



# Essential Questions and Enduring Understandings

*Grade 12 World of Religions: A Canadian Perspective* employs enduring understandings and essential questions from *Understanding by Design*, an approach to curriculum development by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe.

**Essential Question:** An essential question is “a question that lies at the heart of a subject or a curriculum (as opposed to being either trivial or leading) and promotes inquiry and uncoverage of a subject. Essential questions thus do not yield a single straightforward answer (as a leading question does) but produce different plausible responses, about which thoughtful and knowledgeable people may disagree.” An essential question can be either overarching or topical (unit-specific) in scope. (Wiggins and McTighe)

## Essential Questions

- are open-ended and resist a simple or single right answer
- are thought-provoking
- require students to draw upon content knowledge and personal experience
- can be revisited throughout the learning experience to engage students in evolving
- encourage dialogue and debate
- lead to other essential questions posed by students

**Enduring Understanding:** B.F. Skinner said, “Education is what survives when what has been learnt has been forgotten.” This statement encapsulates the notion of enduring understandings.

In *Understanding by Design*, by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, enduring understandings are defined as “specific inferences, based on big ideas that have lasting value beyond the classroom.” These are typically written as full-sentence statements about what, specifically, students will understand and be able to use later on in life, even when the small details of what they learned have been forgotten.

Enduring understandings are also transferable in new situations. Wiggins and McTighe explain that, because enduring understandings are often abstract “they require uncoverage through sustained inquiry rather than one-shot coverage. The student must come to understand or be helped to grasp the idea, as a result of work. If teachers treat an understanding like a fact, the student is unlikely to get it.”

### Enduring Understandings

- represent big ideas having enduring value beyond the classroom
- reside at the heart of the discipline (involve “doing” the subject)
- require uncoverage (of abstract or often misunderstood ideas)
- offer potential for engaging students

## Overarching (Diversity of Religions): Essential Questions

1. What is religion? Why is it important?
  - What is religion and what is religious perspective?
  - Is there a difference between religion and spirituality?
  - Does everyone have a religious perspective?
  - What are basic concepts that define religion?
  - What is the purpose of religion?
  - Are there fundamental needs that all or nearly all people share? What are they? How might religion be understood as a way of addressing these needs and questions?
2. What is the relationship between science, religion, and belief?
  - What is science? Is it a form of belief? What is the difference between a scientific fact and a scientific belief? (Is a hypothesis/theory a belief or a fact?) Are science and religion/belief oppositional?
  - What is the difference between the natural and supernatural? Does the supernatural exist? For whom?
  - Does religion/belief need to be scientifically/historically verified or proven?
3. Should religion/religious belief/creed be a right? Why or why not? Specifically, which religion/religious beliefs/creed?
4. What are the religions and religious perspectives that are present in my community, in Manitoba, in Canada, and in the World?
5. Do I have a specific religion or religious perspective with which I identify and how does it influence or affect me?
  - Do you have a specific or well-defined religious perspective?
  - Where did it come from/develop?
  - What do I know about religious diversity?
  - How does learning about other religious perspectives further your understanding of your own religious perspective?

6. How do I study and gather information about religious diversity?
  - There are many different perspectives from which to view world religions: historical, theological, anthropological, literary, artistic, sociological, and so forth. What are some of the approaches that may be used to study diverse religious perspectives? How do these approaches shed light on different elements?
  - How can we use inquiry and critical literacy approaches to help gather, analyze, and understand different religious perspectives and faith traditions?
  - How can we study religious diversity from a neutral, academic stance, and use inquiry and critical literacy approaches to help gather, analyze, and understand different religious perspectives and faith traditions?
  - How can we study religion in a collaborative, respectful manner?
7. How do religion or religious perspectives inform and influence individuals, groups, or societies?
8. What do we mean by religious pluralism? Can people of different religions and beliefs live together in peace?
9. Is it important to have religious rights protected? Are they part of our collective human rights?
10. How can knowledge of my own religious perspective and of religious diversity help me live and work with others of diverse faiths and beliefs?
11. How has religion influenced society?

## Overarching (Diversity of Religions): Enduring Understandings

Recognize that

1. Human experience presents deep and complex questions, and appreciate that religions seek to understand and answer these deep questions of life.
2. There is a great diversity of religions and that within each religion there is great diversity of views and interpretations.
3. All religions develop and evolve over time—understanding that religious expression varies with time. Students will understand that religions are historical in nature and thus contain elements of both change and continuity.
4. Religion and culture continually intersect. Students will recognize that each religion is shaped by the culture in which it grew, as well as how it continues to shape and influence cultures today.

5. Each religion or religious perspective needs to be understood and respected on its own, but that comparative analysis and awareness of similarities and differences will help develop a good understanding of diversity.
6. Religious literacy is a key aspect of appreciating multiculturalism and diversity in contemporary Canadian society.
7. Religious literacy is a social competency that is widely recognized as valuable, particularly by minority religious communities.
8. A person's right to religious freedom necessitates the recognition of the rights of others to their religious freedom.
9. The study of religions is an inter-disciplinary and cross-curricular enterprise (history, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, arts, psychology, spirituality, etc.).
10. It is important to acknowledge and address stereotypes or inaccuracies that may be prevalent with respect to a specific religion or religions.
11. Respecting religious diversity or another specific religion does not require that we adopt or follow that religion.
12. It is important to be aware of our own biases and how they may impact on our values and interactions with persons of other religious perspectives.
13. One's religion is closely linked to their personal identity. Students will be able to identify and honour the importance that religious practice holds among people of faith.
14. Important insights may be gained by observing or participating in a gathering or event of another religious tradition or group.
15. Relationships of trust are built on personal contact. Students will value interacting with and learning from people of various religious beliefs.
16. It is important to be aware of and sensitive to people of other religions or worldviews in order to be better local and global citizens.
17. Through dialogue and interacting with people with different religious perspectives and experiences, we grow in self-knowledge, knowledge of others, and our ability to articulate these differing perspectives and experiences.

## Religion Specific: Essential Questions

1. What are the essential aspects that I need to know about specific religions?
2. What are the historical origins (time and place) of diverse religious perspectives?
3. What are the core beliefs of different religious traditions? What are the key writings or stories that shape the core beliefs?
4. What are some of the key persons associated with different religions?
5. What are the processes of institutionalization (structures) for each of the major religions?
6. What are the customs and practices related to gathering places of different religions (e.g., synagogues, churches, mosques, temples, shrines, sacred spaces, etc.)?
7. What are the different ways of demonstrating personal identification with and adherence to a specific religious tradition (e.g., worship, devotion, prayer, meditation, dance, music/song, etc.)?
8. What are the special or sacred days that different religions recognize?
9. How are these beliefs acted upon by believers and how do they influence daily life?
10. Ritual is one important way that religious communities affirm their collective identity and translate their beliefs into real-world practice.
11. Rites of passage, such as birth, coming of age, marriage, and funerary processes differ in their details amongst religious traditions, but seem to inevitably appear. Are there common themes or ways of responding to these events shared by traditions?

## Religion Specific: Enduring Understandings

### Overview and the Religious Tradition throughout the World and Canada

1. Each religion or religious perspective is complex and deserves to be studied on its own terms.
2. Comparisons as an organizational and exploratory tool are a necessary and unavoidable part of academic investigation; however, it is important to recognize the limitations of comparative approaches.
3. It is important to be both aware and knowledgeable of the history and place of a religion or religious perspective in the world or Canada.

## Foundational Beliefs, Concepts, and Ideas

1. Each religious tradition has generally held guiding, foundational, or fundamental beliefs that characterize that specific religious tradition.

## Significant Texts and Writings

1. Religions and religious perspectives often have stories, texts, or writings that are foundations for them or that detail important aspects of the religion or religious perspective. These texts or writings help to define the group.
2. Some religions and religious perspectives are based on oral traditions and stories. These stories are as important for the groups as for those that have sacred texts or scriptures.

## Change and Evolution—Diversity within the Religious Tradition

1. Each religious tradition has evolved and changed over time in response to events, significant individuals, study, inter and intra-group influences and pressures, and changing social contexts.
2. Religious traditions in contemporary society may experience pressures to change from external and internal sources. Some of these pressures cut across all or many religious traditions, others may be unique to specific traditions.
3. There are differences within each specific religious tradition that are important and that distinguish different elements within a specific religious tradition.
4. Intra-group diversity or diversity within a specific religion often is a result of different interpretations or versions of significant or foundational stories, texts, or writings, as well as practices.

## Significant Persons/Founders

1. Specific religious traditions have significant or exemplary historical members of the religious community (for example, the Buddha, Jesus Christ, Mohammed, and so on) that are generally deemed to have a special status or place within the religious community.
2. Each religious tradition may have community members that play special or significant roles (monks, priests, imams, elders, and so forth).

## Practices, Rituals, and Symbols

1. Specific religious traditions have distinct rituals, ways of dress, assemblies, and activities generally recognized within the particular faith community as meaningful or representative.
2. These religious rituals and practices are often part of the culture of the adherents and embedded in their daily and social lives.

## Significant Times and Dates

1. Specific religious traditions may have significant or special historical timelines or events that are recognized and commemorated in certain ways.
2. Each religion may have special or otherwise noteworthy occasions during the year that adherents commemorate or recognize in special ways (Ramadan, Christmas, Diwali, Passover, etc.).

## Places: Gathering Places in the World and in Canada

1. Specific religious traditions often have geographic regions that are generally of importance to members of the tradition.
2. Each religious tradition has locations members hold as significant or where they join in community (mosques, sweat lodges, shrines, and so on).

## Contemporary Issues and Challenges

1. Current social issues, changes in international and national laws, societal values, and significant events may influence a religion or religious perspective and stimulate change; bring about questions; or challenge foundational beliefs, interpretations, and practices.
2. Some of these social issues, changes in laws, societal values, and significant events may influence a number of very different religions or religious perspectives; however, the impact may not be simultaneous or to the same degree.