



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

## How Do You Learn About Your Faith Tradition? A Dialogue between Jewish and Muslim High School Students

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### *Abstract*

This curriculum project envisions a peer-to-peer interfaith dialogue among Jewish and Muslim high school students, exploring the similarities and differences in their experiences of religious education, both in and out of school. It was designed for use with students at a Conservative Jewish day school in the New York area. Through their work with the [Tony Blair Faith Foundation's Face to Faith program](#), these students have already participated in videoconference dialogues with their peers at Muslim schools in the US and UK.

The project, as outlined here, is built around a Face to Faith moderated videoconference, but it could easily be adapted for use with students from any two faith-based schools participating in some form of peer-to-peer interfaith dialogue. With more substantial changes (eg, a broader focus on cultural as well as religious traditions) it could also be adapted for use with students participating in cross-cultural dialogues at public or independent schools.

### *Learning/ Dialogue Goals*

George Bernard Shaw once said that England and America are “two nations divided by a common language.” Similarly, it often seems that Jews and Muslims are divided by what we have in common. Our common stories told differently in the Hebrew Bible and Qur’an, our common practices of fasting and avoiding pork, the rhythm of our daily prayers, our lunar calendars, and so on . . . . Each ends up thinking that the other got a shared truth “wrong” somehow. Interfaith discussions focusing on these topics often develop a competitive edge – “Kashrut is stricter than halal,” say the Jews, “We pray more times a day,” Muslims reply.

This lesson plan shifts Jewish-Muslim dialogue away from explicitly *religious* topics like scriptural narratives and ritual observances, by asking students to discuss the *social* and *educational* dimensions of Jewish and Muslim life. Specifically, they will be asked to explore, together, the ways they’ve each learned about their minority faith traditions in the US or UK, with the goal of identifying commonalities as well as differences.

With support from the [Face to Faith online community](#), students will participate in a moderated videoconference on the subject of learning about one's faith.

### *Before the Videoconference*

Teachers will work with Face to Faith to identify a Muslim school in the US or UK interested in partnering on the project. Students from both schools will need to complete (or will have already completed) the Introductory module of Face to Faith. Teachers from both schools will need to coordinate plans for the dialogue.

Students from both schools will do a "hand" exercise (see Face to Faith Intro module) asking: *What are the five most important questions you deal with in your faith tradition?* Post the "hands" in each classroom. Students may then participate in a "Live Chat Room" with Face to Faith, writing comments on one another's "hand" diagrams.

Students divide into teams to prepare a PowerPoint presentation about various aspects of their community and school, focusing on religious education. The two schools exchange presentations before the videoconference.

### *The Videoconference*

Students/teachers from both schools agree beforehand on the main questions for the videoconference, and discuss how they might answer the questions.

Suggested Warmup Question:

***Describe your community in three words. What is one thing you like about your school and/or community? What is one thing you wish you could change?***

Suggested Main Question:

***Where have you learned the most about your religious tradition? At home, in school, in your place of worship, in a youth group, or elsewhere? Who teaches you? And who taught your teachers?***

Suggested Follow-Up Questions on Faith-Based School Life:

***Why did you and/or your parents choose this school for you?***

***What religious studies courses do you take? What do you learn in these courses? What does a person need to know to be active in your religious community?***

***How do you study your sacred scripture? What are you supposed to get out of it? What do you personally get out of it?***

Students might also choose to discuss:

*What have you learned through formal rites of passage?*

*Does your school prepare you for a leadership role in your community? Is there a focus on character education? A community service requirement?*

*Does your school have a dress code? Why? What have you learned from it?*

*Who leads prayers in your school? How long do they take? What does they consist of?*

*Are your secular studies taught in a different way than in public school?*

*What is the relationship between the school and its faith community? What about the broader secular or religiously diverse society?*

Digging deeper:

*What are the most important questions you deal with in your faith? (refer to the hand exercise)*

*Choose one of them. Two or three different students describe how they answer those questions.*

Summing up:

*Ask students to share one thing they learned from the dialogue.*

***For information about the Face to Faith program, and creating peer-to-peer interfaith dialogue through moderated videoconferences see:***

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

***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)***