



**GRADE 12**  
*World of Religions*  
**A CANADIAN PERSPECTIVE**

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Available in alternate formats upon request.

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# Purpose

This document is a resource for educators teaching the *Grade 12: World of Religions: A Canadian Perspective* optional course. Within the course, learners explore important aspects of human diversity, and develop greater understanding and awareness of the historical and contemporary significance of religious diversity in Manitoba, Canada, and the world.

It is important to understand and value religious diversity while recognizing that some aspects of diverse religions may be similar and others may be unique or different. The intent is not to put forward a reductionist view that all religions in some way are the same or are fundamentally at odds with each other. As a result, the curriculum proposes an approach that promotes critical dialogue. “Critical dialogue has several prerequisites. It requires mutual respect, thoughtful listening, knowledgeable inquiry, recognition of the multi-dimensionality of the other’s situation, creative interaction, careful cooperation and, when appropriate, concerned confrontation.” (Erdel)

The intent of religious diversity and world religions courses should not be to encourage the practice or promotion of a specific religion or spiritual belief system, nor the development of religious faith. Rather, the intent should be the development of understanding and appreciation for the diversity of religious belief systems and practices, and their roles in society and people’s lives. The current course also aims to challenge misinformation and biases, both explicit and implicit, that learners may have developed or to which they may have been exposed.

## Delivery of the Course

This course may be delivered as a full-credit course or a half-credit course. As a half-credit course, students would explore 2–3 distinct religious traditions.

Reporting Credits		
Title	Subject Code	Credits
World of Religions	0606	40S 1 credit, 40E 1 credit, 40M 1 credit
World of Religions	0606	40S 0.5 credit, 40E 0.5 credit, 40M 0.5 credit





# Introduction

## Religious Diversity in Canada

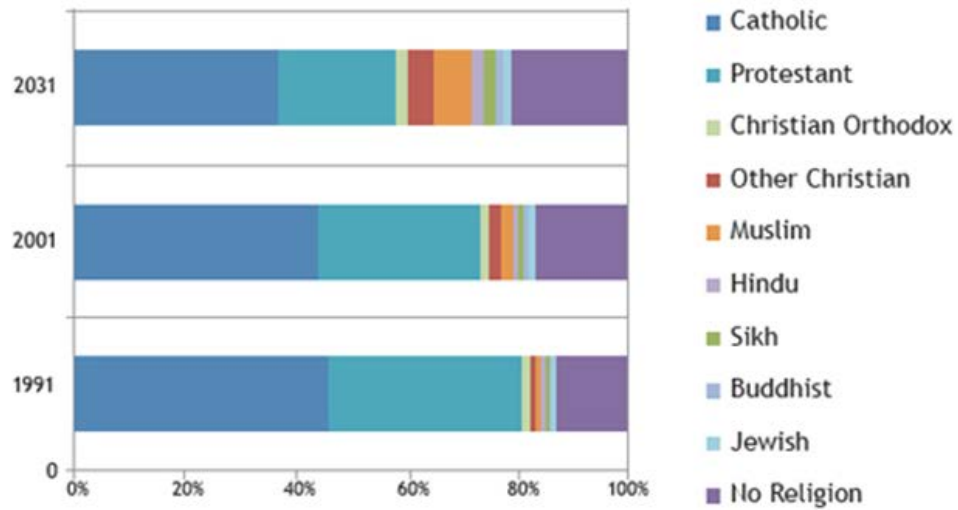
From the beginning, Canada has been a diverse society with a history of welcoming and accommodating newcomers. Historically, diversity in Canada was built on three primary groups of peoples: Indigenous Peoples, French, and British. Over time, this initial diversity has been complemented and expanded by the millions of newcomers from around the world who brought with them a diversity of cultures, languages, and religions. This trend continues today. Canadians are increasingly diverse in their religious perspectives and affiliations. The charts that follow provide an overview of the past, present, and future of religious diversity in Canada.

While the majority of Canadians today identify as belonging to a Christian faith, they increasingly reflect the major religions of the world. As well, indigenous peoples increasingly identify with and practice traditional spirituality.

There are some interesting trends that should be noted, among which the following:

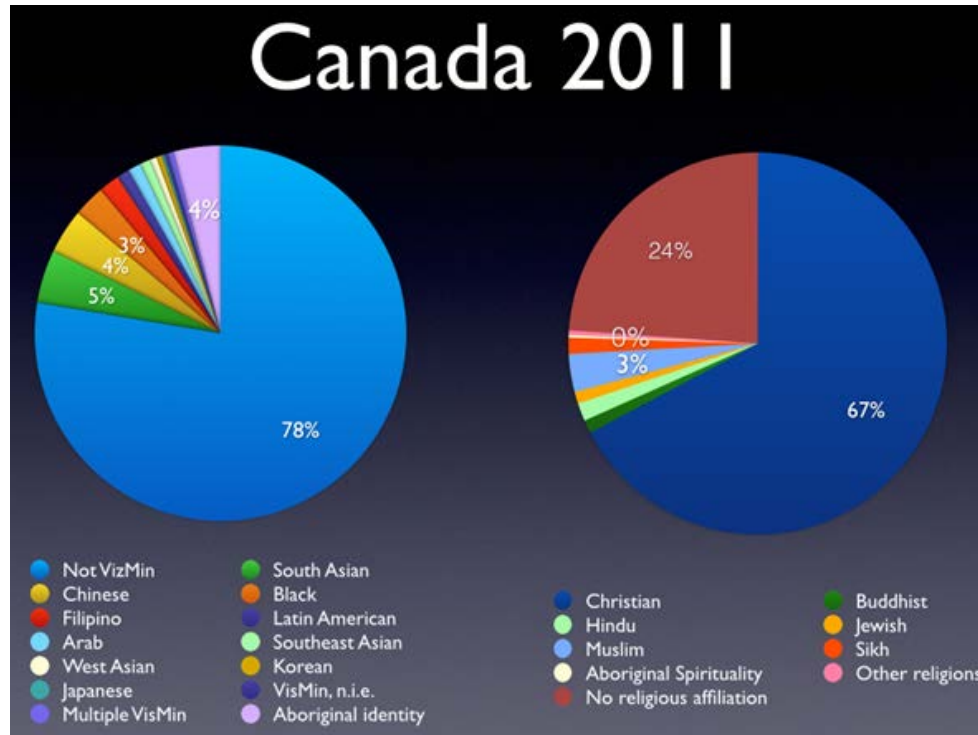
- The number of Canadians reporting no religious affiliation was 17% in 2011 and, at that point, was expected to grow to over 21% in 2016.
- The Muslim community is growing rapidly.
- Christianity is increasingly diverse.

Figure 1: Major Faith Groups in Canada



Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada. "Annual Report on the Operation of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act 2010–2011." 09 February 2012. *Government of Canada*. 02 June 2016, [http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection\\_2012/cic/Ci95-1-2011-eng.pdf](http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2012/cic/Ci95-1-2011-eng.pdf).

Figure 2: Cultural and Religious Diversity in Canada 2011



Source: Griffith, Andrew. "Happy Multiculturalism Day!" 27 June 2014. *Multicultural Meanderings*. 02 June 2016, <https://multiculturalmeanderings.wordpress.com/2014/06/27/happy-multiculturalism-day/>. All rights reserved.

## Understanding Our History: Overcoming Intolerance and Working Towards Acceptance

In exploring the diversity of world religions and perspectives, it is important to acknowledge Canada's history of religious discrimination. For much of Canada's history, cultural and religious diversity was often seen as a problem to overcome. The perpetuation of diversity was not desired and there was a strong emphasis on assimilation (total assimilation of new Canadians of non-English and Christian origins). These xenophobic attitudes and beliefs were, at one point, widespread throughout society.

“Assimilationist ideology was applied in its most explicit and energetic form to immigrants of non-French and non-British background. All the major books on immigration published prior to 1920, and written by progressives and reactionaries alike, (including J. S. Woodsworth's *Strangers Within Our Gates*; Ralph Connor's *The Foreigner*; Alfred Fitzpatrick's *Handbook for New Canadians*; C. A. McGrath's *Canada's Growth and Some Problems Affecting It*; C. B. Sisson's *Bilingual Schools in Canada*; and W. G. Smith's *A Study in Canadian Immigration*) were based on assumptions of Anglo-conformity.” (Maella, p. 63)

Woodsworth was concerned about the influx of immigrants to Canada and the potential negative effects of such immigration. He writes in the preface to *Strangers within Our Gates*, “this little book is an attempt to introduce the motley crowd of immigrants to our Canadian people and to bring before our young people some of the problems of the population with which we must deal in the very near future” (Woodsworth, p. 5). He then goes on to detail what he believes to be the main challenge resulting from immigration, “English and Russians, French and Germans, Austrians and Italians, Japanese and Hindus—a mixed multitude, they are being dumped into Canadian by a kind of endless chain. They sort themselves out after a fashion, and each seeks to find a corner somewhere. But how shall we weld this heterogeneous mass into one people? That is our problem.” (Woodsworth, p. 203)

J. S. Woodsworth was not against all immigration. Generally, he was welcoming of some immigrants and acknowledged the positive aspects of peoples of diverse languages and cultures, and their contributions (e.g., he had positive views with respect to Jews). That being said, he argued for restricting immigration of certain groups—those that, in his view, were from cultures, religions, and races which made them difficult, if not impossible, to assimilate or who may even resist assimilation. Even this well-known, progressive individual and advocate for the poor and the working class did not escape the dominant belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority and the prejudice toward non-Christian, non-Protestant, non-European peoples and ethnicities. His fear of the emergence of ethnic and religious ghettos, and arguments for keeping some people out of Canada is expressed in *Strangers Within Our Gates* at various points.

Alan Mills, a well-known professor of political studies with the University of Winnipeg makes several observations about Woodsworth's views on immigration and diversity.

"Woodsworth did not believe in the equality of all cultures. Because of a mixture of factors—historical and environmental good fortune, genetic inheritance or cultural distinctiveness (he was unclear on this matter)—he held that Anglo-Saxon peoples were highly civilized and superior."  
(Mills, p. 107)

"Finally, implicit in Woodsworth's early account of the immigrant question is a celebration of an independent, democratic, free-hold yeomanry. He observed that many of the immigrants to Canada before World War I had come from areas dominated by Habsburg and Tsarist absolutism, where serfdom was still a remembered reality. Often their religion was of a Catholic type. Such people embodied a condition of political, economic, and religious backwardness. They were unused to the management of farms, were deferential to authority, and politically apathetic; they had embraced a purely local perspective on the world, were illiterate and superstitious, and thus likely to be ignorant and immoral. To Woodsworth they were serfs and barbarians and unworthy of inclusion in the Canadian ideal of educated, independent, Protestant, and technically innovative yeoman farmers." (Mills, p. 108–109)

Woodsworth himself wrote:

"It is generally agreed that the two races are not likely to "mix". Ultimately, then, the question resolves itself into the desirability of a white caste and a yellow, or black caste existing side by side, or above and below in the same country. We confess that the idea of a homogeneous people seems in accord with our democratic institutions and conducive to the general welfare. This need not exclude small communities of black or red or yellow peoples. It is well to remember that we are not the only people on earth. The idealist may still dream of a final state of development, when white and black and red and yellow shall have ceased to exist, or have become merged into some neutral gray. We may love all men yet prefer to maintain our own family life."  
(Woodsworth, p. 277)

"We, in Canada, have certain more or less clearly defined ideals of national well-being. These ideals must never be lost sight of. Non-ideal elements there must be, but they should be capable of assimilation. Essentially non-assimilable elements are clearly detrimental to our highest national development, and hence should be vigorously excluded."  
(Woodsworth, p. 278)

Woodsworth's views on immigration remind us that while Canada is often seen as a historically welcoming nation that is open to immigration and diversity, the reality is that historical records are at odds with this view. At various times throughout Canada's history, specific ethno-religious groups were targeted and faced significant discrimination and limitations on their rights as citizens, or were denied entry into Canada. For example,

- The historical repression and prohibition of Indigenous spiritual practices through the Indian Act
- The denial of the right to vote for Hindus in British Columbia and later restrictions on immigration of Hindus and Sikhs, including the Komogata Maru incident
- The restriction of Mennonite immigration to Canada post World War I because of their pacifist beliefs (Conscientious Objectors)
- The 'none is too many' approach towards Jewish immigration before and during World War II

It is also important to note that religious discrimination and exclusion is not just a Canadian issue. The Pew Research Center reported that, in 2013, the share of countries with a high or very high level of **social hostilities involving religion** had declined somewhat after having reached a six-year peak in 2012. According to the study by the Pew Research Center, "the share of countries with high or very high levels of **social hostilities involving religion** dropped from 33% in 2012 to 27% in 2013." The hostilities experienced range from vandalism of religious property and desecration of sacred texts, to violent assaults resulting in injuries and deaths. (Pew Research Center, 2015)

However, the percentage of countries with high or very high **government restrictions on religion** stayed about the same, dropping slightly from 29% in 2012 to 27% in 2013. (Pew Research Center, 2015)

Overall, the study found that restrictions on religion were high or very high in 39% of countries when restrictions from government policies or from hostile acts by private individuals, organizations, and social groups were considered. (Pew Research Center, 2015)

The Pew Research study found that "among the world's 25 most populous countries, the highest overall levels of restrictions were found in Burma (Myanmar), Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan and Russia, where both the government and society at large impose numerous limits on religious beliefs and practices." (Pew Research Center, 2015)

Similar to studies done in previous years, Christians and Muslims, who collectively make up more than half of the world's population, faced harassment in the largest number of countries. "Christians were harassed, either by government or social groups, in 102 of the 198 countries included in the study (52%), while Muslims were harassed in 99 countries (50%)." (Pew Research Center, 2015)

## Towards Religious Literacy

**Just as reading and writing are considered essential skills for us to survive and thrive in this world, our knowledge of each other's religions is also key. When we aim to better understand each other's faiths, something happens. We begin to stop essentializing each other's religions.  
(Kassamali)**

In recent years, the issue of religious illiteracy/literacy has come to the forefront as an example of the barriers North American societies face with respect to inclusion and social cohesion, as well as with regard to understanding of and interaction within the multifaith, global village in which we live.

Paul Bramadat, a well-known Manitoban (former professor at the University of Winnipeg) as well as a Canadian professor of religious studies and diversity, argues that “the virtual exclusion of religion from public discourse (including its absence from, or awkward presence in, national ceremonies, media coverage, and in most public schools) has produced a kind of religious illiteracy the result of which is that Canadians are increasingly ignorant about world religions, including Christianity.” (Bramadat, p. 5)

James Ron, a secular Jew and associate professor at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University, as well as a former Canada Research Chair at McGill University, states in a 2012 editorial opinion he wrote for the Toronto Star that, in the “graduate program where I now teach, Canada's finest global affairs students seem virtually illiterate when it comes to their own religion, or to the religions of others. Although they eagerly achieve competence in secular politics, they express little interest in learning the basics of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism or Judaism.” (Ron)



Stephen Prothero, in his book *Religious Literacy* (2008), argues that the United States is one of the most religious places on earth, but it is also a nation of shocking religious illiteracy. As evidence of this he pointed out that

- Only 10% of American teenagers could name all five major world religions and 15% could not name any of them.
- Nearly two-thirds of Americans believed that the Bible holds the answers to all or most of life's basic questions, yet only half of American adults could name even one of the four gospels and most Americans could not name the first book of the Bible.

(Prothero)

The PEW Research Centre on Religion and Public found that atheists, agnostics, Jews, and Mormons in the United States correctly answered between 20 and 21 of the Pew Forum's 32 questions on Christianity, world religions, and laws governing faith in public life. In contrast, white evangelicals, averaged scores of only 17 questions correctly answered, while white Catholics and mainline Protestants were able to answer just 16 of the questions. (Pew Research Center, 2010)

A fall 2011 poll in Canada, by Leger, found that people with a good knowledge of other cultures and religions were more likely to have a high level of knowledge about their own religious community and culture (78 per cent) while among those with little knowledge of other religions and cultures, only 23 per cent had good knowledge of their own religion and culture. In addition, people familiar with other cultures and faiths also were more likely to feel confident interacting with people from an unfamiliar culture (84 per cent) than people without that knowledge (33 per cent).

Diane L. Moore of the Harvard School of Divinity, in her book *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: A Multicultural Approach to Teaching about Religion in Secondary Schools*, suggests that there is not only widespread religious illiteracy in North America but across the world. Moore believes that one of the most problematic and urgent consequences of this religious illiteracy is that it often breeds and fuels prejudice and antagonism, consequently limiting efforts aimed at promoting respect for diversity, peaceful coexistence, and cooperative action at the local, national, and global levels. (Moore)

For the purposes of this document, we have adopted the definition of religious illiteracy as defined in *Guidelines for Teaching about Religion: In K-12 Public Schools in the United States*. "Religious illiteracy as a lack of understanding about the following:

- the basic tenets of the world's religious traditions and other religious expressions not categorized by tradition;
- the diversity of expressions and beliefs within traditions and representations; and
- the profound role that religion plays in human social, cultural, and political life historically and today."

(Moore, 2010, p. 4)

Both Prothero and Moore believe that it is possible to address religious illiteracy by teaching about religion from a non-sectarian and non-devotional approach in primary and secondary schools.

Moore defines religious literacy to be the ability to recognize and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social, political, and cultural life “through multiple lenses.” Moore’s concept of a religiously literate person is one who possesses

1. a basic understanding of the history, central texts (where applicable), beliefs, practices, and current manifestations of several of the world’s religious traditions as they grew out of and continue to be shaped by particular social, historical, and cultural contexts
2. the ability to recognize and explore the religious dimensions of political, social, and cultural expressions across time and place

Moore’s definitions assume that religion is a socio-cultural phenomenon that is embedded in human political, social, and cultural life. They also assume that religion shapes and is shaped by the social and historical contexts out of which a particular religious expression or tradition and its influences emerged. Lastly, these definitions presuppose that there is a difference between religion understood through the **lens of personal devotional practice** and the **academic or non-sectarian study of religion**. In other words, one is about *religious learning* (or *learning religion*) through a devotional lens and the other is *learning about religion* from an academic and non-devotional stance. While both are legitimate human activities, they serve complementary but distinctive ends.

## Difference between Teaching of Religion and Teaching about Religion

While there are long, historical ties to religion within the context of education in Manitoba, most have been of a strictly theological or participatory nature. That is, there has been historically less teaching *about* religion than teaching *of* religion. With that in mind, any educational resource package that touches upon religion is bound to raise concerns among educators, students, and community members. What follows are specific concerns or problems in the design of such a program, and suggestions for their amelioration with regard to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom and the provincial educational mandates.

- **Concerns over proselytization:** One of the most significant concerns over the inclusion of religion in public school curriculum is whether said materials operate either overtly or covertly to promote a particular religious ideology. The matter is not as simple as granting equal time to each tradition, but also involves equipping educators to effectively include traditions with which they (and students) may not be familiar. At the same time, humanistic, secular, and atheistic perspectives also cannot be ignored.

- **Additional concerns:** The study of religion is often tightly linked to instruction in particularistic moral values held by dominant socio-cultural groups. What is proposed instead is an examination of *how* various groups respond to the (near-) universal existential questions that are not answerable from a strictly scientific perspective. Moral values, when discussed, would be more equitably framed in terms of citizenship and community, rather than their restriction to individual faith communities.

Religious literacy is, at its core, teaching *about* world religions and exploring religious diversity, and not teaching *of* religion (religious education, indoctrination, or devotion). The differences between teaching about religion in contrast with teaching of religion are as follows:

- The approach and objectives are *academic, not devotional*.
- The programming strives to build student *awareness* of the diversity of religions, but does not encourage or expect student personal acceptance of any religion.
- The focus of the programming is to study *about* religion, not to *practice* the religion.
- The programming *exposes* students to a diversity of religious views, but does not *impose* any particular view.
- The programming focuses on *educating* about religious diversity/all religions; it does *not promote or disparage* any religion.
- The programming may *inform* the student about religious beliefs, but should not seek to *have students conform* to any particular belief.

## Educational, Cultural, and Individual Benefits

The primary impetus behind including religious diversity in educational dialogues is that it can, when implemented carefully and from a good pedagogical foundation, help provide students with a more comprehensive educational experience. At a wider social level, well-educated, well-rounded students promote increased social integration and the development of genuine democratic processes.

At the broad educational level, discussions of religious diversity allow students to develop a better understanding of human history and societies, of literary developments and movements, and of philosophy and life-practice. Ignoring religion unnecessarily restricts students' ability to participate meaningfully in local and national cultural dialogues and to interact positively and respectfully with each other. Religion continues to influence contemporary peoples, cultures, and societies, whether directly or indirectly. A basic fluency in terms of religious diversity allows individuals to more fully appreciate the nature of these influences.

While Canada is widely viewed as a pluralistic and welcoming society, it would be willfully ignorant to suppose that discrimination does not still exist. While the causes of discrimination are complex and multi-faceted, we must recognize that a lack of knowledge and experience dealing with other cultures and belief systems is an important contributing factor. Exposing students to world religions and religious diversity is therefore a direct way to challenge discrimination and to equip students to better understand and appreciate the world in which they live now and in which they will live in the future. Whether it is in the playground, the community, the classroom, or the workplace, a basic understanding of the diversity of religious traditions can help defuse fear and suspicion based upon ignorance or stereotypes.

Preparing educators to engage meaningfully in discussions about religion and religious diversity will assist both teachers and students in responding more actively to current local, national, and international events. It is worth noting that there are many links between religious diversity and many of the most important contemporary issues and international developments. Recognizing the religious dimensions of these issues will more ably equip students to understand not only the world around them, but to make sense of their place within it.

Canada is an ethnically, religiously, culturally, and linguistically diverse country and that diversity continues to grow as Canada moves into the 21st century. The influence and extent of non-Christian religions will become of increasing significance. Manitoba, in particular, is home to individuals with ties to a wide variety of groups and beliefs.

Hiren Bhana Mistry (2003), in a review and critique of the World Religion courses offered in Ontario since 1971, argues for a “transformative model” for the study of world religions in schools.

A transformative model of inclusion, wherein the pluralistic themes, practices, concepts, and mystical traditions of the world’s religions are taught and appreciated on their own terms, requires a carefully thought out organization of the world religions curriculum, that does not ignore, or misrepresent, the often contradictory priorities of the world’s religious traditions.

In order to achieve this, the curriculum must be designed using the broadest conceptual base possible, while drawing on the specific cultural context, religious ideas, practices, and experiences are manifest. Self-reflection must also be in-built into the design of the course, as the discussion and study of religion is a deeply subjective experience, intimately tied to people’s cultural, existential, and metaphysical identities. (Mistry, p. 16)

**“While the contribution of religious studies to the attainment of religious literacy and tolerance of others has been important during the past fifty years, it will be even more crucial in the twenty-first century. In the future, religious literacy will be an important part of the knowledge-and-ethics toolbox of the educated man or woman, and thus religious studies needs to be present in an integrated fashion within every school, college, or university curriculum. “**  
(Coward)

## Education and Religion

**Religious literacy is important for both teachers and students.** The “study about religions should be an essential part of the social studies curriculum. Knowledge about religions is not only a characteristic of an educated person but is necessary for effective and engaged citizenship in a diverse nation and world. Religious literacy dispels stereotypes, promotes cross-cultural understanding, and encourages respect for the rights of others to religious liberty.” (National Council for the Social Studies)

### Assumptions

The development of this document has been guided by this vision and based upon the following important theoretical and normative presuppositions:

- Religious and spiritual diversity has been and continues to be an important aspect of humanity.
- Religious beliefs and practices are reflected in the cultures of different peoples and impacts upon their worldview and daily lives.
- Religious diversity is increasing in Canada and will continue to do so in the future.
- Issues related to religious diversity and expression, as well as to religious oppression and intolerance, have had a significant impact, both historically and in the contemporary world.

- Research suggests that students and the public in general are relatively 'illiterate' with respect to world religions and religious diversity.
- Studying religious diversity increases appreciation and opportunity for pluralism as well as intercultural understanding, and reduces bias, prejudice, and discrimination.
- Investigation and discovery can help to dispel biases and misinformation surrounding religion/religions. Exploring religious diversity can help foster the skills to interact respectfully with people of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds.
- By studying about world religions, students will enhance their self-understanding of their beliefs, attitudes, and predispositions about religions.
- Opportunities to explore religious diversity in public school settings are limited and hampered by a number of factors (e.g., educator discomfort or lack of familiarity, concerns over its ostensibly controversial nature, lack of appropriate resources, lack of pedagogical approaches, unclear goals and outcomes, and/or fear of parental or student resistance).
- Classroom composition will reflect a variety of different experiences, perspectives, practices, and cultures. By the very nature of this course, students will be encouraged to look at these experiences, biases, and values with both an appreciative and critical eye and, in the process, students should not feel diminished or chastised for the views that they and their families may hold.
- Bias and other obstacles to understanding, tolerance, and appreciation of world religions and religious diversity will be reduced or overcome by adopting a non-sensationalist, non-reductive presentation and by providing a wide range of resources and tools to ensure educator and student comfort.



# Theoretical Foundations

## What Is Religion?

Within the academic study of religion, a central methodological concern is defining the term religion. Defining religion first became a problem with the 'discovery' of non-Judeo-Christian religious beliefs. Rather than being solely a scholarly issue, arriving at and agreeing upon a workable definition has important consequences for the implementation of any project involving religion and the school system.

A key challenge is that many definitions of religion are implicitly tied to an individual's own faith commitments, or lack thereof, and thus reflect a particularistic or idiosyncratic notion of religion. For example, although most people would recognize as religious traditions not holding to the existence of gods, deities, angels, or concrete after-death existence, belief in a God or gods is commonly considered the hallmark of religion. Even within particular faith communities, the definition of a member varies according to interpretation and practice. There are thus two interrelated dangers in coming to a definition: that it may be too exclusive to capture what we commonly recognize as religious or that it may be so inclusive as to lack explanatory power.

As a concept, religion allows us to group, analyze, and understand apparently disparate human phenomena. With this in mind, we may understand a religion as any system of **thought, symbol, belief, and action**, possessing **explanatory power** with respect to existential or meaning-making questions, which speak to the foundations of reality, both physical and metaphysical.



# What Are Some of the Different Approaches to Studying Religious Diversity?

Generally, teachers must teach about religious diversity in their classrooms for various reasons. The three most common reasons are

1. The curriculum requires the coverage of the historical roots of religious traditions and/or their continued relevance today.
2. The novels or stories used in the classroom deal with or include explicit religious themes or references and allusions.
3. Students raise questions about religion or religious diversity in reaction to news events or other issues in society and because of their own experiences, knowledge, and interests.

(Moore, *Guidelines for Teaching About Religion in K-12 Public Schools in the United States*, p. 9)

There are many ways to approach the study of religion. The contentious issue is that of the 'insider' perspective compared to the 'outsider' perspective.

## "Insider" or "Outsider" Perspective?

An "insider" (or emic perspective) view is that of a practicing member of that particular religion or religious tradition; one who is engaged and more or less committed to the religion about which they speak or write. The insider is expected to reflect the same views and beliefs about the world and engage in practices consistent with the religion about which they write or speak. This involves not only active participation in recognized faith activities, but the sincere attempt to understand fundamental tenets not so much in terms of their macroscopic/society-level effects, but in terms of their relation to the individual and their community. For some, only insiders' views about their religion are authentic while others contest this claim of authenticity by pointing out that insiders are likely to present a biased and non-critical perspective of their religion.

An "outsider" (or etic perspective) view is that of an individual who does not belong to the religion they are describing or studying, and who does not share the religion's worldview, or is not committed to the particular beliefs and practices of that religion. The outsider perspective approaches religion from an objectivising, external vantage point. This strategy is more akin to a scientific course of study. Here, questions of function often have precedence over those of meaning. An outsider perspective is not hostile to the truth claims made by religious traditions, but rather suffices to leave these claims hypothetical or otherwise unanswered. Its focus tends to be broader in scope, understanding religion as one component of social and cultural systems with effects on both the individual and collective.



For some, only an outsider can be a sufficiently neutral and unbiased observer whose observations about a particular religion are more likely to be accurate and balanced. Conversely, some may claim it is impossible to have a neutral position and that an outsider might in fact reflect biases concerning the religion or religions that they describe.

## Four Approaches

Other approaches to the teaching of World Religions include the following:

The **Historical Approach** is primarily used in social studies classes where issues of religions and religious diversity occur within courses or specific lessons focused on history. A historical approach provides an opportunity for students to explore the origins of world religions. The development of these religions is studied in a historical context with a view of the political and cultural influences on the religion(s) in order to develop an understanding of how a religion emerged, gained followers, and expanded.

The **Literary Approach** has a focus on language arts classes in which students read religious texts themselves or literature (novels, stories, and poetry) with religious themes, references, or imagery. With this approach, teachers help students develop an appreciation for the way a religion infuses all aspects of culture by seeing how religious allusions and metaphors may become a common language shared by a people.

The **Traditions-Based Approach** is often used in elective or stand-alone courses in higher grades, or as the basis for comparative religious studies. With this approach, certain categories or themes that apply to many religious traditions—such as beliefs, texts, rituals, origins, and holidays—or to essential questions that religions address—the purpose of life, how one should live, and various interpretations of identity—are studied. The strength of this approach is that students may identify common themes in diverse religious traditions and it can provide a useful framework for understanding the diversity of religious expression.

The **Cultural Studies Approach** is often used in religious studies classes, which incorporate a multicultural/diversity lens of analysis. This approach builds upon and enhances the other three approaches with an emphasis on recognizing and understanding the ways that religion is embedded in culture and cannot be understood in isolation from the religion's social and historical expressions.

(Moore, *Guidelines for Teaching About Religion in K–12 Public Schools in the United States*, pp. 9–10)

## The Importance of Multiple Lenses

In the past, world religions have been taught from a comparative lens, where other religions are studied with a particular religious lens, and described compared to that specific religious lens. The problem with such an approach is that the religious perspective or religion being studied is mediated or filtered by that particular religious lens. In Canada and the western world, that often means a Christian lens is used to study and try to understand world religions. It is important that the religion being studied is described and understood in an authentic manner, free from bias or the limitations of a particular religious perspective.

Given that the inclusion of religion within public school curricula has historically focused on the indoctrination of dominant belief systems, it makes sense to approach the study of religion primarily from an external perspective. Such an approach finds support in the diversity of Manitoba's population and the desire to value investigation over promotion. Yet, it would be fruitful to retain aspects of the insider view, where appropriate, in the form of educational activities like site visits (to temples, festivals, events, and so on) and presentations by adherents of specific traditions/faiths. Again, the purpose in such activities is not to promote faith commitments on the part of students or educators, but instead to expose them to the diversity of human experience and interaction. What is important is to encourage an attitude that promotes inquiry, understanding, and reflection, rather than naïve rejection or acceptance.

## Guidelines

For the purpose of this course, and in keeping with Manitoba's and Canada's values and laws, we propose the following guidelines for the teaching of religious diversity courses. These have been adapted from the NCSS 1998 position statement on religion (National Council for the Social Studies). Study about religions should

- strive for awareness and understanding of the diversity of religions, religious experiences, religious expressions, and the reasons for particular expressions of religious beliefs within a society or culture
- stress the influence of religions on history, culture, the arts, and contemporary issues
- be conducted by qualified and certified teachers selected for their academic knowledge, their sensitivity and empathy for differing religious points of view, and their understanding of human rights legislation and laws concerning religious freedom
- permit and encourage a comprehensive and balanced examination of the entire spectrum of ideas and attitudes pertaining to religion as a component of human culture
- investigate a broad range of religious traditions, beliefs, and practices representing a diversity of origins and belief systems, both historical and contemporary
- examine the religious dimension of human existence in its broader cultural context, including its relation to economic, political, and social institutions, as well as its relation to the arts, language, and literature
- explore the world's religions from the same perspective (e.g., beginnings, historical development, foundational writings, oral stories, beliefs, practices, and impact on history, culture, contemporary issues, and the arts)
- be as objective as possible
- be academic in nature, stressing student awareness and understanding, not acceptance and/or conformity with a particular religion or perspective
- emphasize the necessity and importance of tolerance, respect, and mutual understanding in a nation and world of diversity
- be taught in an environment free of advocacy for a particular religion or religious perspective
- seek to develop and utilize the various skills, attitudes, and abilities that are essential to learning (e.g., locating, classifying, and interpreting data; keen observation; critical reading, listening and thinking; questioning; and effective communication)
- be academically responsible and pedagogically sound, utilizing accepted methods and materials of the social sciences, history, the arts, and literature
- draw on a range of materials and resources that provide a balanced and fair treatment of the subject

# What Approach Will We Use to Explore Religious Diversity?\*

In this course, the focus generally will be on taking an “outsider-academic” perspective that allows for interdisciplinary explorations.

Religious traditions have a diverse array of practices, beliefs, important figures, places, and times. To do justice to this diversity is a challenge. What is needed is both a solid content knowledge about various religious traditions and a holistic, guiding framework. This has the advantage of assisting educators in presenting an organized, comprehensible course, while providing clear signposts from which to follow community/classroom interests and needs. With this in mind, our approach for exploring each religious tradition or perspective is organized around the following categories.

1. Introduction to the religion (summary) and the religious tradition in Canada and the World
2. Origins and Timeline Charts
3. Significant Texts and Writings
4. Foundational Beliefs, Concepts, and Ideas
5. Change and Evolution—Diversity within the Religious Tradition
6. Significant Persons/Founders
7. Practices, Rituals, and Symbols
8. Significant Times and Dates
9. Places: Gathering Places in the World and Canada
10. Contemporary Issues and Challenges

This framework has the benefit of engaging student learning from both historical and contemporary perspectives. As the following demonstrates, we employ these organizing terms in the context of an essential questions approach.

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\* This section is adapted, in part, from [www.worldreligions.ca/](http://www.worldreligions.ca/).

# Course Outline

The following is an example of a course outline that may be appropriate for a high school that offers a full course.

<b>In-Depth Study of a Series of Specific Religious Perspectives or Traditions</b>
<b>Part 1:</b> Introduction and Setting the Stage for the Study of Diverse Religious Perspectives
<b>Part 2:</b> A Series of Units Exploring 5 to 7 Specific Religious Perspectives or Traditions
<b>Unit 1:</b> Aboriginal Spirituality
<b>Unit 2:</b> Hinduism
<b>Unit 3:</b> Buddhism
<b>Unit 4:</b> Judaism
<b>Unit 5:</b> Christianity
<b>Unit 6:</b> Islam
<b>Unit 7:</b> Humanism, Atheism, and Agnosticism
<b>Part 3:</b> The Reflections and Analysis Concerning Religious Diversity and Significant Issues
<b>Note:</b> In Manitoba, students are introduced to world religions in Grade 8 Social Studies: World History: Societies of the Past. As well, religion is one of the sub-themes in the optional Grade 12 Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability course. This optional Grade 12 course enables students to further explore contemporary world religions and religious diversity in Canada.

## How Do We Study Religious Diversity in a Fair, Respectful, and Non-Judgemental Manner?

Because the course is academic instead of devotional, it aims at exposure, appreciation, and openness. Rather than a mathematical or scientific model, wherein one begins with a question or problem and strives towards definitive and objective resolutions, our study of religion—like the study of literature, languages, and philosophy—aims at opening up conversations and dialogue, and providing the basic tools and frameworks for students to engage in critical self- and social-reflection.

## How Important is Inter- and Intra-Religious Diversity?

One element of respect for diversity that has important bearing on language is acknowledgement and appreciation of intra-religious diversity. It is often relatively easy to identify differences separating traditions. This can serve the purpose of ‘othering’ a religion, such that it becomes what is different, alien, oppressed, or antiquated.

Another danger comes about through the levelling of religious tradition. In an effort to promote tolerance and equality, religions are portrayed in a homogenized manner. This is a common trend in popular depictions (and conversations), where religious differences are seen as minor variations upon universal questions or concerns. It is important not to gloss over these differences. What is needed is an approach that appreciates and respects both similarities and differences.

Likewise, it is important to recognize the internal diversity of a particular faith tradition. For example, Christianity may mean something different to a Seventh Day Adventist and a Roman Catholic. Further diversity may be evident within a particular branch of a religion. For instance, Catholicism may mean something very different to a rural Quebecer than it does to a Catholic living in urban Spain or New York.

These internal differences pose both challenges and opportunities within the classroom. On the one hand, recognizing internal diversity means being mindful not to speak of a tradition as monolithic or fixed in time. What might appear as core beliefs and practices could be internally contested and continually evolving. On the other hand, intra-religious diversity offers an immense variety of exciting opportunities for inquiry, as students pursue topics of particular interest. This necessitates actively making connections and creating personally relevant responses. Moreover, appreciation of diversity of one’s own tradition may naturally lead to the same in other traditions.

# Which Religions Do We Explore?

## Selection Criteria

Even with a working definition of religion in place, there remains the difficulty of selecting which religious traditions to include within the project. If the selection is too wide, it runs the risk of overwhelming both educators and students. If it is too narrow, the danger is in privileging certain traditions at the exclusion of others. Following the lead of existing initiatives, a balance may be struck by selecting the most widespread of the so-called world religions, while allowing educators to include additional traditions based upon community needs and classroom interests. The former are Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. Additionally, it is important to counterbalance the theistic emphasis by including atheistic/humanistic perspectives. Educators are encouraged to use their experience and professional judgement in deciding whether additional traditions (including spiritual movements and indigenous practices) ought to be included. Courses can be constructed upon our model to study one tradition or several.

Some additional considerations in selecting religious perspectives or faith groups to study include

- **Student interest and choice:** Student interests and classroom composition are important in selecting the groups to study. Provide opportunities for students to have a voice in the selection of groups as well as in assignments.
- **Reflecting the local community:** It is important to know and consider the religious diversity of the local school and community in the selection process.
- **Addressing groups which may be or are likely to be stereotyped or discriminated against:** Equally important is to consider which religions or religious perspectives are not present in the school or community, especially those that may be likely to be stereotyped, misunderstood/incorrectly portrayed, or negatively portrayed.

Deciding which specific topics to centre studies upon is also difficult given the wide variety of potential choices. This is an area that is best decided upon in consultation, but at the least would include; historical connections/impact, practices (both public and private), central shared beliefs, and cultural/scientific contributions to world knowledge.

As with all Kindergarten to Grade 12 education, a balance is needed between depth and breadth in terms of curricular materials. It is impossible to do complete justice to the variety of religious traditions (both within and across traditions). Yet the same can be said of all subject areas. The primary impetus, then, is to develop familiarity rather than expertise.

## How Do We Deal with Sensitive and/or Conflictual Ethical and Social Issues?

Teaching about the diversity of religious traditions and perspectives may itself be seen as a sensitive and conflictual issue. While this is not an ethics or religious issues course, it is important to recognize that students will raise sensitive or potentially controversial topics, including, but not limited to, the application of human rights codes or laws to religious entities and organizations, and the role and ordination of women or LGBT2SQ within a specific faith group or across different faith groups.

Many of these issues are not exclusively religious issues and often have broader social and political dimensions. Nevertheless, they often impact on religious practices and beliefs and add to the ongoing debate, development, and evolution of religious traditions.

Throughout history, there have been major conflicts of a social and political nature with religious, theological, and/or ethical dimensions in Canada and the world. These may be thought of as ‘hot topics’ or debates that have generated significant conflict and division within and across cultures and faith traditions, and continue to do so today. These have occurred within various faith groups, between different faith groups, and between faith groups and secular society.

### Teaching Sensitive and Potentially Conflictual Topics in a Religious Diversity Course

The following guidelines are intended to help teachers deal with sensitive and/or conflictual issues in a positive and constructive manner.

- While the intent of this course is to provide a good foundation and awareness of diverse religious traditions and perspectives, students will not acquire a sufficiently incisive understanding of the religion or belief perspective which means that their understanding of the impact of religions and beliefs on people’s decision-making is often distorted. Taking this in consideration, such topics must then be explored in the context of, rather than divorced from, the religious and faith traditions presented in the classroom.
- Although debate and the exploration of hot topics or conflicts is important and should not be avoided, care must be taken to ensure that this does not distract from achieving the objectives of the course, which are to develop a foundational knowledge of religious diversity and a few specific religious traditions.



- As with any other subject or course it is important that educators be familiar with and utilize guidelines for dealing with controversial subjects or issues.
- The contexts and situations in which these conflicts occur (classroom, community, personal, and professional) will impact when, how, and to what extent educators may address the specific topics or issues.

### *General Guidelines for Dealing with Controversial Issues (taken from the Manitoba Social Studies Curriculum)*

A fundamental aspect of learning and teaching—at all grade levels—is the consideration of controversial issues—issues that involve ethics, principles, beliefs, and values. Teachers should not avoid controversial issues. Diversity of perspectives, beliefs, and values; disagreement; and dissension are all part of living in a democratic society.

Furthermore, discussion and debate concerning ethical or existential questions serve to motivate students and make learning more personally meaningful.

The following guidelines will assist teachers in dealing with controversial issues in the classroom:

- approach all issues with sensitivity
- clearly define the issues
- establish a clear purpose for discussions
- establish parameters for discussions
- ensure that the issues do not become personalized or directed at individual students
- protect the interests of individual students by finding out in advance whether any student would be personally affected by the discussion
- exercise flexibility by permitting students to choose alternative assignments
- accept that there may not be a single “right answer” to a question or issue
- respect everyone’s right to voice opinions or perspectives
- help students clarify the distinction between informed opinion and bias
- help students seek sufficient and reliable information to support the various perspectives
- allow time to present all relevant perspectives fairly and to reflect upon their validity

**Note:** See the resources section for information and resources related to teaching about social and political topics, and religion.





# 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.





# *Suggestions for Teaching and Learning*

The success of a course built upon the ideas herein depends to a large degree on how well the class, as a whole, is prepared. The following are suggestions with regard to establishing rules and guidelines for the class; building a classroom community; establishing an atmosphere of respect and comfort; and dealing with potentially sensitive or controversial issues.

What follows are several methodological and practical suggestions for the development, delivery, and refinement of a course exploring religious diversity. One of the most exciting aspects of teaching a course of this nature is the opportunity to revise existing practices or to invent entirely new teaching/learning opportunities as they arise.

## **Religion Backgrounders/Profiles for Teacher Reference and Use**

Recognizing that educators possess differing levels of knowledge and experience with religious and cultural diversity, and also reflect a diversity of religious perspectives and faith traditions, a number of backgrounders of several religions and religious perspectives have been developed, as well as backgrounders related to diversity of religious perspectives and world religions in Canada and internationally.

These backgrounders are a general teacher reference to help teachers prepare for the course. Nonetheless, certain aspects of these backgrounders may be useful as classroom or student resources.

The backgrounders for each religion not only follow the organizers used for this course, but also provide a comprehensive summary of the religious perspective or religion. Most importantly, they provide information on that religious perspective or religion in Canada and in Manitoba. This series of documents will include

- Introduction to Religious Diversity: A Canadian Perspective
- Aboriginal/Indigenous Spirituality
- Atheism, Agnosticism, and Secular Humanism
- Buddhism
- Christianity
- Daoism and Confucianism
- Hinduism
- Judaism
- Islam
- Sikhism

## Developing a Respectful Classroom Community

Teachers and students will benefit from the investment of time in preparing the class to investigate and appreciate religious diversity. A confident, respectful classroom community with clear guidelines will generate more productive discussions and authentic learning experiences.

### Creating a Safe Place

Topics exploring religious diversity and discussion involving these topics often expose student sensitivities more acutely than other classroom topics. We therefore suggest requesting that students treat the classroom as a safe space. It is important that the privacy of individuals be protected. Personal and sensitive information shared by classmates ought not be discussed outside the classroom without their consent. While it is important that learning and dialogue not be restricted to the classroom, it is also important to respect and protect the moments where a student shares something personal or otherwise potentially vulnerable. Classroom discussions before the commencement of the course proper can serve to identify and clarify the distinction.

A second and equally important consideration for guidelines on classroom discussions revolves around the distinction between critical thinking and inappropriate critique. As has hopefully been made clear, the goal of this course is to investigate and celebrate diversity, rather than to promote any particular faith (or humanistic) commitment. While few would doubt that the latter is an important issue, the proper context is not the classroom, but rather the family and individual conscience. Students should be encouraged to examine their own perspectives and beliefs to grow their understanding of themselves and their community. Discussion, questions, and even debate are important tools in this endeavour.

How one questions others and what language one uses to question others about their religious beliefs, practices, and experiences is very important. Teachers and students must be aware of their language and framing of questions to ensure that they are respectful and appropriate. While healthy, vigorous discussion is encouraged, one must always do so in a respectful manner.

Direct personal attacks or put-downs, as well as the use of derogatory terms are never appropriate. Such behaviour only serves to stifle discussion, hurt the individual and group, and repress diversity. The guiding thread for distinguishing between these different modes may be the use of a reflective question.—Is my speech intended to clarify and encourage dialogue, or to personally attack or demean the individual? Again, discussions and exemplars can help students become cognizant of the difference, although even the best-run classroom will occasionally have trouble with this distinction. Such occasions need not provoke only admonishment, but can provide valuable teaching and learning opportunities as well.

Finally, students must learn the difference between arguments and statements of belief. The confusion between the two occurs regularly even in university-level, introductory survey courses. Student learning should not be assessed based on belief. If there is a place for this, it is within faith communities. Instead, student growth, whether demonstrated informally in discussions and reflection, or formally by way of projects and presentations, should be assessed by way of articulation developed in argumentation. Personal beliefs, by their very nature, are subjective positions and should be respected. Healthy discussion about the origins, nature, and importance of a belief or beliefs is to be encouraged. Argumentation, which builds on dialogue and exploration of differing opinions, leads to collective understanding and encourages rational, objective evaluation.

## Effective and Inclusive Learning Environment

An effective environment will be

- student centered
- engaging and relevant
- welcoming and respectful of diversity
- inviting and inclusive
- participatory, interactive, and collaborative
- reflective and celebratory
- integrative
- challenging
- knowledge and inquiry based

## Role of the Teacher

It is the role of the teacher to create a supportive environment. This role is varied and includes

- being a facilitator
- guiding learning and inquiry but not being all-knowing about different religions
- using people from the faith communities as resource people for authentic voices and perspectives
- being sensitive to diverse religious beliefs
- fostering a sense of acceptance, trust, and comfort in the classroom
- demonstrating a valuing of all learners
- guiding students in accessing, using, and understanding a variety of resources and texts related to religious diversity and specific religions
- fostering critical thinking and inquiry
- helping each student form individual beliefs and attitudes
- allowing time for reflection
- challenging students to act upon their learning
- providing time for students to ask questions

While it is understood that each teacher brings their own perspectives, beliefs, and experiences to the classroom, it should also be understood that a teacher should not make any attempt to promote or denigrate any student's beliefs. Pursuant to that, the teacher's role is not to indoctrinate or proselytize.

## Acknowledging and Respecting All Religious Perspectives

Many persons throughout the world do not identify with, follow, or practice one of the major world religions. It is, therefore, essential to recognize that, in addition to what may be thought of as being major world religions, religious perspectives such as atheism and agnosticism, religions with fewer adherents, and emerging religions represent important aspects of religious diversity. As a result, these religious perspectives ought to also be respected.

Furthermore, accepting religious diversity also means accepting as being worth discussion those traditions that are outside mainstream awareness or acceptance. While they are often labelled fringe or cults in a pejorative tone, this generally reflects a desire to maintain firm and clear boundaries between traditions and contested beliefs. Educators must remain aware of the likelihood that students belong to these traditions, or have some interest in them, and be willing to accommodate. The organizational focus here on philosophies, practices, people, places, and times/dates provides a helpful tool for the investigation of all traditions.

## Student Voice and Engagement

Once classroom guidelines have been discussed and established, there are several activities that promote a successful student learning community, and ensure students have a voice and that their interests are reflected in the classroom. Student engagement—absolutely key to authentic learning—comes about not only by way of a safe, respectful environment, but also through ensuring students’ interests are considered and engaged. This is achieved by

- Providing choice and input on which religions to study. A class survey of students’ choices could be especially valuable, provided teachers ensure that student choices include a diversity of religions.
- A pre- and post-course evaluation of students’ knowledge of religious diversity and their own religious perspectives.

A discussion of classroom rules or guidelines ought to embody all of the above, along with particular classroom and community needs and concerns.

## Guidelines for Selecting Which Religious Perspectives to Study

- Relevancy and reflecting the cultures of the classroom: What are the religious traditions/perspectives present in the classroom?
- What are the religious perspectives in which students express interest or curiosity in studying?
- Who is missing and should be included?
  - What groups are living in our community or attend the same school, but are not represented in the classroom?
  - What religious traditions are often misunderstood, or for which the students and community may have either little knowledge or strong stereotypes/misinformation?
- Is there an adequate representation of religious diversity?
  - How can I provide an insight into the range of religious perspectives?
  - Is there adequate representation of religious traditions of significant representation internationally?
  - How can we make linkages to smaller faith groups who may have made significant contributions to the evolution and development of world religions?
- Accessibility to authentic voices
  - What resource people are available?
  - Are there videos and other resources available?
  - Are there gathering places nearby that can be visited?
- What is your own knowledge level and comfort with different religious perspectives?
  - Do you hold significant biases towards a religious tradition or group?
  - What do you need to do to be better prepared?
  - Do you need to be the expert on every religion?
  - Who can assist you in exploring religious perspectives that are less familiar or comfortable to you?
  - How will this further your own learning and growth?



# Teaching and Assessment Tools

## Suggested Assessment and Evaluation Model

Assessment in this course should be ongoing and should include opportunities for student reflection, self-assessment, and peer assessment. Inter-religious experiences (e.g., visit to a religious gathering place, interview with a person of another religious tradition, attendance at a religious event or ritual) are encouraged and should be part of the assessment plan.

A classroom-based assessment approach, including assessment for learning, as learning, and of learning, will help students reach their potential and ensure academic rigour. Early and frequent assessment tasks, including descriptive feedback, will help students learn and grow, and appreciate the religious diversity in our communities.

Teachers may opt to create a class wiki, blog, or other social media tool as a means of facilitating the ongoing exchange of ideas throughout the course. The following model proposes guidelines for assessment of learning, and suggests a wide variety of assessment tools and strategies.

### **Knowledge and Critical Understanding**

Knowledge and critical understanding of religious diversity and specific religions, key concepts; evidence of enduring understandings

### **Research/Inquiry (Process and Product)**

Topic selection and generation of guiding questions, inquiry planning, engagement in dialogue, ongoing learning log, peer and self-assessment

Planning of research-action project, implementation, communication, and evaluation of results

Choice of research product, quality of work, and presentation

Tools:

### **Inter-Religious Experiences**

Knowledge, analysis, reflection, and understanding of religious diversity and specific religions, key concepts; evidence of enduring understandings

Tools:

Teachers are encouraged to use assessment and evaluation practices, such as the following, that are consistent with student-centered instructional practices:

- Negotiating and making explicit the criteria by which performance will be evaluated
- Designing assessment tasks that help students make judgements about their own learning and performance
- Designing assessment tasks that incorporate varying learning styles
- Individualizing assessment tasks as appropriate to accommodate students' particular learning needs
- Providing feedback on student learning and performance on a regular basis

Assessment activities, tasks, and strategies include, but are not limited to, the following:

- |  |                         |
|--|-------------------------|
| ■ anecdotal records                    | ■ performance tasks     |
| ■ audiotapes                           | ■ portfolios            |
| ■ checklists                           | ■ projects              |
| ■ conferences                          | ■ questioning           |
| ■ demonstrations                       | ■ questionnaires        |
| ■ exhibitions                          | ■ self-assessments      |
| ■ interviews (structured and informal) | ■ seminar presentations |
| ■ inventories                          | ■ surveys               |
| ■ investigations                       | ■ tests                 |
| ■ learning logs/journals               | ■ videotapes            |
| ■ media products                       | ■ work samples          |
| ■ observation (formal and informal)    | ■ written assignments   |
| ■ peer assessments                     |                         |

Some additional teaching and assessment tools and activities that may be particularly useful for this course include the following:

- **Reflection journals**

As part of ongoing assessment, a regular reflection journal would be especially valuable. Journaling would allow the course content to better reflect student concerns, questions, and learning needs, while also helping students take ownership of their growth. Journals may be shared with teachers, or could be used as inspiration for larger projects.

- **Site visits**

Making links with community groups would help students connect academic ideas and real-world practice. Visits to religious sites and participation in ceremonies would help accomplish this purpose. Given the sensitivity of such visits, students would need to be coached on appropriate, respectful behaviour.

- **Guest speakers**  
Speakers can help connect students to the community, increase their exposure to religious diversity, and ensure authentic voices.
- **Discussion**  
In-class discussions are particularly valuable when exploring diversity. More strongly than with other types of school activities, discussion encourages students to engage actively in the exploration of diversity by directly encountering the differing viewpoints of other students. Various strategies (jigsaw, think-pair-share, circles, galleries, fishbowl, etc.) could be employed.
- **Portfolios**  
One form of on-going assessment that may prove valuable to students is to maintain a portfolio. Students could include not only reflections, but also articles from newspapers or from the Internet. One advantage of this approach is that it would allow and encourage students to focus on a particular topic or tradition, rather than religion as a whole.
- **Creation/Production Artistic Expression/Works**  
Visual Arts, Drama, Music, and Dance can be valuable ways of connecting the course to learners who experience more success from a variety of learning styles. Creating a school mural on religious diversity can be an active way for the class to express their understanding and engage other students.
- **Literature Studies (Novels, Graphic Novels, Essays, Stories, Biographies...)**  
Students' reading of novels or literature may enhance their understanding of a religion and provide a personal perspective or narrative that they might otherwise not experience.
- **Process Writing**  
Essays, Stories, Poems, Opinion Pieces...

## Selecting Learning Resources

A range of learning resources such as literature, narratives, films, videos, and multimedia resources can be effective for exploring issues related to diversity of religious perspectives and world religions. However, it is critical that teachers carefully preview, select, and plan for the use of these resources to ensure that they are used effectively and that learners benefit from reading and discussing the resource.

Video, websites, and multimedia resources, as with all other literature or educational resource selections should be reviewed by school division staff before they are used by students. In this way, learner sensitivities and the perspectives of the student population, as well as the appropriateness of the resource for the intended learning objectives are taken into account. In addition, the effectiveness of a particular resource will depend greatly on what the teacher or facilitator does in terms of preparing the audience before viewing, as well as the needs and interaction of students during and post viewing.

In selecting learning resources for this course, consider the following questions:

1. Are you confident that the books, readings, and other resources you are using are of sufficiently high quality?

This is indicated by a range of factors, including: accessibility of text; accuracy, balance, and relevance of the material; usefulness of illustrations and pictures; appropriateness and challenge of learning activities; depth of treatment; and acknowledgement of diversity and sensitivities/controversy.

2. Are you confident that the books, videos, or other resources on religious perspectives, religions, and beliefs that you are using give a fair and authentic representation of them?

Not all resources are the same, many experts can find much to praise in most books and learning resources that treat religions either individually or thematically, they can also identify weaknesses.

3. Do you and/or the school library/learning resource center provide students with access to a wide range of good quality books and other resources for exploring religious diversity?

School libraries/learning resource centres may offer collections of books and other resources on specific religions and diversity of religions, but these can sometimes be dated or not adequately reflect the contemporary diversity of religious perspectives in the school and Manitoba's communities.



# Teaching and Learning Resources

## Religious Education Guidelines

- **Guidelines for Teaching about Religion in K-12 Public Schools in the United States:** <https://www.aarweb.org/about/teaching-about-religion-aar-guidelines-for-k-12-public-schools>
- **Teaching Tolerance Website** ([www.tolerance.org/](http://www.tolerance.org/)) of the Southern poverty law centre is a place “to find thought-provoking news, conversation and support for those who care about diversity, equal opportunity and respect for differences in schools. The site offers a number of ideas and resources for antibias education, including World Religions.” This includes Taking a Closer Look at Religions Around the World | Teaching Tolerance and 10 Tips for Starting a World Religions Curriculum | Teaching Tolerance.
- **Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools:** [www.osce.org/odihr/29154](http://www.osce.org/odihr/29154)
- **United Kingdom: Religious Education in English Schools: Non-Statutory Guidance 2010** (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-guidance-in-english-schools-non-statutory-guidance-2010>): The purpose of this publication, produced by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), is to support the provision of high-quality religious education (RE) in maintained schools in England. It provides clear, non-statutory guidance about RE in the curriculum and the roles of those who have a responsibility for, involvement in, or interest in the subject.
- Wertheimer, Linda K. “How to Teach about World Religions in Schools.” Time, 30 Sept. 2011, <http://time.com/4515229/religion-teaching-public-schools/>.

## Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusive Classrooms

- **Developing Cultural Sensitivity in the Classroom:**  
[www.acsa.edu.au/pages/images/ideas\\_developing.pdf](http://www.acsa.edu.au/pages/images/ideas_developing.pdf)  
This Australian resource provides a short learning sequence that focuses on developing cultural sensitivity and intercultural understanding. It incorporates practical strategies and includes Blackline masters that help students explore their cultures and religions.

## Dealing with Sensitive or Conflictual Ethical and Social Issues

- **Teaching Controversial Issues in Religious Education:**  
[www.re-handbook.org.uk/section/approaches/teaching-controversial-issues-in-religious-education](http://www.re-handbook.org.uk/section/approaches/teaching-controversial-issues-in-religious-education)
- **Teaching Controversial Topics:**  
<http://ctl.yale.edu/teaching/ideas-teaching/teaching-controversial-topics>
- **Religion and LGBT People:**  
[https://wiki2.org/en/LGBT\\_and\\_religion\\_topics](https://wiki2.org/en/LGBT_and_religion_topics)
- **Controversial Issues in World Religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam:**  
<http://schools.yrdsb.ca/markville.ss/history/religion/islamissues.html>

## Canada Religious Diversity Statistics and Information

- Canada Policy Research Initiative (2009). Religious Diversity in Canada, Horizons, Vol. 10, No. 2. [http://publications.gc.ca/site/archivee-archived.html?url=http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection\\_2009/policyresearch/CP12-1-10-2E.pdf](http://publications.gc.ca/site/archivee-archived.html?url=http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2009/policyresearch/CP12-1-10-2E.pdf).
- **Statistics Canada: Religion** ([www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/help/bb/info/religion](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/help/bb/info/religion)) web page of the Government of Canada with links to the latest information on religion from Statistics Canada, including tables and articles.

## World Religions—Religious Diversity Curricula

- **International Baccalaureate World Religions Curriculum:** “The Diploma Programme SL world religions course is a new course that was launched in September 2011... The Diploma Programme world religions course is a systematic, analytical yet empathetic study of the variety of beliefs and practices encountered in nine main religions of the world. The course seeks to promote an awareness of religious issues in the contemporary world by requiring the study of a diverse range of religions.” <https://www.ibo.org/programmes/diploma-programme/curriculum/individuals-and-societies/world-religions/>
- **Newfoundland and Labrador Religious Education Curricula** (<https://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/k12/curriculum/guides/religion/index.html>): Curriculum guides for religious education for Kindergarten to high school are available. This includes the World Religions high school course. ([https://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/k12/curriculum/guides/religion/rel-ed3101\\_3106.pdf](https://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/k12/curriculum/guides/religion/rel-ed3101_3106.pdf))
- **Religions of the World Course and Digital resources at HippoCampus** is a project of the Monterey Institute for Technology and Education (MITE). The goal of HippoCampus is to provide high quality, multimedia content on general education subjects to high school and college students free of charge. [www.hippocampus.org/Religion](http://www.hippocampus.org/Religion)

## Diversity of Religion: Websites

- **Adherents.com** ([www.adherents.com/](http://www.adherents.com/)): Provides a collection of adherent statistics, religious geography citations, and references to published membership/adherent statistics and congregation statistics for over 4,200 religions, churches, denominations, religious bodies, faith groups, tribes, cultures, movements, ultimate concerns, etc. The religions of the world are enumerated and data is provided from both primary research sources such as government census reports, statistical sampling surveys and organizational reporting, as well as citations from secondary literature, which mention adherent statistics.  
  
Adherents.com also has detailed lists of influential and famous adherents of over 100 different religious groups and lists of prominent people classified by religious affiliation. These lists are linked to detailed religious/spiritual biographies.

- **American Academy of Religion, Why Study Religion?** ([www.studyreligion.org/site/about.html](http://www.studyreligion.org/site/about.html)) welcomes all disciplined reflection on religion, both from within and outside of communities of belief and practice. The site offers resources related to the study of religion and may serve as a guide for students interested in the study of religion. The website is divided into sections.
  - Why Study Religion?
  - What Is Religion?
  - Misconceptions
  - Pressing Issues
  - What Will I Study?
  - Where Can I Go?
  - Where Do I Start?
  
- **Annenberg Learner:** Features several resources that may be useful for this course. Annenberg Learner resources can be accessed free at <https://www.Learner.org>.
  
- **Bridging World History** ([www.learner.org/courses/worldhistory/about.html](http://www.learner.org/courses/worldhistory/about.html)) is a set of multimedia materials designed to help learners discover world history. The following two units may be particularly useful for this course.
  - **Unit 7: The Spread of Religions** ([www.learner.org/courses/worldhistory/unit\\_main\\_7.html](http://www.learner.org/courses/worldhistory/unit_main_7.html)) explores how religions interact, adopt new ideas, and adapt to diverse cultures. As the missionaries, pilgrims, and converts of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam moved around the world, the religions created change and were themselves changed.
  - **Unit 5: Early Belief Systems** ([www.learner.org/courses/worldhistory/unit\\_main\\_5.html](http://www.learner.org/courses/worldhistory/unit_main_5.html)) explores how people begin to understand themselves in relation to the natural world and to the unseen realms beyond, and how religion is a community experience. In this unit, animism and shamanism in Shinto are contrasted with philosophical and ethical systems in early Greece and China, and the beginnings of Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, and Judaism.
  
- **BBC World Religions** ([www.bbc.co.uk/religion/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/)): The British Broadcasting Company website features a section devoted to religion and religious education. Resources available range from information on specific religions ([www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/)) to podcasts of shows and includes “Class Clips” (video) on religious themes.
  
- **Beliefnet Website** ([www.beliefnet.com](http://www.beliefnet.com)): Beliefnet is a multi-faith inspiration and spirituality website. It provides information, community, and services on a wide variety of topics. Beliefnet’s main topic channels include Inspiration, Health, Entertainment, Love and Family, Holistic Living, Blogs, Community, Faith & Prayer, and News. Beliefnet is not affiliated with any spiritual organization or movement. The website is ad supported.



- **Facets of Religion** is a religious resources index and is the WWW Virtual Library's official Religion category. The WWW Virtual Library was the very first web directory. [www.facetsofreligion.com/About/about.html](http://www.facetsofreligion.com/About/about.html)
- **Geography of Religion Website** ([www.greenwoodsvillage.com/gor/mainmenu.php](http://www.greenwoodsvillage.com/gor/mainmenu.php)): This site is the result of classes offered at Morehead State University in Morehead, KY taught by Dr. Timothy Pitts and features a collation of the research done by the students of GEO 399, The Geography of Religion. Various religions are covered, with each page containing the main points of each religion, and may include related texts, graphics, and links to relevant sites. The summary of each faith is followed by the geography of that faith which may include maps and demographic data.
- **Interfaith.org** ([www.interfaith.org](http://www.interfaith.org)): Is an independent online publication, providing information on a comprehensive range of issues relating to religion, faith, and spiritual matters. The main areas the site covers include major world religions, new religions, and spiritual development. While Interfaith.org was primarily developed with a United Kingdom audience in mind, they try to cover key events across the world, as they deem relevant.
- **Internet Guide to Religion (Wabash Center)**: The Wabash Center supports teachers of religion and theology in higher education. The Center's website offers a selective, annotated guide to a wide variety of electronic resources related to the study and practice of religion, including syllabi, electronic texts, electronic journals, web sites, bibliographies, liturgies, reference resources, and software. [www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/guide-headings.aspx](http://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/guide-headings.aspx)
- **Internet Sacred Text Archive** ([www.sacred-texts.com/index.htm](http://www.sacred-texts.com/index.htm)): Features the electronic texts of over 1700 sacred texts from various religions and backgrounds.
- **Lessons from the World's Major Religions: A Narrative WebQuest—An Integrated Social Studies and English Unit for Middle School Students from School District No. 71—Comox Valley, British Columbia** by T. Jerome (Cape Lazo Middle School). This WebQuest ([http://sd71.bc.ca/Sd71/Edulinks/ICT6\\_9/lessons/Index.htm](http://sd71.bc.ca/Sd71/Edulinks/ICT6_9/lessons/Index.htm)) is a Humanities based project that integrates Social Studies and English learning outcomes. Students can seek information about one of the world's major religions, read stories from this religion, and then write their own religious narratives based on their research.
- **The Major World Religions** ([www.omsakthi.org/religions.html](http://www.omsakthi.org/religions.html)): This is a world religions site of the Hinduism based Adhiparasakthi Movement that originated in Southern India. The site provides basic information on major world religions including key books/resources.
- **New York Times: Resources—World Religions** (<http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/09/10/resources-world-religions/>): This is a resource from the New York Times Learning Network site. It features a list of resources on world religions, and students' responses to the paper's Student Opinion questions on spirituality and religious tolerance.

- **Public Broadcasting Station Education** ([www.pbs.org/education/](http://www.pbs.org/education/)) provides resources from the PBS for teachers. The site includes resources for teaching about religious diversity and ethics. **Public Broadcasting Station Learning Media** (<https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/>) offers media that teachers may use and <https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/student/> is dedicated to student use.
- **The Pluralism Project** ([www.fas.harvard.edu/~pluralism/](http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~pluralism/)) was developed by Diana L. Eck at Harvard University to study and document the growing religious diversity of the United States, with a special view to its new immigrant religious communities. The website features many resources related to religious diversity of interest including online resources on specific religions and teacher resources. The site includes a description of the CD-ROM and slide sets that give teachers and students of religion multimedia resources to enhance their appreciation of religious diversity.
- **RE: Online** ([www.reonline.org.uk](http://www.reonline.org.uk)) Culham St Gabriel's ([www.cstg.org.uk](http://www.cstg.org.uk)) is a charitable trust from the United Kingdom dedicated to supporting religious education (RE) in schools. RE: ONLINE offers a range of resources from guidelines to articles on specific religions.
- **Religion and Diversity Project** ([www.religionanddiversity.ca/en/](http://www.religionanddiversity.ca/en/)): Is a bilingual website of academic collaborative whose aim is to explore a number of questions on religious diversity in Canada.
- **Religion Facts** ([www.religionfacts.com/](http://www.religionfacts.com/)): The goal of ReligionFacts is to provide free, reliable information—just the facts—on the various questions related to religions, as well as the rituals and customs that go along with them. The site features articles on a wide variety of world religions, both ancient and modern, as well as “ways of life,” philosophies, mind-body teachings, and even some anti-religion systems like ancient Epicureanism and modern atheism. In addition, comparison charts, a glossary, and information on icons and images are featured.
- **Religious Studies in Secondary Schools (RSISS)** website: RSISS is a coalition of public and private secondary school teachers working in conjunction with the Council for Spiritual and Ethical Education (CSEE), in Portland, Oregon. They are committed to the idea that education is not complete without the academic study of the world's religious traditions and the ethical values, literatures, and cultures inextricably linked to them. The site offers information on texts and resources on specific religions and examples of religious studies syllabi, including, but not limited to World Religion courses. <http://fore.yale.edu/education/professionaldevelopment/workshops/rsissworks/>
- **Religious Studies Web Guide:** This website, in existence since 1995, focuses on free Internet resources of use to researchers involved in the academic study of religion. (<https://library.ucalgary.ca/religiousstudieswebguide>)
- **Religious Tolerance** ([www.religioustolerance.org/](http://www.religioustolerance.org/)): This Ontario group is dedicated to promoting understanding among different faith groups. Teachers will need to review the resources of this site for appropriateness.

- **Religious Worlds of New York: Teaching the Everyday Life of American Religious Diversity:** The Religious Worlds of New York site is the result of a summer institute that was developed and offered in New York. The goal is to contribute to such understanding by helping public, private, and parochial school teachers teach more effectively about the everyday lives of American religious communities. The institute introduces teachers to six religious traditions. The site has an excellent array of downloadable resources from teaching guidelines to literature reflecting religious diversity. (<http://religiousworldsnyc.org/content/welcome>)
- **The Islam Project Education Resources** ([www.theislamproject.org/education/Lessonplans.htm](http://www.theislamproject.org/education/Lessonplans.htm)): The Islam Project is a multimedia effort aimed at schools, communities, and individuals who want a clearer understanding of this institution: complex, diverse, historically and spiritually rich, and—to many—mysterious and even forbidding.
- **World Religions and Spirituality** ([www.has.vcu.edu/wrs/index.html](http://www.has.vcu.edu/wrs/index.html)): The stated mission of World Religions and Spirituality is to provide “objective, reliable and comprehensive information about the diverse array of religious and spiritual groups currently found in North America.” The central feature of the site is to provide profiles of contemporary religious and spiritual movements, established world religions, and historical religious and spiritual movements. Each profile includes a presentation of the group’s distinctive beliefs, rituals, organization and leadership, and issues/challenges. This website strives to offer comprehensive, balanced information for religion scholars, students, media representatives, and those with a personal interest in understanding the diversity of religious and spiritual alternatives in the contemporary world. The text-based group profiles also include video clips and links to scholarly resources. WRSP profiles currently can be searched alphabetically.
- **United Communities of Spirit:** is a “global interfaith network, linking people of diverse faiths and beliefs who want to work with others to build a better world.” Their aim is to promote awareness that all humanity is part of the same spiritual family. UCS has been online continuously since January 1996. <http://interspirit.net/home.cfm?group=462823>
- **A Comparative Analysis of the Major World Religions from a Christian Perspective** ([www.comparativereligion.com/index.html](http://www.comparativereligion.com/index.html)): Provides a comparative analysis of the major world religions from a Christian perspective.
- **World Religions Index** (<http://wri.leaderu.com/index.html>): This is a site developed by a Christian group, Telling the Truth Project, which seeks to equip “Christians to Understand Other World Faiths and Religious Philosophies”. The site features personal stories, articles, and comparison studies, as well as the group’s recommended links for other sites that deal with world religions, cults, and religious philosophies.

## Multifaith Calendars

- **Canadian Multifaith Calendar** ([www.amssa.org/](http://www.amssa.org/)): Information on the calendar and how to obtain it.
- **Interfaith Calendar** ([www.interfaith-calendar.org/](http://www.interfaith-calendar.org/)): Extensive online calendar with a wealth of information including short descriptions of the special days noted.

## Religious Diversity Texts

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Resource for secondary school faculties and students. The book contains first-person accounts of religious practices and rituals representing all of the major spiritual traditions. This Center for Spiritual and Ethical Education; Updated edition (CSEE) provides in depth coverage of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, with additional discussion on symbols, myths and rituals, indigenous cultures, and religious experiences. Available through the Curriculum page, Resources for Grades 9-12, World Religions, on the CSEE website: [www.csee.org](http://www.csee.org).
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## Examples of Teaching Units

- **Grade 7 Unit on World Religions** in the Michigan Citizenship Collaborative Curriculum: A Comprehensive K-12 Social Studies Curriculum, Based on the Michigan Social Studies Content Expectations.  
[www.scope.oakland.k12.mi.us](http://www.scope.oakland.k12.mi.us)
- **Unit—How Have World Religions Shaped Who I Am Today?** From Thirteen Ed Online. [www.thirteen.org/edonline/concept2class/mi/lp\\_middle1.html](http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/concept2class/mi/lp_middle1.html)
- **World Religions Unit** developed by Introduction to some of the worlds faith traditions by Cindy Dougharity-Spencer.  
[www.livebinders.com/play/play\\_or\\_edit?id=127886](http://www.livebinders.com/play/play_or_edit?id=127886)
- **World Religions and Spirituality Unit (Grade 6)** ([www.rainiervalleyhistory.org/world-religions-and-spirituality/](http://www.rainiervalleyhistory.org/world-religions-and-spirituality/)): This is a unit developed by a teacher, Chris Quigley for Grade 6 students. In the unit, students are exposed to many of the world's major religions, as well as forms of spirituality that are not "organized" religions. The document provides many useful insights and suggestions for teaching world religions courses. It is one of two teaching units developed by The Rainier Valley Historical Society, located in Seattle, Washington.

## Student Project Example

- **The World Religions—Opening the Doors to Understanding** website was developed by a student team consisting of two eighth graders and two seventh graders. <http://library.thinkquest.org>





# Appendices

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