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*Religious Worlds of New York • Curriculum Development Project*

# Independent Student Explorations of Religious Diversity

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## Abstract

I teach in an independent Catholic girls school in Los Angeles. The school is very diverse, and its culture is fairly progressive, both politically and theologically. I teach a year-long World Religions elective course. I have tried to lead class visits to various religious sites, but over time these trips have gotten harder and harder to pull off. Instead, I've decided to do a project where each student goes on an individual visit, then reflects on the experience and reports back to the class. Ideally, about 10 students will individually (or sometimes in pairs) visit a religious site of their choosing connected to the unit we're studying. After 3 or 4 weeks of study as a class, those 10 students will present slides of their various visits and their reflections.

## Learning Goals

Each student will do one field trip per semester, reflect on it, and report back to the class about their experiences. There are four main goals of this project:

1. Get students out of their comfort zones and into the big wide wonderful world of religious diversity in L.A.
2. Help students discover something about a world religion as it is made concrete in one particular local community.
3. Allow students to practice skills of observation, communication, and respect, as well as research, reflection, and writing skills.
4. Help students appreciate the *internal* diversity of religious traditions by learning from their peers about their visit experiences.

## Handout for Students

Use the following questions to organize your process. (Make a copy of this document and answer the questions.)

1. What space will you visit? *It could be a "house of worship" or temple, but it could also be a study center or community center, or an outdoor gathering, or a private home for a religious event, or maybe even a grocery store. Put the full name and address of the place.*
2. Why have you chosen this place to visit? *Is it a place in your neighborhood? A place you've heard of? A place you found on google? Answer here:*
3. Before your visit, do a little background research on the place. What have you learned? *As you know, big religious traditions like "Hinduism" and "Islam" are internally diverse. Where in the larger religious world does this place fit? For example, if you were going to visit a Christian church, is it a Lutheran church? A Romanian Orthodox church? A Catholic church? If Catholic, is it a diocesan church? A Franciscan Church? Is it a Filipino parish? If it's called "St. Elizabeth of Hungary" parish, who is St. Elizabeth of Hungary? What's the history of the place? What makes it important for the local religious community. Answer in one solid paragraph: 4-8 sentences:*
4. Contact the site. *This is optional, but it might be a good idea, because you might be able to learn about best times to visit, learn specifics like dress codes, and maybe even set up a meeting with someone during your visit. If you contact the site, explain that you are a World Religions student from I.H. and tell them the purpose of your visit (to learn about how the religion is lived, through observation, inquiry, & immersion in a religious site). Again, you don't have to do this, but if you visit a place and don't experience some kind of religious practice and talk to a real person, you can't get full credit. If you contact the site, and or receive a response, copy and paste all that correspondence (complete with dates) here:*
5. When will you go, and what do you hope to experience? *Ideally, you should plan to visit when there will be some sort of activity going on that you can observe and talk to people. Just being in a space is good, but it's better to see, hear, and smell real people "doing" religion. So what activity do you plan to witness? A puja? a seder? a lecture? a meditation session? Working in a soup kitchen? Answer here, and include date and time:*
6. Who will you go with? *You can visit with at most ONE other World Religions student, from either your section or my other section. You can also go with another friend or friends, parent(s), sibling(s), etc. Answer here:*

7. Parent/guardian Signature. *You need the permission of a parent/guardian to make your visit! Parents: ask questions before you sign! If you would like to contact me with questions or concerns, I'm at agrindon@ihs.immaculateheart.org*

I give my permission for my child to participate in this project and make this visit.

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parent/guardian signature

date

8. The Actual Visit: Look, listen, think, feel, ask questions.

*Be respectful and curious. ENGAGE the people you meet. To the extent that it's possible and respectful, take pictures and selfies, video and audio.*

9. Reflection Questions. *(answer in 4-8 sentences per question)*

—Describe what happened during your visit.

—Describe some noteworthy sights, sounds, tastes, textures, and smells you experienced.

—How did your actual experience match with what you *thought* you would experience before you went?

—Based on your experience, how would you relate your learning to the “Belief Behavior Belonging” framework we discussed at the beginning of the year?

—How did your experience either fit with or broaden or challenge our class learning about this tradition? (Use the vocab you've learned!)

—What are two follow-up questions you have about your experience and your learning?

10. Presentation *Each student will share their experience with the class in a 5-10 minute presentation. If you took some pictures, show them. This does not need to be a formal powerpoint presentation. No notes! If you did all the previous steps, this will be easy and fun. Be ready to answer questions, so you may need to do a little follow-up research on something you saw or heard.*

11. Listen and take notes. *there will be a question on the final exam about the other presentations*

## Grading Rubric:

Visiting the place you signed up to visit:	20 points
Parent/guardian signature	20 points
Thoughtful completion of the above document	30 points
Quality of presentation	10 points
Evidence that you had a real conversation with a real person:	10 points
Evidence that you observed (participated?) in some sort of religious activity, service, etc.	10 points
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	100 points total

***For information about the Religious Worlds of New York  
summer institute for teachers, and more resources to enrich your teaching  
on religious diversity, visit [www.religiousworldsnyc.org](http://www.religiousworldsnyc.org).***