***Teaching about World Religions using the AAR Pedagogical Competencies***

***“Scavenger Hunt”***

The objective of this modified “Scavenger Hunt” is to familiarize you with the World Religions identified in the OACS, understand the key issues and challenges faced with teaching about this content in public schools, and identifying appropriate resources, best practices and skills to effectively teach about World religions. We will use the Pedagogical Competencies outlined in the AAR document

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Pedagogical Competencies***  | ***Explore/Research/Reflect*** | ***Application*** |
| ***Station 1 (20 points)**** Identify the OACS that focus on World Religions
* Be able to find and recognize appropriate resources about religion when needed, on the Internet or in more traditional media.
 | Grade 6Strand: GeographyTopic: Human SystemsStatement #8: Modern cultural practices and products show the influence of tradition and diffusion, including the impact of major world religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism).Strand: HistoryTopic: Early CivilizationsStatement #2: Early civilizations (India, Egypt, China and Mesopotamia) withunique governments, economic systems, social structures, religions, technologies and agricultural practices and products flourished as a result of favorable geographic characteristics. The cultural practices and products of these early civilizations can be used to help understand the Eastern Hemisphere today.**Buddhism**<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/buddhism/>* This website provides categorized information about Buddhism. It includes beliefs, customs, ethics, history, holy days, people, and information about subdivisions of Buddhism.

Wilkinson, P. (2003). *DK Eyewitness Books: Buddhism*.  New York, NY: DK Publishing.* This is a reference book both students and teachers could use. It explores the history and practice of Buddhism beginning with the life of Buddha and continuing through to the spread of Buddhism in Asia and the Western world. It includes many wonderful pictures, both illustrated and photographs of different aspects of Buddhism.

Koja, K. (2004). *Buddha Boy*. New York, NY: Speak  Publishers.* This is a young adult novel about a boy, Jinsen, who is called “Buddha Boy” by the kids at school. He is paired with another student to work on an art project, and this student discovers Jinsen’s amazing artistic talent. Jinsen is also able to draw strength from his Buddhist beliefs in times of trial and bullying at school. This book has a strong male character as the main character.

**Hinduism**<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/>* This website provides categorized information about different aspects of Hinduism, including important concepts, deities, ethics, history, holy days, rites and rituals, texts, and worship.

Lochtefeld, J.G. (2002). *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of*  *Hinduism*. New York, NY: Rosen Publishing Group.* This book is written by a historian and expert on Hinduism, Buddhism and other Asian religions. It is written in a straightforward manner and includes over 2500 entries that are alphabetically arranged. Along with the entries on rituals, art, celebrations and more, there are maps, charts and other useful diagrams to help understand the information.

Arni, S. (2011). *Sita’s Ramayana*. Toronto, ON:  Groundwood Books.* This is a graphic novel that is a retelling of the classic Hindu Epic of the Ramayana, but is told by Sita, the queen. It is also told in the style of a folktale and is a more kid-friendly retelling of a complex story. There are very vivid and graphic illustrations, as it is a graphic novel.

**Islam**<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/>* This website provides categorized information about various aspects of Islam including: arts and culture, beliefs, history, holy days, ethics, practices, prayer and worship, rites and rituals, subdivisions and texts. It is organized in a user friendly way.

Stone, C. (2005). *DK Eyewitness Books: Islam*. New York,  NY: DK Children.* This book could be used by teachers or students and is full of many great illustrations and a ton of information. It specifically looks at how faith, culture, and history have shaped the modern Islamic world. Additionally, it looks at the Qur’an and the Five Pillars of Islam. It also includes timelines, traditional dress for men and women, and information about what takes place during a hajj.

Husain, A. (2010). *Neither This Nor That.* Lulu.com.* This is a young adult book about Fatima, who is a young American Muslim. She is trying to fit in and figure out where she belongs, while holding true to her Islamic morals and her family’s way of life.

**Christianity**<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/>* This website provides categorized information about Christianity, such as beliefs, ethics, holidays and holy days, people, places, religious figures, prayer, rites and rituals, and symbols. It is easy to navigate and find what you are looking for.

Wilkinson, P. (2006). *DK Eyewitness Books: Christianity*.  New York, NY: DK Children.* This resource book is set up similar to the website above in terms of categories. It provides many wonderful photographs of various artifacts relating to Christianity. Additionally, it goes through the life of Jesus, different branches of Christianity, religious authorities, culture, and timelines. It also includes a detailed glossary of important terms.

Lewis, C.S. (1950). *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.  UK: Geoffrey Bles Publishing* This book is a classic in terms of Christian fiction. It is widely known for many Christian themes and morals that can be found throughout the book. The main story is an allegory of Christ’s crucifixion and there are many parallels that can be discussed as well.

**Judaism**<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism/>* This website provides categorized information about various aspects of Judaism including beliefs, customs, history, ethics, people, the Holocaust, rites, texts, and worship. It is organized in a way that is easy to access the various information.

Schreiber, M. (1998). *The Shengold Jewish Encyclopedia.*  Lanham, MD: Schreiber Publishing.* This encyclopedia provides great information about religion, beliefs, customs, and personalities. It is a more up-to-date version of a previous edition, with more timely information. There are a hundreds of illustration and the book was compiled by over 30 specialists on the Jewish religion and culture.

Bat-Ami, M. (1995). *Dear Elijah*. New York, NY: FS&G.* This is a story about a girl who is scared because her father has gotten sick and might not make it home from the hospital in time for Passover, or maybe even at all. She decides to write to the prophet Elijah, since she does not want to talk to her friends about this. In these letters she shares her joys, doubts, trials, and tribulations and includes a lot of good information about being a traditional Jewish girl.
 | ***Write a short description highlighting key points of each religion*****Buddhism**Buddhism is very spiritual in nature and focuses on personal spiritual development and attainment of a deep insight into the nature of life. Buddhists seek to reach a state of nirvana, following the path of Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, who went to seek Enlightenment in the 6th century. There is no belief in a personal god. Buddhists believe that change is always possible and nothing is fixed or permanent. To seek Enlightenment, Buddhists practice morality, meditation, and wisdom.*(http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/**buddhism/ataglance/glance.shtml)***Hinduism**Hinduism is the religion of the majority of people in India and Nepal. It originated near the Indus River Valley in modern day Pakistan. Hindus believe in a Supreme God, whose “qualities and forms are represented by the multitude of deities which emanate from him” (BBC Hinduism). They also believe that their life is governed by Karma and they pass through a cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. Additionally, Hindus believe that the soul passes through many cycles of lives and in the next incarnation, the life is dependent upon the one previously lived. The sacred scripture is called the Vedas, which is written in Sanskrit and often mention dharma, their code of law or code of conduct. (*http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/**religions/hinduism/ataglance/glance.shtml)***Islam**Islam means “submission to the will of God”. Muslims believe that there is only one God, which, in Arabic, is Allah. They believe many prophets have been sent, including Jesus, Moses, and Abraham, but Muhammad is the final Prophet. Their holy book is the Qur’an, which includes their laws. There are Five Basic Pillars of Islam, which include, praying five times a day, a declaration of faith, giving money to charity, fasting, and a pilgrimage to Mecca, which is their holy land. It was there that Muslims believe Islam was revealed. Ramadan is their most well known holy day, which is a time when Muslims fast during the daylight hours. It falls during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. Muslims worship in a Mosque.*(http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/)***Christianity**Christians believe in one God, and that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who was sent to earth to save humanity from our sins. Although Christians believe in one God, they believe there are three persons: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One of the most important concepts of Christianity is Christ’s crucifixion, followed by his resurrection on the third day, which is celebrated in modern times on Easter Sunday. Christians worship in churches, led by religious authorities called priests or ministers. Their holy book is the Bible, which consists of the Old and New Testaments. It contains the life story of Jesus, as well as ways to live a Christian life. There are a couple of different branches of Christianity, including Protestantism and Catholicism.*(http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions**/christianity/)***Judaism**Judaism is the oldest of the 3 Abrahamic faiths (the others being Christianity and Islam). It was founded by Moses over 3500 years ago, but Jews trace their ancestry back to Abraham. Judaism is a monotheistic religion, and Jews have a covenant with this God. Jewish people try to keep God’s laws and bring holiness into every aspect of their lives, in thanksgiving for all of the goodness God has done for them. Jews worship in synagogues with Rabbis as the religious authority. Their holy book is the Torah, which include scripture as well as laws.*(http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/**judaism/ataglance/glance.shtml)* |
| ***Station 2 (15 points)**** Develop skills in leading students in discussion regarding their religious beliefs and practices, as well as the beliefs and practices of others.
* Be aware of examples of best practices in teaching about religion.
* Develop the ability to present multiple religious perspectives in a fair or neutral way.
 | ***Highlight at least 2 key points from the reading that addresses each of these competencies*****Develop skills in leading students in discussion regarding their religious beliefs and practices, as well as the beliefs and practices of others.** 1) This is addressed in the “Initial Steps” section. It is there that they talk about having students think about their assumptions about various religions and then hold a discussion surrounding these assumptions. This is important to do at the beginning of the school year to help set up a tolerant environment and get all assumptions and misinformation out in the open.2) In the “Setting the Context” section, it discusses that teachers should make a clear distinction between devotional religion and secular academic religion early on in the year. Making this distinction will “help them realize that the aim of teaching about religion is to better understand the religious dimensions of human experience, not to promote religion or a particular religious perspective” (AAR, 2010, p. 11), which will lead to more tolerant, respectful discussions.**Be aware of examples of best practices in teaching about religion**1) The cultural studies approach gives an example of best practice in teaching. This approach ensures that teachers and students are interpreters of meaning. This means that teachers and students are not just looking at the surface level of documents, but interpreting the meaning behind why they were written.2) Another best practice mentioned in the section about the cultural studies approach, is the idea of covering less and going more in depth, rather than strictly covering surface level information. This is part of the best practice that talks about learning being challenging and students taking responsibility for their learning, sometimes going above and beyond what is actually required of them to learn, to get a deeper understanding of the topic.3) Teachers should also help their students to critically analyze any information the media portrays about religion. The media is often a source we get our information about religion from. However, sometimes it can be portrayed in ways that misinform the audience. Educators should “explicitly address with their students the problems associated with relying on the media for information about religion and its role in human affairs” (AAR, 2010, p. 11).**Develop the ability to present multiple religious perspectives in a fair or neutral way.**1) Looking at the historical approach to teaching religion, the authors mention that “religions do not evolve in a vacuum, and looking at the historical circumstances that shaped the development of a tradition or worldview can help students see that religions are complex webs of practices and values with a variety of expressions rather than monolithic, fully formed sets of ideas and beliefs” (AAR, 2010, p. 9).2) We can also look at the fact that religions are internally diverse (premise #1), and present that within one religion, there may be multiple ways it is practiced based on the socioeconomic status of the people or the region of the world in which they are practicing.3) Students also need to learn that religions are still changing today, and students cannot base their knowledge simply on historical information. They must pair it with more relevant information and look at it through an unbiased lens. From a religious studies view, there is no such thing as a single meaning of a given tradition, belief system, or practice (AAR, 2010).  | ***How can incorporate this into your teaching of world religions? Provide at least 1 example for each competency***To lead students in discussion regarding their religious beliefs and practices, as well as the beliefs and practices of others, I liked what the document suggestions about having students think about their assumptions about various religions. Often our assumptions become a biased lens through which we look at other religions. It is important to make these assumptions known, in order to create a more tolerant and respectful learning environment for all students. Students could write down what they know about certain religions and share them with the class if they feel comfortable. Those who may be experts on a religion could offer corrected information if anything is wrong. Also, if there are assumptions that include misinformation, students could become the experts on the religion. This would be an opportunity to also teach how to evaluate sources in order to gain accurate, unbiased information.In order to incorporate best practices, I would have my students interact with the dialogue of an important religious document and act out a portion of it. I want them to go deeper than simply surface level. This may cause us to move at a slower pace, but students will have a better understanding of the material. Students will also need to evaluate these materials in order to determine whether they find them to be accurate.To develop the ability to present multiple religious perspectives in a fair or neutral way, I would have students pick one of the major world religions. Before having them choose a religion, I would teach a mini lesson on how to evaluate sources. It is so important that students are able to see these religions from multiple perspectives, but also they need to know that not every source is accurate to pull information from. After they had chosen their world religion that they want to become an expert on, they will need to find a variety of sources such as children’s literature, websites, and other books, that present varied perspectives on the same religion. |
| ***Station 3 (15 points)**** Understand the difference between the secular academic and devotional approaches to religion, and consistently use the secular academic approach.
* Be able to address in a constructive way religious disagreements and conflicts that arise in the classroom.
* Be aware of, and manage effectively, religious diversity in the classroom.
* Create an environment of respect and tolerance—a safe environment in which students feel free to talk about religion.
 | ***The AAR guidelines outlines 4 Approaches to teaching religion (see pages 10-11). Which approach do you think you will follow? Why?*** I think I would use the cultural studies approach, because it is the most comprehensive. Although it requires additional training in religious studies, I believe religion is important enough to teach to students that the additional training would be beneficial. Another potential weakness, that could actually be a strength after our discussion about standards, is that this approach causes teachers to slow down and cover less content more in depth (AAR, 2010). However, I like this approach because it includes many aspects of the other three approaches. I think it is important for students to understand that religion is embedded in culture and cannot be understood in isolation from social/historical expressions (AAR, 2010). Also, an important part of curriculum today is understanding meaning. A strength of this approach is that teachers and students are interpreters of meaning.***What do you understand by the competencies in Station 3?*** I understand that it is extremely important to separate devotional approaches to religion from secular academic approaches. Without this separation, teachers may influence the way religion is taught and students would not get an unbiased view of the many religions practiced throughout the world. Teachers need to teach the “facts”, for lack of a better word, without sharing their opinion about religion in any way. From the second competency, I understand that teachers need to have a good understanding of the religions they are teaching so they do not misinform their students. The more confident they are in the secular academic information on the religion, the more constructive ways they will have to solve any religious disagreements that arise in the classroom because their information will be unbiased and strictly secular academic information. Teachers should understand where their students are coming from and be open to listening to their opinions about religion. The teacher should not try to change their views in any way, rather, simply present information in an academic manner. Lastly, I have always believed that students should feel safe to share personal information in the classroom. All classrooms should be safe places and the teacher should demand an environment of tolerance. Religion is a very personal matter for many students, especially schools that are quite diverse. Therefore, teachers should be respectful themselves, as well as teaching their students to be respectful of others’ views. | ***How will you implement your approach/understanding of competencies into practice? Provide at least 2-3 specific examples.***At the beginning of the year, I will be sure to set up an environment that is safe and tolerant of all students. I will explain to them the headache analogy. To get rid of a headache, some people may take an Advil®, others might take two Tylenol®. In this way, everyone is different. This works for both creating a tolerant classroom for learning as well as respecting everyone’s views. I also think it is important to give students an opportunity to share their “story” with one another. Both teachers and students should know about their fellow students and where they are coming from. Early on in the year, each student could have the opportunity to do a presentation on their family’s culture and history, so we can learn together and learn from everyone.To implement the cultural studies approach, I would discuss religion anytime we are talking about culture, to have students understand that religion is embedded in culture. However, I would also tie in historical documents and primary sources because religion cannot be understood in isolation from historical or social expressions. Additionally, I would ask my students, if they are comfortable, to share about their culture and possibly how religion plays a role in their culture. I would like my students to learn from one another, in a respectful manner. |
| ***Station 4 : Final Reflection******10 points*** | ***Reflect on the AAR document –what impact did these guidelines have on your professional development and pedagogy?***This document helped me to think about ways that are appropriate to teach religion in public schools. I consider myself a religious person and was concerned, if teaching in a public school, that my own personal views may come across when teaching. However, this document provided many appropriate ways to approach the topic of religion, strictly in a secular academic way, rather than devotional. I appreciated the document’s different approaches that can be used in different settings, such as the historical approach in social studies and the literature approach in language arts. Answering questions about religion can be very challenging, especially when a teacher may feel ill-prepared to answer them. I felt that the frequently asked questions section was very valuable and worth holding onto for future years as I enter my own classroom.This document really solidified the point that religion is meant to be understood, not necessarily agreed upon, when learning about it in school.  | ***How will you take all of the information you have gained from AAR and your research and make it comprehensible to your 6th graders? This is your “snapshot of practice” - provide at least 1 specific example of practice.***I would allow my students to ask questions about religion and hold time at the end of each period during our unit or specific class on religion to answer any of their questions. Or, perhaps students could submit questions the day before and I could have time to look at them to prepare accurate answers based on factual, unbiased information. I will make sure my students understand the importance of evaluating all sources of information before making assumptions about religion. We will look at a variety of sources and compare and contrast the different perspectives. At the beginning of the year, I will hold a discussion on creating a tolerant classroom environment where students feel comfortable sharing about their religion and culture.  |
| ***Total: 60 points*** |  |  |