to be removed. Silver is suing the school by saying that her right to free speech has been violated.

## Interview Project:

**Background:** During this unit, we will be studying 5 world faith traditions and how they approach some deep questions about our lives. As we do this exploration in class, your job is to do some exploring outside of class!

**Task:** You will choose one person from your family or community to interview about the role of religion or faith in their life. You will ask them at least five different questions and write down their responses in your notes. This project will be due on: Monday June 15th.

### Planning:

1. Who will you be interviewing? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Which questions will you ask? Choose from the list below or write you own.
  - How long have you been a member of your faith community?
  - How has being \_\_\_\_\_ shaped or affected your life?
  - How has being \_\_\_\_\_ changed over your life?
  - To you, what does it mean to be \_\_\_\_\_ in New York?
  - What was it like growing up \_\_\_\_\_ in your hometown? Do you have a particular story that demonstrates this?
  - How is that different from your experience here? Do you have a story about this?
  - What parts of your religion are most important to you?
  - Are there any rituals or holidays that are particularly meaningful to you?
  - Your own questions:
    1. \_\_\_\_\_
    2. \_\_\_\_\_
    3. \_\_\_\_\_

### Things to Keep in Mind:

- There is an unbelievable amount of diversity in human religion. Not everyone you interview will think of their religion in the same way that we've discussed. That doesn't make anyone wrong, it just makes everybody different.
- Some people might not be comfortable with you using their full name in your reflection. Make sure you ask them beforehand if it's ok for you to use their name when you share.
- Sometimes, when talking about religion, it is easy to offend people or to get offended yourself. If your interviewee expresses an opinion that offends you or vice versa, do your best to approach this as a "professional."
- Interviews will probably take longer than you think. Sometimes, the best conversations are the ones that last a lot longer than you expected
- In person interviews are preferable to phone or email interviews (please, no snapchat interviews!). If you have to resort to phone or email, please let me know and we can discuss how you can get the most out of your interview.
- Don't just stick to your questions! An interview is a conversation, not a robotic survey.

**Interview Recording Sheet:**

Directions: Use this sheet to record the the answers to your interview questions. At the end write your own reflections on what your interviewee shared.

Question 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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Question 2: \_\_\_\_\_

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Question 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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Question 4: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
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Question 5: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Reflection:**

What was interesting or surprising to you? Do you agree or disagree with anything that was said? What did you learn?

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