

World Religions

Course Description and Rationale

The study of world religions is an integral part of understanding individuals, countries, and nations. Many concepts in religion can be very abstract. Consequently, an effort has been made to create a course outline that simplifies the task at hand: teaching world religions in a manner that communicates abstract concepts in historical context with an understanding of diversity and sensitivity to individual beliefs.

This course outline relies upon a chronological and geographic approach. For units IA and IB a sequential approach is employed. Beginning with IC, a geographic approach is added. At this point the study of world religions is divided into eastern and western with Mesopotamia being the dividing line. Under the development of western religions a study of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are included. Under the development of the eastern religions a study of Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Sikhism, Shinto, and religions of Korea and Japan are included. Although this is only one approach, by taking a geographic perspective, religions with similar history and features are automatically grouped. Additionally, the study of religions benefits from an approach that considers the three fundamental features of religions: theoretical, practical, and sociological.

Finally, the study of religions is not limited to those included in this course outline. The included religions are those that have been historically studied as part of religious studies. The instructor should integrate other religions where appropriate.

World Religions Content Outline

Unit One: Background and Western Religions

(Suggested time frame: nine weeks)

I. Understanding the World's Religious Heritage

(Suggested time frame: two weeks)

- A. Function of Religion
- B. Forms of Religious Expression
- C. Periods of Religious History
- D. Fundamental Features of Religions
 - 1. Theoretical
 - 2. Practical
 - 3. Sociological
- E. Women in World Religions

II. Cosmic Religions of Prehistoric and Tribal Peoples

(Suggested time frame: three weeks)

- A. First Human Faiths
 - 1. Hunters and Gatherers
 - 2. Early Settlements: Farmers
- B. Initiations
- C. Shamans

III. Introduction to Monotheistic Religions and Zoroastrianism

(Suggested time frame: one week)

IV. Judaism *(Suggested time frame: three weeks)*

- A. Ancient Story of Judaism
 - 1. Old Testament
 - 2. Early history
- B. Jewish Beliefs and Life
- C. Medieval and Modern Judaism
- D. Festivals and Practices
- E. Women in Judaism
- F. Judaism in America

Unit Two: Western Religions Continued (*Suggested time frame: nine weeks*)

I. Christianity

- A. Jesus and Paul
- B. Christianity in the Roman World
- C. Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy
- D. Medieval Christendom
- E. Reformation
 - 1. Protestant: Martin Luther and John Calvin
 - 2. English
 - 3. Catholic
 - 4. Radical Reform
- F. Christianity in America- Denominationalism
- G. Women in Christianity
- H. Christianity in the World Today

II. Islam

- A. Meaning of Islam
- B. Story of Muhammad
- C. Five Pillars of Islam
- D. Historic Islam
 - 1. Spread of Islam (early)
 - 2. Sectionalism: Sunni, Shi'a, Sufism
 - 3. Islamic Mysticism
- E. Classic Islamic Civilization
 - 1. Art/Literature
 - 2. Sciences
- F. Women in Islam
- G. Islam in the World Today

Unit III: Eastern Religions: Religions of South Asia
(*Suggested time frame: nine weeks*)

I. Hinduism

- A. Aryans and Dravidians
- B. Practice of Hinduism
 - 1. *Vedas and Upanishads*
 - 2. Gods and Goddesses
 - 3. Festivals and Practices

II. Buddhism

- A. Siddhartha Gautama Buddha
- B. Basic Buddhist Teachings

1. Four Noble Truths
 2. Eight-Fold Path
 3. Nirvana
- C. Branches of Buddhism
1. Theravada
 2. Mahayana: Vajrayana (Tantric), Pure land Buddhism, and Zen Buddhism
- D. Women in Buddhism
- E. Buddhism in the World Today

III. Sikhism

Unit Four: Eastern Religions: Religions of East Asia

(Suggested time frame: nine weeks)

I. Daoism

- A. Laozi
- B. Dao De Jing

II. Confucianism

III. Shinto

III. New Religious Movements*

IV. Religion in the World Today

*An ideal place to integrate other religions, especially those that are of interest to students in class.