



**UNION**

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

**Engaging the Senses at a Hindu Temple in California**

*Ellen Donlin, Notre Dame High School, San Jose, CA*

***Abstract***

I propose an adaptation to the Hinduism unit in the all women Catholic high school's junior and senior "World Religions" Religious Studies elective I am inheriting. I will swap out the current small group puja/ pooja project for a site visit to the relatively nearby Hindu Temple Vaidica Vidhya Ganapathi Center (VVGK) so as to more authentically examine Bhakti Marga.

***Demographics of Student Body***

A single section of this "World Religions" class is comprised of 28-30 young women ages 16-18.

- Wide socio-economic spectrum (those below the Federal Poverty Level to families earning \$250,000+ annually)
- Ethnically: roughly 33% White, 33% Latina, 33% Indian/Asian/Pacific Islander, 1% Black
- Religious Affiliation: a spectrum. 60% of students indicate Catholic on admissions paperwork. Informal classroom, private polls reveal 8+ traditions in a group of 55 students. Students have openly claimed identity as: Muslim (both with and without the hijab), Reform Jew, Catholic, Mennonite, Buddhist, Hindu, Protestant (variety), Sikh, Jain, agnostic, atheistic, and more.

***Objectives***

- Students will be able to paraphrase Hinduism's three paths to liberation. (Method: textbook reading, lecture, class discussion clarification)
- Students will be able to explain where and how they witnessed Bhakti Marga during the VVGK site visit. (Method: field trip, observation & reflection worksheet)
- Students will be able to write an evaluation of the three paths of liberation based upon its compatibility with her own demeanor. (Method: summative assessment)
  - A) Bhakti Marga as explored through the VVGK site visit
  - B) Jnana Marga as examined through a close reading of the Bhagavad Gita
  - C) Karma Marga as explored through a guided reflection on their already required community service hours

### ***Rationale and Pedagogic Goals***

The NEH Religious Worlds of New York Summer Institute's day on Hinduism that combined 1) an hour long academic lecture on Hinduism by John (Jack) Stratton Hawley, followed by 2) a panel discussion with New York Hindu Community Leaders and Educators Anindita Chatterjee Bhaumik, Gadadhara Pandit Dasa, and Chan Jamoona, and later topped off with 3) a site visit to the Hindu Temple Society of North America (Ganesh Temple) has rooted me in a desire to treat Karma Marga, Jnana Marga, and Bhakti Marga as authentically and equitably as possible in my Hinduism unit. This means examining Hinduism theology and lived experiences. The site visit to the Ganesh Temple was my first experience of a Hindu Temple and witnessing devotees spontaneously come to the temple for devotional practices illuminated for me the possibility of a field trip wherein students could see the space, observe devotional activities, and possibly engage in a Q&A session, all without participating in a devotional practice themselves.

Furthermore, all three panelists spoke to the importance of returning to the Bhagavad Gita with younger generations of Hindus. In reflection upon my inherited curriculum, the emphasis has been on Bhakti Marga, but has been done in a simulated manner. This has been appropriate given the private and parochial nature of the school, but given the proximity of a Hindu temple to the school, students could observe authentic devotee pujas/ poojas. A calculation on my part has revealed that swapping out the small group "in-house" pujas (sample, instructions, work time, each group leading, clean-up, etc) would approximately equate a site visit occurring during a single 85 minute block class day. Without the logistical issues of structuring lessons so that everyday one or two small group leading pujas, the existing Bhagavad Gita textual analysis for Jnana Marga could receive more focused attention by both the instructor and students. In addition, a site visit to VVGC would lend structure and purpose to the current god and goddesses pantheon research project.

The god and goddesses project would provide critical background knowledge such as names, roles, symbols, etc. of the gods students would encounter at VVGC. Finally, including the powerfully sensory experience of a site visit within the first major tradition in the course brings the issue and reality of lived religions to the surface in an immediate manner versus lecturing that different groups live out the tradition differently.

### ***Relationship to Broader Curriculum***

The course follows a "bucket" approach to studying five major faith traditions. Introductory weeks to the course establish an empathetic versus comparative approach, give foundational vocabulary that inherently sets up comparative categories, frame the study in an oscillation between universals and particulars in a given tradition, orient students to the Catholic Church's official teachings on studying other religions, and explore indigenous traditions. Hinduism is the first unit studied, followed by Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The course final is a group project wherein 5-6 students research and prepare a 40 minute lesson on an additional faith tradition (e.g. Sikhism, Jainism, etc.) Each of the five major faith traditions explores lived religion in a unique manner: Hinduism will be a site visit, Buddhism will be a movie clip, Judaism is a Seder ritual, Christianity will be an independent site visit for a worship service with a subsequent reflection comparing and contrasting that service to a school Catholic Mass, and Islam is a guest speaker from the ING speaker's bureau.

## ***Resources Required & Logistical Process***

### Preparation:

- Parents will be informed of potential guest speakers and field trips in the course overview packet that they sign the first week of class. That signature sheet also invites families to suggest speakers or sites to the teacher.
- Textbook reading, lecture, class discussion prompts covering Hinduism's three paths of liberation and other tenants of Hinduism – TBD by instructor
- Site visit preparation:
  - Field trip proposal form for administration approval – TBD by instructor
  - Field trip permission form to be signed by parents – TBD by instructor
  - Temple Observation & Reflection Notes (assignment) – attached
  - Students will be instructed to wear formal uniform and wear/ bring a pair of socks.
  - Alternative assignment should students not go on the field trip: Students will A) view the 1998 Smithsonian Institution 29 minute, not rated film *Puja: Expressions of Hindu Devotion* and B) use it to complete a 30-60 second multi-media PSA podcast that encourages interreligious literacy.

### Day of:

- Ground Rules: standard field trip decorum applies with special instructions related to respecting another's place of worship and careful observation.
- Assignment: Temple Observation & Reflection Notes (attached)

### Follow-up

- Reflection & assignment: Temple Observation & Reflection Notes (same as above)
- Debrief & discussion:
  - Pod (groups of 4) discussion and sharing of Temple Notes assignment
  - Class discussion comparing and academic theological approach to a lived religions approach of studying religion
- Summative assessment where students evaluate of the three paths of liberation based upon its compatibility with her own demeanor – TBD by instructor

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Religious Worlds of New York summer institute for teachers,  
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religious diversity, see:***

**[www.religiousworldsnyc.org](http://www.religiousworldsnyc.org)**

World Religions

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Ms. Donlin

Block \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Unit 2: Hinduism

### Temple Observation & Reflection Notes – 20 points total

#### **Instructions:**

First and foremost, experience the temple! Experience it in a sensory manner, note your own emotions and thoughts, critically take-in the behavior of devotees or temple officials, and more. Points are awarded for completeness and specificity. This sheet is due at the beginning of our next class (the day following this field trip).

#### **Observation Notes (10 points):**

What or who is present and what/ who is absent? What did you experience and/or witness others experiencing? If others were experiencing something, describe those participants. Consider: sights, sounds, touches, smells, tastes, ritual actions, interpersonal interactions, etc.

#### **Reflection (10 points):**

- What thoughts *and* emotions did you/ do you have?
- Where and how did you witness Bhakti Marga during the site visit?
- Name three specific additional connections you can make to class material.
- How is this experience different from learning about Hinduism through the class textbook?
- Write a specific, critical, and well worded question you now have about Hinduism? To whom would you address that question and why them?
- How is Hinduism lived out at this temple?

*\*\* Note: This would be formatted slightly differently before being photocopied. \*\**