



**UNION**

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

## Introducing Religious Worldviews

*Tara Rigby, Fossil Ridge High School, Fort Collins, CO*

### ***Abstract***

This project consists of a series of introductory activities for a comparative religions course. This course is offered to 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students at a public high school, as one option for fulfilling a humanities requirement for graduation.

The purpose of this project is to introduce students to the study of religion by exploring both religious and secular influences on socialization and the development of worldviews. A strong emphasis will be placed upon religious diversity both within and among the faith traditions practiced within the United States, particularly as they pertain to the concept of lived religion.

Students will be required to:

1. Read and discuss a poem, to introduce the importance of learning about/across differences.
2. Watch and discuss a brief video, to introduce the importance of worldview and socialization.
3. Create their own brief videos, interviewing peers and/or community members to explore their worldviews.
4. Read a series of sources on American religious diversity, then write on an essential question:  
***How are the lived experiences of Americans influenced by religion?***

Within their responses, text-based evidence will be required for the purpose of supporting their information/explanatory writing. The written results of this activity will serve as a jumping off point for students as they continue to formulate their thoughts and ideas related to this essential question throughout the duration of the course.

The design and progression of activities is based on templates provided by the Literacy Design Collaborative. The formula for creating the informational/explanatory writing task, along with the accompanying rubric, can be found within these materials. Also included is a list of Common Core standards met by each writing task. [Click here for these Literacy Design Collaborative templates and other materials.](#)

## ***Learning Activities***

The following text- and video-based activities will provide the sources needed for students to formulate their final, written response to the essential question.

### **1. Poem Analysis with Text Rendering**

#### [A Ritual to Read to Each Other, by William Stafford](#)

This poem will provide a basis for discussion in which students reflect upon the importance of engaging with others in a respectful and meaningful manner. This reflection will be significant in that it will provide them with a framework for the course. It is important to introduce the idea of maintaining open and engaging minds while developing an awareness of personal world views as they enter into the study of people different from themselves.

Students should read and annotate this poem for homework. Within class, they will be asked to read the poem out loud by taking turns reading each stanza. Each student in class will be asked to report out one word or phrase that they selected from the poem that was of particular significance to them.

Questions for reflection: Why is it important to know about people who are different from you? What gets in the way of positively engaging and understanding others? Who makes the “patterns” about the other that you end up believing?

### **2. Video Analysis and Discussion**

#### [What does it mean to be awake in the world?, interviews by Religion and Ethics Newsweekly](#)

Many students will select the line “awake people be awake” from the William Stafford poem above. Following the discussion of the poem, and the many and varied text selections from students, we will come back to this concept of “awake people be awake”. What does that mean to the students?

Show the five minute video that asks the question, “What does it mean to be awake in the world?” to a selection of people.

Use discussion of the video to introduce the concept of “worldview,” by asking students: What do you think influenced the responses of the people interviewed? Where do we develop our beliefs and values?

This discussion should develop into an understanding that there are a number of places from which people develop their beliefs and values and, in combination, they create the framework from which we view the world. These agents of socialization can include: Family, School, Peers, Religion, Government, Mass Media.

Through discussion and lecture, students will be introduced to the sociological concept of socialization and the agents through which socialization occurs. At this point, there is no special

attention given to “religion” within the discussion. It is simply identify as one of many places for socialization to occur.

### 3. Video Production Project

Students will now be asked to replicate the video project that they just observed. They should develop a question that might offer a clue into people’s worldviews, then film the responses of a cross section of people within their local community.

They can limit their interviews to students and staff within the school, or branch out to family and other community members. The goal is simply to allow people to respond to the question with no further prompting other than, “We are doing a project for school, would you be willing to briefly answer this question on film?” Final products should be no longer than four to five minutes in length.

Students can come up with their own question, or select from the following options.

***What is . . . [charity, compassion, community, forgiveness, hope, vengeance, despair, cruelty, commitment, justice, fairness, love, acceptance, hospitality] ?***

Once students have completed their video projects, the class will view and discuss the final outcomes. Questions for discussion might include:

- Are there similarities among answers? What might contribute to the similarities?
- Are there differences among answers? What might contribute to the differences?
- Where do we develop our understanding of these concepts?
- How would you categorize these questions? Beliefs? Values? Morals? Ethics?
- What is “World View”, and how does it impact our lives?
- How does our socialization impact our “World View”?

I want students to see the commonalities because I think that there will be many similar answers. The purpose here is to allow students to begin seeing these questions as value based or morally based. The similarities are often products of common culture and similar socialization experiences that do not necessarily stem from religion alone.

Additional Questions for discussion once religion has been isolated as an agent of socialization:

- What observations might indicate that religion impacted people’s answers?
- Was religion the only thing influencing these answers?
- Was it a powerful thing for some people? Why do you think so or not?
- Where else do people develop a concept of morality?

Students should understand that morality and value based socialization happens for all members of society regardless of religious affiliation. However, I also want them to eventually recognize that many answers likely were expressly guided by the religion of the individual. This will also be an

opening into the guided understanding that not every individual will be impacted by their religion in the same way as others, even when socialized into the same religious tradition.

These concepts can be introduced by asking the students how the answers might change if the questions were to be worded slightly differently. For example, instead of asking “What is...”, how might answers have been different if you began your question with “Who is...?”, “What groups are...”, or “What political party is...” This change in questioning should allow students to consider that even when concepts of value and morality are similar in how they are *described*, the act of identifying *examples* of those concepts in lived experiences depends entirely on a person’s world view. In addition, this world view can be deeply shaped by one’s religious identity.

#### 4. Additional Readings and Final Writing Assignment

Students can now be introduced to the essential question that is being introduced by this set of activities: ***How are the lived experiences of Americans influenced by religion?*** This question will continue to be asked throughout the duration of the course, but the following additional texts and activities will be used to help students formulate an initial response to the question.

After reading/exploring the sources provided below, as well as sources from the previous learning activities, students will write two or three paragraphs in which they begin to explain the ways that religion influences the lived experiences of Americans. They will need to support their discussion with evidence from the texts. (Note: as “texts,” we are including video and graphic analyses in addition to written texts, as sources from which students can draw support.)

The additional texts:

**Reading:** [Sociology Now by Michael Kimmel and Amy Aronson](#), 2010, pp. 503-505

This brief textbook reading will give students an introduction to the demographics of religious practice within the United States.

**Web Search and Analysis:** [The Association of Religion Data Archives](#)

Students should use this activity to view and interpret data sets that identify religious affiliation within the United States. They should begin by creating a pie graph from the data set that represents the percentage of religious followers in a visual format. The goal, ultimately, is to compare religious followers within the United States to the rest of the world. Teachers should select a list of regions that are required for the purpose of comparison, but students will be asked to select and include an additional region of their choice.

**Reading:** [“Religion and Everyday Life in America” by Jon C. Malinowski, Ph.D.](#)

This brief reading will introduce how religion is present in our everyday lived experiences even when we don’t belong to a particular religious tradition. Students will begin to see how religion shapes society, popular culture, and legislation. This reading can be extended through a paired discussion where students come up with additional thoughts on how religion is seen within secular society.

## *Culminating Assignment*

**How are the lived experiences of Americans influenced by religion?**

After reading the sources provided, write two or three paragraphs in which you begin to explain the way that religion influences the lived experiences of Americans. Support your discussion with evidence from the texts.

Students should now formulate an in-class written response to the above question. The rubric from the Literacy Design Collaborative for Information/Explanatory writing should be used for assessment.

***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).***