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Soccer as Religion (Maybe): Belief, Behavior, and Belonging in Sports

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Abstract

For many American teachers and students, the study of world religions can be intimidating. Due to the deeply personal nature of religious life in America, as well as the unfamiliarity with other religious traditions, it can be challenging to prepare students to approach the study of religion as an academic topic. The following lesson helps students “break the ice” for the study of religion by exploring arguably religious dimensions of a major sport – soccer. The lesson was developed for any high school course on world religions that needs an engaging, analytical lesson about the definition of “religion.”

Students will start by examining what many scholars have described the three major components of religious life, **belief**, **behavior**, and **belonging**. They will then use YouTube highlights, primary sources (news stories) and personal reflections to answer the question, “*Can soccer be viewed as a religion?*”

The goal of this lesson is not to have students staunchly support or oppose the labeling of soccer as religious, but rather to see the different ways that belief, behavior, and belonging can be applied to lived religious experience. Students will build off their definitions of these terms when applying them to other religions practiced around the United States and the world.

Teacher Goal, Student Goal, and Overall Goal

1. Teacher goal: The goal for teachers is to offer students the tools needed to understand components of modern religions, as well as to prepare students to answer essential questions about lived religion in the United States and around the world.
2. Student Goal: The goal for students is to approach world religions with an open mind and be willing/able to analyze the differing ways people practice their religion. Students need to understand how to analyze behavior, belief and belonging among religious groups.
3. Overall Goals: The overall goal of this lesson is for teachers and students to work together to build understanding about diverse religions, and practice the tools needed to analyze religious life.

Curricular Context

This assignment could be used in a history or social studies class to introduce the concept of religions in a way that is free of religious intolerance or prejudice. In addition, it will allow students to study soccer in the same way religious beliefs can be studied (by using behavior, belief and belonging—see the resources sections below for a slide on the 3B Framework of behavior, belief, and belonging). The skills used to analyze soccer would eventually be applied to lived religions.,

Procedure

1. Opener/Bell Ringer- Have students answer the question, “What Do You See?” when looking at a collection of soccer images such as the crowd during play, players facing off after a hard foul, a celebration after a goal by players, Wembley stadium lit up during a game, etc. (See resources below for example images.) Discuss students' responses.
2. Instruction: Have students create definitions and examples of **belief**, **behavior**, and **belonging**, and share their definitions and examples with partners. Then provide formal definitions and examples via Google Slides. (See graphic organizer below for a helpful tool for the exercise.)
3. Class Discussion: Return to the images of soccer from the opener and have students find examples of belief, behavior, and belonging in the images.

4. Individual Work: Students use samples provided to find examples of belief, behavior, and belonging in soccer. (See suggested examples in resources below).
5. Class debrief: Ask students to provide examples to the whole class of behavior, belief and belonging from their individual work.
6. Closer/Exit-Slip: Have students answer the question, “Do you think soccer can be religious? Why or why not?”

Formative Assessment

Students will be assessed continuously during the lesson, but specifically when they are working on the discussion of how the open images represent behavior, belief and belonging. Students will also be assessed during the individual work as teachers will circulate the room to probe understanding and challenge examples students have found. The final assessment will be when students answer the exit slip (see below) with evidence from their individual analysis.

Resources


Examples of images to use for the opener/bellringer



<https://www.buzzfeed.com/noradominick/us-womens-world-cup-soccer-celebration-pictures>



<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/14/sports/soccer/german-soccer-team-kneels-in-solidarity-with-nfl-players-protests.html>

<p>Definition of Belief, Behavior, Belonging</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">2. WHAT IS RELIGION? <i>Religious Identity</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Religious Identity: 3B Framework</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 33%; vertical-align: top;"> <p>3B Framework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1. Belief ● 2. Behavior ● 3. Belonging </td> <td style="width: 33%; vertical-align: top;"> <p>A: Sacred</p> <p>theologies, doctrines, sacred narratives, and holy texts</p> <p>holy rites and rituals</p> <p>trans-historical, trans-national community of co-religionists complete with a social structure</p> </td> <td style="width: 33%; vertical-align: top;"> <p>B: Mundane</p> <p>social values and ethics</p> <p>habits and daily practices</p> <p>racial, ethnic, familial, gender, sexual, and other identities</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p>3B Framework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1. Belief ● 2. Behavior ● 3. Belonging 	<p>A: Sacred</p> <p>theologies, doctrines, sacred narratives, and holy texts</p> <p>holy rites and rituals</p> <p>trans-historical, trans-national community of co-religionists complete with a social structure</p>	<p>B: Mundane</p> <p>social values and ethics</p> <p>habits and daily practices</p> <p>racial, ethnic, familial, gender, sexual, and other identities</p>
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<p>Graphic Organizer (For defining Belief, Behavior, Belonging)</p>	<p>See below.</p>			
<p>Sample for Individual Student Analysis of Soccer</p>	<p>Sacramento Republic Miracle Win LINK</p>  <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRnKLGMAtbM</p> <p>Famous Soccer Quotes: LINK</p> <p>Ten Most Beautiful Soccer Stadiums: LINK</p> <p>Church of Diego Maradona: LINK</p>			
<p>Exit Slip</p>	<p>See below.</p>			

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.

Graphic Organizer for Behavior, Belief and Belonging

Task: Use the chart below to create your definitions of the vocabulary terms behavior, belief and belonging.

Student Definition and Example of Behavior	Student Definition and Example of Belief	Student Definition and Example of Belonging
Partner Definition and Example of Behavior	Partner Definition and Example of Belief	Partner Definition and Example of Belonging
Teacher Definition and Example of Behavior	Teacher Definition and Example of Belief	Teacher Definition and Example of Belonging

Name:

Soccer as Religion Exit Slip

Task: Answer the question below using one piece of evidence from class for behavior, belief and belonging.

Essential Question:

Do you think soccer can be experienced or described as religious? Why or why not?

Self-Evaluation:

How well do you understand the terms behavior, belief and belonging? Can you provide an example for each? (circle below and explain in one sentence)

- 1** (I am very confused)
- 2** (I understand it but still struggle)
- 3** (I am confident I know it)
- 4** (I can teach it to someone else)

One sentence explanation of self-evaluation: