

Decoding Religion's Roots
Buddhism to Confucianism

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SUMMARY OF PROJECT

Saffron-robed monks and golden stupas dominate the landscape of Thailand. Not in Vietnam. As I traveled and studied the cultures of both countries, I learned about the nonconfrontational nature of the Thai people and how Vietnam has been constantly involved in defending their country in wars with other nations. The overwhelming majority of people in Thailand believe in Buddhism. Vietnamese are split in belief between Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. Does a strong central religion create strength in a nation - peace in a nation?

Nations fight over religions. The Christians fought the Muslims in the Crusades. The Irish Catholics battle the Protestants. The Jews battle the Muslims. Most believers feel theirs is the only true faith.

The purpose of this unit is to search for cultural and political factors influencing the rise of four religions in history: Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Confucianism. In addition to those large factors, what elements influenced the lives of the religious prophets to inspire the beginnings of these faiths. Did these religions find their beginnings as an answer to key question of life and if so, how did they answer those questions.

By synthesizing the roots of these four major religions, the goal is for students to recognize the positive application of peace and religious tolerance through knowledge and understanding of their foundations. To gain perspective on the importance of religion in the lives of human beings and, to understand that everyone seeks answers to life's key questions will lead to cognition of the idea that a strong central religion might be the reason there has historically been peace within the borders of Thailand but not necessarily in Vietnam. Students will then begin to make applications to the larger world and how accepting differences in religion can help facilitate peace among nations.

Learners will study the background in the life of the four founding prophets of these religions: Siddhartha, Muhammad, Abraham, and Confucius. By examining the events of the founder's lives, they will draw conclusions as to what tenets of the religion were influenced by their life experiences. They will also examine cultural and political events concurrent with the life span of each prophet. From this information, they will ask the question: What ultimate problems of human life were the people seeking answers to? Finally, students will evaluate whether or not the foundation of each religion was able to answer key questions to life.

The primary objective of the study is for students to not only grasp the tenets of each of four major world religions, but begin to make the application of that knowledge to understanding other cultures. By knowing and understanding those who have different beliefs than ourselves, we can start to accept that what they believe is based on the same need for life answers that all humans have.

GRADE LEVEL: 7th Grade World History

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

1. What are the foundations of Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Confucianism?
2. What elements of the lives of the prophets Siddhartha, Muhammad, Abraham, and Confucius similar?
3. How did those elements influence their religion's beginnings and leadership?
4. What cultural factors were present prompting the rise of Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Confucianism?
5. What political factors were present prompting the rise of Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Confucianism?
6. How did the foundations of the four religions provide answers to the "key to life"?

STANDARDS (Eligible Content, State of Oregon, 2002)

1. G - 5 Identify, locate, and compare the cultural characteristics of places and regions, i.e. religious symbols, etc.
2. G - 6 Recognize relationships between the cultural characteristics of a place or region.

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will be able to identify the foundation tenets of Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Confucianism.
2. Students will be able to identify the framing events in the lives of the religious prophets: Siddhartha, Muhammad, Abraham, and Confucius.
3. Students will be able to identify and sequence cultural events influencing the creation of each religion.
4. Students will be able to identify and sequence political events influencing the creation of each religion.
5. Students will be able to analyze, draw conclusions and evaluate the cause and effect of cultural and political patterns on the rise of religions.
6. Students will be able to analyze, draw conclusions, and evaluate the cause and effect of events in the lives of religious prophets on the evolution of the religion.
7. Students will be able to hypothesize the effectiveness of the function of religions to answer key questions in the lives of its followers.

LESSON 1

OBJECTIVE:

To introduce the concept of religion.

LESSON PLAN

1. Ask students to brainstorm the definition of “religion.”
2. Ask for volunteer answers.
3. Read the following definition: “A system of beliefs and practices through which a group of people struggle with the ultimate problems of human life.”
4. Students will brainstorm what are the “ultimate problems of human life.”
5. Discuss their brainstorm.
6. Brainstorm religions they have heard of.
7. Brainstorm what they know about the founders of those religions.
8. Explain the objectives of the unit and what key questions we will attempt to answer.

ASSESSMENT

Give each student a 3 x 5 card. Students will write one factual question and one open-ended question they have about religions after today’s discussion. Cards are to be presented to teacher as an exit pass from class.

LESSON 2

OBJECTIVE

To introduce the foundation of the religion of Buddhism.

LESSON PLAN

1. Read out loud “The Golden Elephant,” page 14-15 from Sacred Myths, by Marilyn McFarlane.

Summary: A young boy owned a golden elephant. The king demanded the boy to give ownership of the elephant to him. This brought great sadness to the boy. As time passed, the elephant came back. He then gave away all his remaining possessions to become a monk. But the elephant was creating a huge distraction to his people. Through soul-searching, he freed the elephant and experienced peace through silence.

2. Ask students to identify the message of the story.

3. Discuss.
4. Ask students to infer from the story the key principles of Buddhism. Possible inferences include: anti-materialism, thinking and meditating, help poor, revere monks, renounce ordinary life, compassion, love, purity, peace, free of concerns, contentment, and Karma.
5. Handout to read: "Buddhism and Thai People." Focus on:
 - a. 5 Layers of Buddhism
 - b. Buddhism as Enlightenment
 - c. Ideal Society in Buddhism
6. Summarize lecture notes: "Thai Religions, Buddhist Teaching and Practice, Buddhist Meditation' by Dr. John Butts, July 22, 2002.
7. Explain Religion Chart to students
8. Referring to the handout, students fill in key tenets of Buddhism in appropriate column of Religion Chart.
9. Ask question: Thinking back to your brainstorm on ultimate problems of life, which tenet provides a solution to one of the problems listed?
10. Allow time for processing and ask for volunteers to answer.

ASSESSMENT:

Completion of religious tenets on Buddhism Religion Chart.

ENRICHMENT:

Students may add up to five auxiliary columns on Religion Chart. One for each of the following branches of Buddhism: Theravada, Mahayana, Shinto, Vajrayana and/or Zen.

LESSON 3

OBJECTIVE:

To examine the events in the life of Buddha that might have influenced his religious beliefs.

LESSON PLAN

1. Show slides of mural in Doi Suthep Temple: Life of Lord Buddha.
2. Students brainstorm key events in the life of Lord Buddha.

3. With a partner, students create a flow chart including key life events.
Criteria for Flow Chart:
 - a. show sequence of events in chronological order
 - b. identify and draw a tiny sketch of each event
 - c. determine which events might have influenced his religious inspiration
 - d. use three different colors to identify events with positive impact, one for zero impact, and one for negative impact
4. Display flow charts

ASSESSMENT

Completion of flow chart meeting criteria. Discussion of the impact on religious beliefs.

LESSON 4

OBJECTIVE:

Students will identify key cultural and historical events in the lifetime of Siddharta.

LESSON PLAN

1. Homework prior to Lesson 4:
Students will interview parents about key cultural and historical events in their personal lifetime i.e. abundance of cell phones, Gulf War, Clinton Presidency. They are to ask their parents how these events have influenced or changed their lives in tangible ways? In intangible ways? Did they change or alter their religious or moral beliefs? If so, how?
2. Discuss the answers to their questions.
3. In-Class/Computer Lab Activity:
 - a. Research and create a timeline of India from 560 to 480 BCE
 - b. Identify ten events that could possibly have influenced Siddharta's religious beliefs
 - c. For each event, hypothesize what problems or questions might the people have needed solutions or answers to.
4. Discuss results.

ASSESSMENT:

Completions of timeline, evaluation of timeline and discussion.

LESSON 5

OBJECTIVE

To introduce the religious tenets of Islam.

LESSON PLAN

1. Read out loud, "A boy of Courage," page 50-51, Sacred Myths, by Marilyn McFarland.

Summary: A young boy, Salamah, known for his skills in archery and running, was also devoted to Muhammad. One day he was needed to rescue the prophet's camels. He went after the thieves, who in turn chased him and circled him on a hilltop. Muslims on horses rescued him and praised Sahamah for his courage.

2. Ask students to identify the message of the story.

3. Discuss.

4. Ask students to infer from the story the key principles of Islam.

Possible inferences include: courage, cleverness, love for Allah, love for Muhammad, Muhammad is a prophet, Muslims will defeat other Muslims.

5. Read packet on Islam: "The Message," by Elsa Marston.

6. Refer back to the Religion Handout. Students fill in key tenets of Islam in appropriate column.

7. Ask question: Thinking back to your brainstorm on ultimate problems of life, which tenet provides a solution to one of the problems listed?

8. Allow time for processing and ask for volunteers to answer.

ASSESSMENT

Completion of Islam column on Religion Handout and oral evaluation and reflection.

LESSON 6

OBJECTIVE

To examine the events in the life of Muhammad.

LESSON PLAN

1. Students will view the video,

2. Read "The Life of the Prophet," page 12-13, Islam, by Neil Morris.

3. Students brainstorm key events in the life of Muhammad.

4. With a partner, students create a flow chart including key life events.

Criteria for Flow Chart:

- a. show sequence of events in chronological order
- b. identify and draw a tiny sketch of each event
- c. determine which events might have influenced his religious inspiration
- d. use three different colors to identify events with positive impact, one for zero impact, and one for negative impact

5. Display flow charts

ASSESSMENT

Completion of flow chart meeting criteria. Discussion of the impact on religious beliefs.

LESSON 7

OBJECTIVE

Students will identify key cultural and historical events in the lifetime of Muhammad.

LESSON PLAN

1. In-Class/Computer Lab Activity:
 - a. Research and create a timeline of India from 570-632 A.D.
 - b. Identify ten events that could possibly have influenced Muhammad's religious beliefs
 - c. For each event, hypothesize what problems or questions might the people have needed solutions or answers to.
2. Discuss results.

ASSESSMENT:

Completions of timeline, evaluation of timeline and discussion.

LESSON 8

OBJECTIVE

To introduce the religious tenets of Judaism.

LESSON PLAN

1. Read out loud, "David and Goliath," page 66-678, Sacred Myths, by Marilyn McFarlane.

Summary: David was a shepherd boy from Israel. His father sent him to take supplies to his brothers in battle. The battle was between the Philistines and Israelites. Goliath was a giant Philistine warrior who wanted to fight someone from Israel. David volunteered. Israel won the battle because David killed the giant with stones and a slingshot.

2. Ask students to identify the message of the story.

3. Discuss.

4. Ask students to infer from the story the key principles. Possible inferences include: Israel will fight those who def their God, the Lord delivers the faithful, and strength comes from having God on your side.

5. Read The Ten Commandments, Exodus 20: 3-17.

6. Refer back to the Religion Handout. Students fill in key tenets of Judaism in appropriate column.

7. Ask question: Thinking back to your brainstorm on ultimate problems of life, which tenet provides a solution to one of the problems listed?

8. Allow time for processing and ask for volunteers to answer.

ASSESSMENT

Completion of Islam column on Religion Handout and oral evaluation and reflection.

ENRICHMENT:

Students may add up to five auxiliary columns on Religion Chart - one for each of the following branches of Judaism: Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative.

LESSON 9

OBJECTIVE

To examine the events in the life of Abraham.

LESSON PLAN

2. Read "Judaism," page 1-3, One World, Many Religions, by Mary Osborne.
3. Students brainstorm key events in the life of Abraham c 1900-1700 B.C.
4. With a partner, students create a flow chart including key life events.

Criteria for Flow Chart:

- a. show sequence of events in chronological order
 - b. identify and draw a tiny sketch of each event
 - c. determine which events might have influenced his religious inspiration
 - d. use three different colors to identify events with positive impact, one for zero impact, and one for negative impact
5. Display flow charts

ASSESSMENT

Completion of flow chart meeting criteria. Discussion of the impact on religious beliefs.

LESSON 10

OBJECTIVE

Students will identify key cultural and historical events in the lifetime of Abraham.

LESSON PLAN

1. In-Class/Computer Lab Activity:
 - a. Research and create a timeline of Israel c.1900-1700 A.D.
 - b. Identify ten events that could possibly have influenced Abraham's religious beliefs
 - c. For each event, hypothesize what problems or questions might the people have needed solutions or answers to.

2. Discuss results.

ASSESSMENT:

Completions of timeline, evaluation of timeline and discussion.

LESSON 11

OBJECTIVE

To introduce the religious tenets of Confucianism.

LESSON PLAN

1. Read out loud, "Country Gods," Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology.

Summary: Lady Horsehead had charge over the protection of silk-worms. When her father was kidnapped by pirates, she refused to eat. Her mother offered the marriage of her daughter to anyone who could bring back her father. A horse, who was in love with Lady Horsehead, found the father and demanded his reward. In a rage, the father killed the animal and skinned him. The "skin" saw the girl passing by him, leaped at her and carried her off. Jade changed the girl into a silk-worm and took her to Heaven. She now ranks among the concubines.

2. Ask students to identify the message of the story.
3. Discuss.
4. Ask students to infer from the story the key principles. Possible inferences include: the value daughters place on their fathers.
5. Read: "The Superior Man." (Teachings of Confucius)
6. Refer back to the Religion Handout. Students fill in key tenets of Confucianism in appropriate column.
7. Ask question: Thinking back to your brainstorm on ultimate problems of life, which tenet provides a solution to one of the problems listed?
8. Allow time for processing and ask for volunteers to answer.

ASSESSMENT

Completion of Confucianism column on Religion Handout, discussion, and oral evaluation.

LESSON 12

OBJECTIVE

To examine the events in the life of Confucius.

LESSON PLAN

1. Read "The Man," Confucius by Betty Kelen
2. Students brainstorm key events in the life of Confucius
3. With a partner, students create a flow chart including key life events.

Criteria for Flow Chart:

- a. show sequence of events in chronological order
 - b. identify and draw a tiny sketch of each event
 - c. determine which events might have influenced his religious inspiration
 - d. use three different colors to identify events with positive impact, one for zero impact, and one for negative impact
5. Display flow charts

ASSESSMENT

Completion of flow chart meeting criteria. Discussion of the impact on religious beliefs.

LESSON 13

OBJECTIVE

Students will identify key cultural and historical events in the lifetime of Confucius.

LESSON PLAN

1. In-Class/Computer Lab Activity:
 - a. Research and create a timeline of China
 - b. Identify ten events that could possibly have influenced Confucius's religious beliefs
 - c. For each event, hypothesize what problems or questions might the people have needed solutions or answers to.

2. Discuss results.

ASSESSMENT:

Completions of timeline, evaluation of timeline and discussion.

FINAL ASSESSMENT

Required:

1. Multiple Choice Test -Individual - see Appendix
2. Fourfold Poster - Group
 - a. Student will have completed four Religion Charts with information on tenets, prophet's life and timeline of influential events for that prophet.
 - b. In Group: students will synthesize information into a Fourfold Display Poster with one quadrant for each of four religions.
 - c. Each poster quadrant must display life of prophet, timeline of main events in his life, and major tenets of religion.
 - d. Color identification of similarities and differences:
 - green identifies anything that is similar in each religion
 - blue identifies anything that is different in each religion
3. Essay - Individual
 - a. Brainstorm possible theories about how religion answers problems of human life.
 - b. Compose five paragraph essay explaining three answers provided by religion. This can be one answer per religion or three answers for one religion.

EXTENSION OPTIONS:

1. Graph displaying membership of each religion
2. Map displaying concentration or membership of each religion
3. Invite community speakers
4. Simulate a day in the life of a Buddhist monk, etc.
5. Do identical study on Lao-tzu, founder of Tao.

APPENDIX

“Thai Religions, Buddhist Teaching and Practice, Buddhist Meditation”

Notes on lecture

by John Butts

July 22, 2002

1. The Buddha - the founder from NE India - died 483 B.C.E.
2. The Dharma - teaching
3. The Sangha - community

Axial Age - 500 years in B.C.E. - turning point in religions.

Key religions in Axial Age: Judaism (Israelite Prophets), Ionian, Zarathrusta, Hindu, Mahavera, Confucianism. Religions rose because the key had disappeared and these prophets came up with answers.

Hindu - new birth - many lives. This was the problem for Buddhism - what to do about new birth.

Dharma - structure - support - reality - Truth

Buddha discovered Dharma and explained it.

Teachings - equivalent of God

4 Noble Truths

- a. Unhealthy condition - what it is
- b. Cause - diagnosis
- c. Healthy Condition - goal
- d. Medicine - treatment

Dukkha - all is suffering - imperfect

Life as a Condo - parking garage = hell; apartments = best places in the middle; VIP suites (penthouse) = heavens. The noose around the neck is that all have a temporary lease. Morals are the cash that determine where you go. VIP leaders - are narcotic, influenced and fooled with luxury.

Buddhists say that chances of rebirth as human are nil. Each human is master of future.

Mayhayana Buddhism - practices in north in Korea, China, Japan. Similar to Christianity living Buddha. Many lights years away 100,000 million civilizations to West - believe chanting vibrates through space to reach Buddha who radiates grace and merit. Death sends soul to Buddha. First worldly (needs food, etc.), becomes fed up with worldly pleasures, and goes to Buddha and attains enlightenment to become a Buddha. Finally, passes away to Nirvana.

Zen - Riddle used to pierce human nature to reach core of Buddha. In Japan. Burn scripture or kill Buddha because words lead you to get stuck like a spider in his web. Must wait for intuition.

Step 1 - faith

Triple Gems - three incense sticks - one for each gem.

- Worship Buddha: different things to different people: god, a great person, or a spiritual leader.
- Dharma - teachings
- Sangha - enlightened disciples

After Buddha himself was gone the followers worshiped body relics - stupa - spread throughout provinces.

Bo tree - tree under which Buddha worshiped. People put stick under tree to protect Buddhism.

Greeks - conquered East (Alexander the Great) who died at 33 years. Greeks had to go home because the soldiers got too homesick. Greeks made sculptures of Buddha for the first time.

amulet - Buddha images hanging from neck as protection. Thai believe inside Buddha image is a living soul.

grandfather - Buddha is the grandfather - holy father.

Enlightenment (Wisdom)-

1. Impermanence - everything is changing - anicca
2. Suffering - imperfection - dukkha
3. "Not mine" - our body is not our own - no "I" - an-atta

Ignorance - Once you understand the above truths, ignorance will disappear. Ignorance is the root of human failures.

Purity - Mind is purified.

Peace - Third level of enlightenment (true happiness)- nothing is left to disturb.

Compassion - final step - possible once. The result of compassion: never harm others, humans, or animals, work hard to help other humans.

- Buddha slept two hours a day - 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.
- Four Steps of Enlightenment:
 - 1) less of anger/greed

- 2) 40% conquer
 - 3) 50% conquer
 - 4) 100% pure
- Monk may eat meat if: did not see killed, not hear killed and not suspect it is for him.

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- Stack, Peggy. A World of Faith. USA: Signature Books, 2002.
- Wood, Angela. Judaism. New York: Thomson Learning, 1995.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Video

“Buddhism, Man and Nature,” Alan Watts, 1968.

Web Sites

www.beliefnet.com

basic information with quizzes

www.nativeweb.org

access to other Web sites on indigenous religions

www.ettl.co.at/us/ws/indes.html

scriptural passages and sacred texts organized by themes

http://religion.rutgers.edu/vr/comp_rel.html

comparative study of religions

Books

World Religions Today by John Esposito, Oxford University Press.

The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions by Huston Smith, Harper SanFrancisco.

World Religions Pretest

The Oregonian, 28, October, 2002, B1

1. Put the following figures from the Hebrew Bible in the order of their birth:
a. Adam b. Elijah c. Abraham, d. Solomon e. David
2. Put the world's major religions in the order in which they arose:
a. Judaism b. Buddhism c. Christianity d. Islam
3. What was the Buddha doing when he became enlightened?
4. What Jewish holiday did Jesus celebrate before his death.
5. Which of the following is not a pillar of Islam:
a. prayer b. charity c. pilgrimage d. scripture e. creed
6. Which of the following is not one of Buddhism's Four Noble Truths:
a. life is suffering b. karma is the path to rebirth c. desire causes suffering
d. to end suffering, end desire e. to end desire, follow the Eightfold Path
7. Who encountered God at the burning bush?
a. David b. Jesus c. Abraham d. Moses e. Isaac
8. Muslims pray facing the sacred city of:
a. Jerusalem b. Medina c. Mecca d. Baghdad e. Samarra

Fill in the Blanks

9. Buddhism originated in the land now known as _____.
10. The Hebrew name of the first five books of the Bible is _____.
11. Muslims believe that Abraham, or Ibrahim, dreamed of sacrificing his son, _____.
12. _____ is the holy month of fasting in Islam.
13. What does the title Buddha mean?
14. What does the word Islam mean?

Key

1. a,c,e,d,b
2. d,b,a,c,e
3. sitting under a tree
4. Passover
5. d
6. b
7. d
8. c
9. India
10. Torah
11. Ishmael
12. Ramadan
13. Awakened or Enlightened One
14. Peace or Surrender