

Curriculum Guide

Name of Course: Comparative Religions **Written/Revised:** 5/09

Course Number: 252 **Number of Credits:** 5

Level of Course: CPA **Grade Level Offered:** 11, 12

Course Description:

Introduction:

Why study religion? Isn't religion a personal matter in a secular post-modern world? One may be interested in the study of one's own religion, but the religion of others should scarcely concern us. These may seem to be valid questions and statements, but when one examines the impact of world religions, the discerning student quickly realizes the fundamental role that religion has played in the progress of civilization. Can one read the literature of any culture without an understanding of their religious heritage? Any examination of the human condition throughout the millennia that fails to consider the essential role of religion is a myopic endeavor. Can anyone alive in the twenty-first century mitigate the seminal role that religion plays in geo-politics and world events? In the post 9/11 world it would be foolish to assume that knowledge of religions is passé. We live in an era of 24 hour news, satellite coverage of events, and instant video; this has created a world which has become what some call, for better or worse, a "global village." No longer can any culture or civilization exist in a vacuum without the inevitable commingling of ideas. If you want to understand why Jerusalem seems to be the center of the world; why some religions see this time in history as the "end times"; why do most wars in history seem to be centered around religious conflict; what is man's relationship with god?; if you want to better understand the fundamental beliefs and practices of major world religions to better prepare yourself for the "global village" you will find this to be an essential course of study.

The course would serve as an introduction to most major world religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Shinto, Sikhism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, etc. It will be an unbiased and scholastic investigation of the basic history, values, goals & beliefs of each religion; however, as religion is a cultural reality, debate should, and will, arise to discuss the merits and foibles of each religion and its modern manifestations, practices and beliefs.

This course will be facilitated through discussions, primary religious source reading, documentaries, films, independent investigation, group work, guest speakers, field trips to various religious worship sites, projects, and of course, lectures. I will create an open forum setting in the classroom, where each student feels safe in stating their opinions without fear of reprisals from other students. We will respect the opinions and beliefs of others; it is in such open forums where the most effective learning occurs. Having said that, there will be a participation component of your grade—you must enter the room each day prepared to talk about the topic of the day, the reading etc. No course of study should ever place obtaining a certain grade as the paramount goal; education should be about personal transcendence and finding an interest in learning for the sake of learning.

It is my goal to facilitate the personal growth of each student, so that you can say that you are better off for having spent 180 days in this class.

The following films may be shown to facilitate the students understanding of each religion:

The Seventh Seal (Judaism, Christianity, prophecy)

Star Wars Trilogy: Spirituality and the New Frontier

The Ten Commandments (Judaism, Christianity, Islam)

Left Behind (evangelical Christianity)

The Passion of the Christ (Christianity)

The Lord of the Rings (Christianity)

Little Buddha (Buddhism)

Seven Years in Tibet (Tibetan Buddhism)

Kundun (Tibetan Buddhism)

The Apostle (Pentecostal)

Schindler's List (Judaism)

Chariot's of Fire (Christian)

The Chosen (Judaism)

The DaVinci Code (Christian Mysticism)

Pi (Judaism)

Gandhi (Hinduism)

The Cup (Buddhism)

The Message (Islam)

Kingdom of Heaven (Crusades)

A Passage to India (Hinduism)

Copious documentaries may also be used to facilitate the students understanding of various religions.

Core Curriculum Content Standards Addressed:

Standard 6.1 (Social Studies Skills)

All students will utilize historical thinking, problem solving, and research skills to maximize their understanding of Civics, History, Geography, and Economics.

Standard 6.3 (World History)

All students will demonstrate knowledge of world history in order to understand life and events in the past and how they relate to the present and the future.

The Birth of Civilization to 1000 BCE

Early Human Societies to 500 CE

Expanding Zones of exchange and interaction to 1400 CE

The age of global encounters (1400-1750)

The age of revolutionary change (1750-1914)

The era of the Great Wars (1914-1945)

The modern world (1945-1979)

Looking to the future (1980-present)

Standard 6.6 (Geography)

All students will apply knowledge of spatial relationships and other geographic skills to understand human behavior in relation to the physical and cultural environment.

The World in Spatial Terms
Places and Regions
Physical Systems
Human Systems
Environment and Society

Course Outline/ Timeline:

(Basic outline; subject to change)

OBJECTIVES (general):

Upon successful completion of this course, the students will be able to (measured by: participation, quizzes, tests etc.):

1. Demonstrate knowledge of the origins of religion as a human/ anthropological manifestation.
2. Understand why one should study religion.
3. Demonstrate an understanding of what religion is and why it originated.
4. Demonstrate knowledge of the cultural, ethnic and class variations in each religion.
5. Demonstrate a working knowledge of the various processes of assimilation and pluralism, as well as how these various processes have been applied to the various cultural manifestations of each religion.
6. Demonstrate an understanding of the impact of religion on history, today and the future.
7. Demonstrate knowledge of the basic tenets of each religion.

Critical thinking objectives:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the significant differences between each religion and its cultural manifestations.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the significant similarities of each religion.
3. Demonstrate knowledge of the current geo-political landscape and how it has been affected by religion.
4. Demonstrate knowledge of religious and cultural practices and holy days and how they are different and how they are similar.
5. Identify the causes and forms of religious conflict, in the past and the present.

Unit 1

Goals include the following: 1) to examine the basic scriptures of selected religions; 2) to describe the effect of religion on the arts of selected societies; 3) to describe the relationship between the institutions of religion and the state in selected societies; 4) to describe the teachings of selected religions on the nature of man, the natural universe, and the supernatural; 5) to describe the moral code of selected religions; and, 6) to assess the role of religion in the life of modern man and its impact on the modern geo-political landscape; 7) to examine the origins of religion as an

anthropological manifestation; 8) to define religion; 9) to describe the role of study and discussion in the course of Judaism; 10) to examine the role of Judaism over the past five millennia of history; 11) to evaluate the curious union of Judaism and evangelical Christianity and their political agendas; 12) to examine the book of Genesis as the origin of all three monotheistic religions; 12) to evaluate the miracle that is the modern state of Israel.

1st Marking Period:

@ 1-2 weeks:

Introduction to course and discussion of why study Religions

Defining religion: What is Religion? Is religion mans way to god, or god's way to man?

Anthropological explanations for the origins of religion: Animistic theories, Nature-Worship theory, Theory of Original Monotheism, The Magic Theory, Theory of Religion as Projections of Human Needs.

Marking Period 1-3

Semitic Monotheism: Judaism, Christianity, Islam

Judaism (@ 6-8 weeks)

Creation and the Book of Genesis

Garden of Eden

Flood, Babel, Sodom & Gomorrah

Biblical Patriarchs

Exodus

Moses, the Exodus and the Law

Film: *The Ten Commandments*

Documentary: *Exodus Decoded*

Religion in the time of the Hebrew Monarchy

Exile, Return and Diaspora

Medieval Judaism

Judaism and the Modern World

Anti-Semitism, the Modern State of Israel, Terrorism etc.

Film: *Schindler's List*

Jewish Festivals and Holy Days

History of the Hebrews: Promised Land to Diaspora

Film: *The Chosen*

Possible Film: *Pi*

Documentary Film: *God's Warriors: Judaism*

*Field Trip to a Jewish Synagogue will be organized pending administrative approval.

*Guest Speaker (i.e. Rabbi) will be planned to discuss nuances of Jewish faith.

UNIT II

Goals include the following: 1) to examine the basic scriptures of selected religions; 2) to describe the effect of religion on the arts of selected societies; 3) to

describe the relationship between the institutions of religion and the state in selected societies; 4) to describe the teachings of selected religions on the nature of man, the natural universe, and the supernatural; 5) to describe the moral code of selected religions; and, 6) to assess the role of religion in the life of modern man and its impact on the modern geo-political landscape; 7) to describe the role of prophecy in the lives of the believers of Christianity; 8) to examine the role of Christianity over the past two millennia of history; 9) to evaluate the increasing role of evangelical Christianity in the political arena; 10) to examine the differences between different sects of Christianity and other fringe groups who are considered cults by orthodox Christianity.

Christianity (@ 8-10 weeks)

The existence of evil: what is the origin of evil? What is original sin?

The Fall and its implications; the battle between God and Satan.

Jesus of the New Testament

Parables, Book of Acts, Romans, Ephesians

What is "Born Again"?

Why did Jesus have to die to fulfill the Law and to redeem mankind?

Possible Film: *The Passion of the Christ*

Peter and Paul and the spread of Christianity; Early Christianity

Medieval Christianity

Possible Film: *The DaVinci Code*

Protestant Reformation, Catholic Counter-Reformation

Modern Christianity

Vatican II, Modern Evangelicalism, growth of non-denominational churches, ecumenicalism and the role of the various churches today, end-times prophecies, the Book of Revelation

Possible Film: *The Apostle*

Film: *The Seventh Seal*

Film: *Left Behind*

Documentary Film: *God's Warriors: Christianity*

*Field Trip to a Catholic Cathedral will be organized pending administrative approval.

*Guest Speakers (i.e. local Pastor or Priest) will be planned to discuss nuances of Christianity.

UNIT III

Goals include the following: 1) to examine the basic scriptures of selected religions; 2) to describe the effect of religion on the arts of selected societies; 3) to describe the relationship between the institutions of religion and the state in selected societies; 4) to describe the teachings of selected religions on the nature of man, the natural universe, and the supernatural; 5) to describe the moral code of selected religions; and; 6) to assess the role of religion in the life of modern man and its impact on the modern geo-political landscape; 7) to examine the role of Islam over the past fourteen-hundred years of history; 8) to consider the role of Arab culture in creating modern Islam; 9) to consider the differences between Sunni and Shiite Muslims and other minority

groups within greater Islam; 10) to discuss the role of Terrorism as a tool of radical Islam; 11) to consider the battle for Palestine and Arab imperialism of the past.

Islam (@ 7-9 weeks)

Pre-Islamic Arab Religion & the Life of Muhammad

The Qur'an

The Nature of God, Predestination, Eschatology

Documentary Film: *Inside Islam*

Religious Institutions

The Mosque, The Five Pillars, Islam and Women, Islamic Taboos, Jihad

Documentary Film: *God's Warriors: Islam*

The Spread of Islam, The Caliphate

Variations or Sects of Islam

Sunni, Shia, Mystics

Muslim Calendar and Holy Days

Film: *The Message*

Modern Islam

Pan-Arabism, the Holy Land, Terrorism, Jihad

Other minor religions to be considered if time permits: Bah'ai, Zoroastrianism

UNIT IV

Goals include the following: 1) to examine the basic scriptures of selected religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism); 2) to describe the effect of religion on the arts of selected societies; 3) to describe the relationship between the institutions of religion and the state in selected societies; 4) to describe the teachings of selected religions on the nature of man, the natural universe, and the supernatural; 5) to describe the moral code of selected religions; and, 6) to assess the role of religion in the life of modern man and its impact on the modern geo-political landscape; 7) to consider the role of Indian culture on Hinduism and the role of Hinduism on Indian culture; 8) to evaluate the modern Hinduism and how it is manifest in an India which is becoming more literate and modern; 9) to consider the role of Gandhi on modern India and de-colonization; 10) to evaluate the battle between India and Pakistan and the disputed territories of Punjab

Marking Period 3-4

Indo-European Polytheism and Religions Originating in India

Hinduism (@ 3-4 weeks)

Origins: Aryans, The Vedic Era

The Vedas, The Upanishads, The Law of Manu, Bhagavad Gita

Postclassical Hinduism

Three Major Gods: Vishnu, Shiva, Brahma

Muslim Influences

Modern Hinduism

Disputed Punjab Region, Split of decolonized India/ Pakistan,

Gandhi, Caste System, Pakistani-Indian Tensions

Film: *Gandhi*

Possible Film: *A Passage to India*

Hindu Holy Days

*Field Trip to a Hindu Temple will be organized pending administrative approval.

*Guest Speaker (i.e. Practicing Hindu) will be planned to discuss nuances of Hinduism.

UNIT V

Goals include the following: 1) to examine the basic scriptures of selected religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism); 2) to describe the effect of religion on the arts of selected societies; 3) to describe the relationship between the institutions of religion and the state in selected societies; 4) to describe the teachings of selected religions on the nature of man, the natural universe, and the supernatural; 5) to describe the moral code of selected religions; and, 6) to assess the role of religion in the life of modern man and its impact on the modern geo-political landscape; 7) to evaluate the reasons for the increasing popularity of Buddhism in the west; 8) what are the attributes of a modern Buddhist.

Buddhism (@ 3-4 weeks)

The Life of Gautama and the Teachings of the Buddha

The Development of Buddhism

Theravada Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism

The Principles of Mahayana, Tibetan Buddhism, Ascetics, Zen

Buddhism Today

Is Buddhism a set of moral/ cultural choices? Is Buddhism atheistic?

Film: *Little Buddha* (Buddhism)

Seven Years in Tibet (Tibetan Buddhism)

Possible film: *Kundun* (Tibetan Buddhism)

*Field Trip to a Buddhist Temple will be organized pending administrative approval.

*Guest Speaker (i.e. Buddhist Monk) will be planned to discuss nuances of Buddhism.

Other religions to consider if time permits: Jainism, Sikhism, Shinto, Confucianism, Taoism

Discussion of other modern religious movements if time permits:

Neo-Paganism, Satanism, Jedi, the impact and appeal of cults etc.

Possible Film: *The Star Wars* films

Additional Assignments and Materials:

In addition to the course of study listed there will be a once per week or once per two week current events discussion of religion in our world and its seminal impact on geo-political events. There will be a project component to the course, perhaps one per marking period; it will be based upon each individual students interests and be student directed.

Reference/Textbook:

There is no textbook assigned for this course, however, there will be readings from each religious text, i.e the Bible, Qur'an, Bhagavad Gita, Vedas etc. Other readings will be assigned when the need arises.

Evaluation Tools:

There will be quizzes, tests and projects which will comprise the bulk of the assessment for this course; however, class participation is essential for each individual student and the class at large. Grade breakdown: Quizzes: 20%, Tests 50%, Projects 20%, Class Participation/ homework 10%

Additional Course Policies:

It is expected that all work be the students. In a world where information is at our fingertips, the practice of plagiarism has become more relevant than ever. Please understand that any work that is not yours will be given no credit; there will not be an opportunity to hand in a late representation of your work. Any work handed in late will receive the following grade penalty: 50% grade reduction for one day late, 0 credit thereafter. There must be consequences to our actions, if not, than those who have devoted themselves to raising you up to become functioning and capable adults have failed you: I will not fail you. Remember that grades may prove important for entrance into the college of ones choice, but it is the personal quest for knowledge and personal growth and transcendence which will prove to benefit the individual far more. Grades are important as evaluation of ones learning and effort, the desire to learn for the sake of learning is more fundamental to ones future success.