



**UNION**

*Religious Worlds of New York • Curriculum Development Project*

## Imagining Early American Interfaith Dialogue

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### **Synopsis:**

In this 3 class-period unit, students will research a number of the faith traditions represented in the early American colonies, then choose a historical “panelist” to represent the faith tradition they researched. Working in groups, students will discuss the creation of a “Colonial American Faiths Panel,” and choose a limited number of panelists (from the 10+ traditions presented). Students will evaluate aspects such as the legacy of these groups based on this research.

### **Implementation/ Rationale:**

This project is designed to fit into a high school-level United States History I course in the unit on European settlement in the Americas. This unit is one of the first in the course and begins to teach American history, but more importantly the skills associated with studying history, including critical analysis, respectful conversations/discourse and research ethics and skills.

### **Essential Questions:**

- Who made up the American colonies and how did their faith traditions shape (or not shape) our present country?
- What is the “dominant narrative” of a community of historical period and who creates it?

### **Objectives:**

Students will be able to examine the diversity of faith traditions in the American colonies, while critically examining their impact in on the country since their arrival/foundation. In addition, they will practice skills of research, respectful discourse, discussion, and speaking/listening.

# Unit Plan

(Class; Day 1)

1. Class will watch and discuss a Ted Talk to begin the conversation and studying of the concept of a “panel discussion”. (Discussion questions include: Who are the panelists? What is his/her background/age group/gender etc.? Why do you think these people were put on this panel or who are they meant to represent? What are the strengths of having a panel? What are the weaknesses? What conversation skills do you see being used by the panelists? What does respectful conversation and discourse look like?)
2. In partners/ small groups, students will be assigned a particular faith group in the Euro-American colonies between the 16th and 18th centuries.

(Beginning in class, completing for homework)

3. Students will use the internet and databases to learn about their faith group. Then groups will choose one figure to represent that faith tradition on a “historical panel discussion”.

Possible groups:

- Puritans
- African Traditions
- Jews
- Catholics
- South-eastern Natives
- North-eastern Natives
- Muslims
- Quakers
- Evangelical Baptists
- Anglicans

4. Groups will create an informative visual about that person. One suggestion is in the style of a poster with the person’s likeness and information and documentation about their tradition’s ideals and legacy, or an “interview” with questions such as “tell us about your faith tradition” “tell us about its role in your life” “tell us about the role of... in your tradition” etc.

(Class Day 2)

5. Groups will share-out these figures while the audience takes notes on each.

(Homework)

6. Using their notes from class, students will independently answer in a few paragraphs: If you had to create a “Colonial American Faiths Panel” containing 3-4 panelists from the figures you and your classmates have presented who would sit on it and why? What would be your criterion for including/ discluding a group? (Group size? Historical impact? Present presence? Present impact? Inclusion in the dominant narrative? Exclusion from the dominant narrative? etc)

(Class Day 3)

7. Students will have a “Socratic Seminar”- style discussion answering the same question they did for homework: If you had to create a “Colonial American Faiths Panel” containing 3-4 panelists from the figures you and your classmates have presented who would sit on it and why?
8. Exit/ Reflection: Student Journal Entry: Reflect on who “made the panel” and why? Who was left off of it? What does that tell you? Are we creating or abiding by a “dominant narrative” why or why not?

(Homework)

9. Answer the following in a few paragraphs: If we did this same project for our city today who “would be on our panel” and why?

## Resources:

- Ted Talk; The Interfaith Amigos -- Breaking the taboos of interfaith dialogue  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPnZArtsG\\_c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPnZArtsG_c)
- PBS God in America Series Resources  
<http://www.pbs.org/godinamerica/view/>

## Relevant Standards:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.B Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.D Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.
- NJ-CCCS. SS.6.1.12.1.A.b Analyze how gender, property ownership, religion and legal status affected political rights
- NJ-CCCS. SS 6.1.12.D.14.e Evaluate the role of religion on cultural and social mores, public opinion, and political decisions.
- NJ-CCCS. SS 6.2.12.B.2.a Relate the division of European regions during this time period into those that remained Catholic and those that became Protestant to the practice of religion in the New World.

***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).***