



Religious Worlds of New York • *Curriculum Development Project*

Structuring Student Site Visits to Houses of Worship

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Abstract

All 9th graders at Lyons Community School take a required semester-long social studies course, “World Religions in NYC.” Throughout this course they learn about six different religions, looking at each one’s unique understanding of the world. They study origins, sacred texts, beliefs, rituals, daily practices and visual culture of each religion and how those religions are practiced in NYC. For their final project, students create a tour of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in which they develop a theme that is meaningful to them which they see expressed and explored in multiple religions.

An important part of this course is making site visits to places of worship for the major religions that we study. Because of First Amendment issues, it is important to make clear to students and families that these visits are a required part of their learning and the visits are for academic (secular) purposes only. The template provided in this project provides a clear structure for the academic study of a place of worship that can be used for any site visit of any religion. The student handouts and other materials included below show how this template may be used to structure a visit to a Hindu temple.

Broader Goals of the Course

The course serves two broad purposes:

- 1) It acquaints students with a broader understanding of the people in the NYC community. Despite living in an extremely diverse city, my students – like many adults – do not come into meaningful contact with people who are very different from themselves. This course is designed to enable them to think about themselves as the sort of person who engages with other people, the sort of person who can get to know, go to school or work with people who may have vastly different world-views and life stories (See Goldschmidt, “Being There: What do Students Learn by Visiting Houses of Worship?” pg 3)

2) Enter student “into a conversation” that has taken place across time and cultures “about what makes life meaningful.” Religion gets at some of the deepest questions that all people - perhaps especially teenagers - have about the meaning of life. Warren Nord and Charles Haynes argue that “every educated human being should have some grasp of the answers that people have given to these questions” because of the profound influence these questions and different ways of answering them have on our lives. (Nord and Haynes, *Taking Religion Seriously Across the Curriculum*, pp 37-38)

Specific Goals of the Project

- Students will be able to articulate how the sacred space reflects the core beliefs, worldview and practices of the religion.
- Students will design/create three photos that demonstrate what they have learned in the space and write about what they have created.
- Over the course of the five site visits conducted throughout the semester, students will grow increasingly comfortable entering unfamiliar spaces and practicing strategies for becoming exploring and learning in new spaces.

Relevant State Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

In discussion and writing: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.7

Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment. (This relates to how ideas in core texts of the religion are represented in the art and architecture of the space.)

Project Sequence

1. Do Now: Personal response and observations of the space. Write for 15 minutes – exploring the space with the senses. Using the sentence starters on their worksheet students are guided to observe more deeply as they write and reflect throughout the 15 minutes.

Rationale: This part of the visit allows students to become accustomed to the space, to develop their own ideas, questions and connections without the teacher or others mediating their experience. It also enables students to take a more secular or academic approach to the space because the sentence starters simply direct them to make observations. Clearly, they are not expected to worship or to be having a religious experience.

2. Concept development/text analysis: Read/review texts that reflect the religion's unique worldview and identify the ways that important concepts in the religion are reflected in what we observe in the space.

Rationale: The goal of this part of the visit is to allow students to see how the important concepts in the religion are lived by participants of the religion and how the space has been constructed or is used to support those beliefs/practices.

3. Site specific activities (incomplete)

- Divya Dham Temple: Student presentations on the Hindu gods
- Zen Temple:
- Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue: Meeting with community leader, tour of museum of Greek Orthodox Jewish life
- Islamic Cultural Center of New York: Meeting with imam
- Saint John the Divine

4. Exit - Capturing what you have figured out:

- a. Students take a set of only 3 photos that reflect what they have discovered in the place of worship.
- b. Students write about their photos using provided template, which will change over the course of the semester as student writing skills develop.

Rationale: The students capture what they have observed and learned by carefully creating three images and writing briefly about each of them. Students need to home in on the most salient aspects of the visit and use visual thinking strategies to create an image that conveys what was most important about the visit. [Note: students need to be exposed to the different types of photos before the first site visit.]

Types of photos students might take:

- 1 – Look back over what you wrote when we first entered the temple.
Photograph one aspect of the temple that caught your eye in those first 15 minutes.
- 2 – How can you represent the religion’s beliefs or practices in a photo? Take one photo that reflects an aspect of the religion’s worldview and how it is practiced here in the temple.
- 3 – What “world religion themes” do you see reflected in the temple? Where? Take one photo that reflects a theme. (This would be based on a list of themes or topics that we generate early on the in semester and add to throughout the course.)

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.

DRAFT – HINDU TEMPLE VISIT

Name: _____

Date: _____



Location: Divya Dham Temple, Queens NY

Who are the Hindu gods? How and why are they worshipped?

Find a quiet place to sit, away from other people and explore this space with your senses. When you are ready, use the following sentence prompts to get yourself writing about what you see. Write for 15 minutes – you need to fill in every line, write everything you are thinking/feeling. There are no wrong answers.

1. **First Glance.** The first thing I notice is ... My eye is drawn immediately to...

2. **Deeper Observation.** Looking / Smelling / Listening closer, I notice ...

3. **Emotional/ Visceral Response:** This (place/area/object) reminds me of ... This (place/area/object) makes me feel ...

4. **Analysis:** How do you think this space helps Hindus worship?

Hindu god presentations

Take notes on each presentation (not your own)

Name of Presenter: _____

God: Durga Ganesha Hanuman Kali Krishna Lakshmi Parvati Shiva Vishnu

People worship this god because . . .		
One thing I find interesting about this god is . . .		
One thing I liked about the presentation was . . .		
Attribute 1 (sketch)	Attribute 2 (sketch)	Other notes

Name of Presenter: _____

God: Durga Ganesha Hanuman Kali Krishna Lakshmi Parvati Shiva Vishnu

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