



Religious Worlds of New York • Curriculum Development Project

Engaging the Senses at a Hindu Temple in Michigan

Becky Kraft, Plymouth High School, Canton, MI

Abstract

This project is created for use in a 9th grade World History classroom with a population of diverse learners in a required course. In this lesson, after learning about the foundations of the Indus valley civilization and Hindu principles, students will visit a neighborhood Hindu Temple attended by most Indian students in the district. This visit will be followed by a debrief wherein students will discuss what they found to be true during their time at the sacred space. The unit comes near the beginning of the school year, and the visit will be part of the first field trip of the year. It will help students to empathize with the Indian Hindu students around them, and to understand the historical and present perspective of the Hindu people as they live their religion.

Context

World History and Geography at Plymouth High School is structured thematically and taught alongside the English World Literature class. This project will take place during the second unit of study on the growth of empires in late September. The unit will begin with the river valley civilizations with an emphasis on the Indus Valley and an introduction the belief system of Hinduism as a component of civilization and continue through the Moghul Empire and its decline and with a glimpse of the modern legacy of these traditions. It will coincide with my World Literature partner's unit on the hero and more specifically the study of the Ramayana through multiple media formats.

Goals

Students will be able to view a traditional Indian text through the culturally relative lens of Indian culture, including the religious beliefs of that culture, in both traditional and modern civilizations.

Students will also be able to apply what they know of Indian culture and traditions and the religious world of Canton Hindus to better understand the experience of their neighbors and classmates.

Set-up

Students will have background in the significance of religious institutions in society as well as a framework for observation vs inference and analysis. This will be necessary to make empirical observations which will allow students to remain as objective as possible while within the temple.

Using the textbook chapters, students will have a basic knowledge of the fundamentals of early Indian civilization and geography. This information will give students the necessary schema to make sense of the origins and growth of the religion.

Students will have learned very basic principles of Hinduism such as the 4 yogas, the three main deities and their common representations/avatars. Instruction on these topics will be enhanced through use of selected readings from the Bhagavad Gita and Hindu imagery from throughout history and modern times. This will provide meaning to the actions and images they will see within the temple. We will also discuss the idea of Monotheism vs Polytheism and iconography as opposed to idolatry in the hopes that these conversations will help them to see the experience of the temple from within the culture rather than as an outsider to the culture.

Students will have a brief introduction to the temple they will be visiting including the history of the temple, guidelines for behavior inside the temple, and basic layout or what to expect from the visit. This should prepare them without imposing too much structure on their visit from the outset. Again, this will help to make sense of the space for students so that it feels less “foreign” or “other”.

Students will also each prepare three questions that they might want to ask of a practitioner of Hinduism while we are at the temple. Should we have the chance to speak with a representative, students will be able to ask their questions or others which arise while visiting the space.

Execution

Students will visit the Hindu Temple in Canton, MI where many of their classmates practice. In emulation of the experience we had on our site visits through the NEH Religious Worlds Institute, students will visit as observers maintaining open attentiveness. During their visit, students will use their class notebooks to record observations of their surroundings. What can they see, hear, smell, touch in their surroundings?

Debrief

Students will begin by reflecting on their experience at the temple by consulting their empirical evidence. For each of their observations, they will make a connection to what we've learned in the classroom about the beliefs, traditions, and practices of the Hindu community. These connections will be structured into the four categories of the yogas. Following this independent exercise, students will pair with classmates, and finally share with the larger group their findings and the connections they found. We will discuss which of the four yogas we see practiced most often in the temple, and why we may not have seen others in practice within that space.

Students will conclude with a more personal journal reflection wherein they make connections between the experience they had at the temple and experiences within their own lives or cultures. They might be able to relate practices to their own devotional traditions. They may be able to discuss some particular art that resonated with them. They will be welcomed to introduce any aspect of the experience that did not sit well with them or that disturbed them, recognizing the importance of scrutinizing their criticisms.

Assessment

I would like to give students a scenario that their neighbors in the Hindu community might encounter, and one way in which Hindus might respond. Then I'd like to have them suggest ways that their faith tradition might have informed the decision they made and justify it using vocabulary and information which we've learned in class.

I'll also read their empirical evidence from the temple and their connections to what they learned as well as their personal journals. The benefit of their journals is that I will not only be able to discover whether they learned from the lesson, but I'll also be able to discover whether I need to make any changes to what I did in order to make students feel more comfortable. In this way, it will be an assessment of the project, not of their learning.

Michigan State Standards

F3 GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF WORLD RELIGIONS: Hinduism, Judaism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam

- spatial representations of that growth (origin and growth of all six world religions)
- interactions with culturally diverse peoples (cultural diffusion)
- responses to the challenges offered by contact with different faiths (taxes, expulsions, Crusades, trade, migration)
- ways they influenced people's perceptions of the world (caste vs. equality, women's roles)

5.3.3 South Asia/India through the 18th Century

- Muslim invaders impact India by creating the Mughal Empire and spreading Islam

***For information about the
Religious Worlds of New York summer institute for teachers,
and many more resources to enrich your teaching on
religious diversity, see:***

www.religiousworldsnyc.org

At the temple:

Record your empirical observations in the quadrants below.

Sight	Touch
Smell/Taste	Sound

Debriefing

In what category would you place each of your observations from the temple yesterday? Choose the Yoga within which it best fits and then explain why you've placed it here.

Karma	Bhakti
Jnana	Raja

In which of the four categories did you find the most observations? Why do you think this is?

In which of the four categories did you find few observations? Why do you think this is?