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Religious Worlds of New York • Curriculum Development Project

Belief, Behavior, and Belonging: Journaling on the “3 Bs”

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Abstract

This project outlines an ongoing journal assignment for a yearlong required ninth grade world religions class at an Episcopal independent school in New York City. After an introductory unit, the class spends around five weeks (with one hour-long class per week) on each of the so-called “Big Five” religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Each of these units includes a site visit to a local house of worship.

This journaling assignment will serve as the catalyst for the introductory unit, with the first three classes requiring a journal entry, but entries will also be assigned after every site visit at the end of every religion unit, and at the end of the year.

The theme of the journal is based on the [3B Framework](#) developed by scholars of religion including [Douglas Marshall](#), and adapted for K-12 education by Ben Marcus of the Religious Freedom Center of the Freedom Forum Institute (now called [Newseum Institute](#)). This framework is a tool for describing and understanding religious life and identity formation through three different factors: **belief, behavior, and belonging**.

After introducing the “3 Bs” in the first class, students will be asked to reflect on these three categories of identity in their own lives (regardless of whether the student identifies as “religious”). The journal’s subsequent entries will ask students to discuss how each religion unit and site visit sheds light on a religious tradition’s internally diverse perspectives on beliefs, behavior, and belonging.

Learning Goals

- Students will identify points of both connection and difference between their own worldviews and those found in different religious traditions (even, or perhaps especially, if the student does not identify as religious in any way)
- Students will demonstrate diverse ways in which people situate themselves within broader religious traditions
- Students will deeply consider their own religious or secular identities in the ways that matter most to them

Journaling Instructions

Over the course of the year, you will be asked to write journal entries based on given prompts. These journal entries are meant to document your **personal** ideas and experiences— you will be very much speaking from the “I” perspective. These entries should thoughtfully and thoroughly engage with the prompt at hand.

Each *initial* journal entry is graded credit/no credit based on completion, and I will provide comments (I will also incorporate these journal entries into class discussions and activities, so keeping up is very important!). **At the end of each semester, however, you will submit typed, revised and polished highlights (2 entries of your choosing) which will be letter graded.** I will give more details for my expectations towards

Journal Entry Prompts, Over Course of the Year

Intro Class #2: Belief

In at least 250 words, answer **one** of the following prompts:

- A) What is your personal motto and why?
- B) If you were caught in a sticky moral dilemma, what would you do? Whom would you consult? What factors would you consider?
- C) What does it mean to be a good person? Is it important to be a good person? Why?
- D) Do you think about the afterlife? What do you think happens after we die?

Intro Class #3: Behavior

Choose one holiday, either religious or secular, that you celebrate annually and is important to you. In at least 250 words, answer **each of the following** questions:

- A) To you, what are the most essential elements of this holiday? If you didn't celebrate the holiday this year, what traditions would you miss the most?
- B) What traditions are unique to you/your family, and what traditions are more broadly seen?
- C) Are there stories associated with this holiday? If so, how well do you know them? Are they an important part of celebrating the holiday for you (ex: do you read these stories every year, or see them performed)?
- D) What do you do in order to participate in this celebration (ex: do you give presents, make certain foods, travel somewhere)?

Intro Class #4: Belonging

In at least 250 words, answer **one** of the following prompts:

- A) What does it mean to "belong" to a space or community?
- B) In what spaces do you feel most comfortable or welcome? What is your home (or homes) "away from home?" If it is a physical space, what does it look/sound/smell like?
- C) What identities are the most important to you and your sense of self? Are there any tensions between your different identities?

Site Visit Reflection #1: Hindu Temple

In at least 250 words, answer **TWO** of the following prompts:

- A) What did it feel like to be in the space? What sights/sounds/smells stood out to you?
- B) How did this site reflect Hindu beliefs or stories that we learned about in class?
- C) What Hindu practices were discussed and/or shown? How did the people around you interact with the space?
- D) What did you learn about this specific Hindu community?

Unit Reflection #1: Hinduism

In at least 250 words, reflect on our study of Hinduism in terms of **beliefs, behavior, and belonging**. Here are some prompts to get you started:

What aspects of the religion felt most familiar to you and your experience? What aspects were most new to you?

What stories, images, or practices made the biggest impressions on you and why?

Fill in the blanks: "I used to think that Hinduism/Hindus _____, but now I know _____"

What questions remain for you? What more would you like to know about either Hinduism or specific Hindu communities and why?

Site Visit Reflection #2: Buddhist Temple

In at least 250 words, answer at least **TWO** of the following prompts:

- A) What did it feel like to be in the space? What sights/sounds/smells stood out to you?
- B) How did this site reflect Buddhist beliefs or stories that we learned about in class?
- C) What Buddhist practices were discussed and/or shown? How did the people around you interact with the space?
- D) What did you learn about this specific Buddhist community?

Unit Reflection #2: Buddhism

In at least 250 words, reflect on our study of Buddhism in terms of **beliefs, behavior, and belonging**. Here are some prompts to get you started:

What aspects of the religion felt most familiar to you and your experience? What aspects were most new to you?

What stories, images, or practices made the biggest impressions on you and why?

Fill in the blanks: "I used to think that Buddhism/Buddhists _____, but now I know _____"

What questions remain for you? What more would you like to know about either Buddhist or specific Buddhist communities and why?

Site Visit Reflection #3: Synagogue

In at least 250 words, answer at least **TWO** of the following prompts:

- A) What did it feel like to be in the space? What sights/sounds/smells stood out to you?
- B) How did this site reflect Jewish beliefs or stories that we learned about in class?
- C) What Jewish practices were discussed and/or shown? How did the people around you interact with the space?
- D) What did you learn about this specific Jewish community?

Unit Reflection #3: Judaism

In at least 250 words, reflect on our study of Judaism in terms of **beliefs, behavior, and belonging**. Here are some prompts to get you started:

What aspects of the religion felt most familiar to you and your experience? What aspects were most new to you?

What stories, images, or practices made the biggest impressions on you and why?

Fill in the blanks: "I used to think that Judaism/Jews _____, but now I know _____"

What questions remain for you? What more would you like to know about either Judaism or specific Jewish communities and why?

Site Visit Reflection #4: Grace Church

In at least 250 words, answer at least **TWO** of the following prompts:

- A) What did it feel like to be in this space in the context of a religion class? What sights/sounds/smells stood out to you? Did you notice different aspects of the church that you hadn't noticed before?
- B) How did this site reflect Christian beliefs or stories that we learned about in class?
- C) What different ways have people interacted with the church? How do *you* interact in the church during chapel?
- D) Did this visit change your perspective on Grace Church? If so, in what ways?

Unit Reflection #4: Christianity

In at least 250 words, reflect on our study of Christianity in terms of *beliefs, behavior, and belonging*. Here are some prompts to get you started:

What aspects of the religion felt most familiar to you and your experience? What aspects were most new to you?

What stories, images, or practices made the biggest impressions on you and why?

Fill in the blanks: "I used to think that Christianity/Christians _____, but now I know _____"

What questions remain for you? What more would you like to know about either Christianity or specific Christian communities and why?

Site Visit Reflection #5: Mosque

In at least 250 words, answer at least **TWO** of the following prompts:

- A) What did it feel like to be in the space? What sights/sounds/smells stood out to you?
- B) How did this site reflect Muslim beliefs or stories that we learned about in class?
- C) What Muslim practices were discussed and/or shown? How did the people around you interact with the space?
- D) What did you learn about this specific Muslim community?

Unit Reflection #5: Islam

In at least 250 words, reflect on our study of Islam in terms of *beliefs, behavior, and belonging*. Here are some prompts to get you started:

What aspects of the religion felt most familiar to you and your experience? What aspects were most new to you?

What stories, images, or practices made the biggest impressions on you and why?

Fill in the blanks: "I used to think that Islam/Muslims _____, but now I know _____"

What questions remain for you? What more would you like to know about either Islam or specific Muslim communities and why?

End of the Year Journal Entry #1: Learning about religion

In at least 250 words, answer **at least one** of the following prompts. Be sure to cite specific examples from class content to provide evidence:

- A) Does religion matter? What roles does religion play in society today?
- B) Why study religion in high school? Should religion be a required class? Why or why not?
- C) How would you define “religion?”

End of the Year Journal Entry #2: Checking in on Your 3 Bs

In at least 250 words, check in with yourself and reflect on your own identity in terms of beliefs, behavior, and belonging. Here are some prompts to get you started:

- A) Whom or what do you look to for guidance on how to navigate the world?
- B) What traditions do you participate in that are meaningful to you, and why are they meaningful?
- C) What stories most resonate with you and why?
- D) What communities are most meaningful to you and why?

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