

Course Outline

Name of Course: **Comparative Religions** **Written/Revised: 5/2/09**
Course Number: **252** **Number of Credits: 5**
Level of Course: CPA **Grade Level Offered: 11, 12**

Course Description:

Introduction:

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.

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 attempt to 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)

UNIT I

1st Marking Period:

@ 1-2 weeks:

Introduction to course and discussion of why one should 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.

[Semitic Monotheism: Judaism, Christianity, Islam]

Judaism (@ 6 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*

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

UNIT II

Christianity (@ 8 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,
end-times prophecies, the Book of Revelation
Film: *The Seventh Seal*
Film: *Left Behind*
Documentary Film: *God's Warriors: Christianity, Visions of Mary*

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

UNIT III

Islam (@ 8 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

Marking Period 3-4

Indo-European Polytheism and Religions Originating in India

Hinduism (@ 6-7 weeks)

Origins: Aryans, The Vedic Era

The Vedas, The Upanishads, The Law of Manu, Bhagavad Gita
Samsara and Moksa and the Trimarga

Postclassical Hinduism

Three Major Gods: Vishnu, Shiva, Brahma

Modern Hinduism

Muslim Influences

Disputed Punjab Region, Split of India post-WW II, Gandhi,
Caste System, Pakistani-Indian Tensions

Film: *Gandhi*

Possible Film: *A Passage to India*

Hindu Holy Days

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

UNIT V

Buddhism (@ 3-4 weeks)

The Life of Siddhartha 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)

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

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

Discussion of other modern religious movements and traditions, if time permits, include:
Neo-Paganism, Scientology, Mormonism, cults, Satanism, Jedi (possible film: *The Star Wars*
films) etc.

Additional Assignments and Materials:

In addition to the course of study listed there may be a twice per month discussion of current world events and how they are impacting 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 interest and be student directed.

Reference/Textbook:

There is no textbook assigned to this course, however, there will be readings from each of the religious texts: Bible, Qur'an, Bhagavad Gita, Vedas, etc. Other readings may be assigned as 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.

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 prevalent 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.