



UNION

Religious Worlds of New York • Curriculum Development Project

Misunderstood! Addressing Religious Diversity in the Classroom

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Abstract

Students will analyze several hypothetical case studies of religious conflicts or misunderstandings that may develop in a diverse classroom. Students will evaluate the root cause of each conflict, and develop an action plan to help resolve the problem. This lesson could serve as an introductory activity to a World Religions unit, or as a culmination activity (or both, with a comparison of the before & after outcomes).

Target audience: Grades 7 8

Procedure

1. Divide students into mixed ability groups of 3 4 and have the student groups brainstorm answers to the Essential Questions.
2. Debrief results with the whole class. How were the answers similar or different among the groups?
3. Distribute a hypothetical case study to each group. Students should designate a scribe to take notes and another reporter who will share the notes with the whole class during the final discussion activity.
4. Optional: For a richer follow-up discussion, assign each Case Study to two or more groups, so that the class can compare the results.

Essential Questions

1. What are some of the day-to-day issues that may develop because of religious pluralism in American schools?
2. What does a person need to know and understand about another's religious beliefs in order to develop a positive mutual understanding and a respectful relationship?
3. How can diverse groups of students in American schools embrace, validate, and learn from one another's faith differences?

Case Studies

#1

A group of students wants to host a holiday party at school before Winter Break in December. Some of the proposed party activities include: a Secret Santa gift exchange, a holiday card making table, and a screening of “How the Grinch Stole Christmas.” Several non-Christian students have complained that the party is too focused on Christmas. The student organizers have replied that none of the activities are intended to be religious, because Santa and the Grinch are fictional characters, and students can make any type of card at the craft table. The issue is now being presented to the Student Government, which must decide how to resolve the conflict. What will you do?

#2

Your school has a “no hat” rule. Students are not allowed to wear hats or hoodies during class or while on school grounds. However, a Muslim family has moved into the area and enrolled their two daughters at the school. Both girls wear the *hijab*, or traditional head covering, to school. Several non-Muslim students have started a petition requesting that the “no hat” rule be dropped, arguing that that it unfair that the Muslim students are receiving special treatment. The petition has over 100 student signatures, and has been presented to you, the Student Government, to take to the Principal. What will you do?

#3

Your school schedule begins each day with a one minute moment of silence. During this period of time, students are not allowed to talk so that others may pray, meditate, or think. A group of students have approached you, the Student Government, because they feel that the moment of silence is a form of forced prayer. They think the moment of silence should not be mandatory, and moved to an optional time like lunch or another student break time. The school principal has said that the one minute silent period is not designated specifically for prayer, and therefore there is no religious conflict. As the Student Government, your job is to represent all student concerns. What will you do?

Follow-up Discussion

Each group presents its Case Study and proposed solution to the whole class. The class should evaluate the proposal, using some of the following criteria.

1. What is the root cause of the conflict?
2. What are the arguments for and against this idea?
3. Does the group’s solution successfully address everyone’s concerns? If not, does the group clearly explain the rationale for the final decision?
4. Is “fair” always “equal”?

Extension Activity: Film Screening of *David*.

This film vividly depicts some of the contemporary conflicts facing two eleven-year-old boys, one Muslim and one Orthodox Jewish, in Brooklyn, NY. (80 minutes)

SYNOPSIS

“As the son of the Imam of the local Brooklyn mosque, eleven yearold Daud has to juggle the high expectations of his Father (Maz Jobrani) and his feelings of isolation and difference— even from his peers in the Muslim community. Through an innocent act of good faith, Daud inadvertently befriends a group of Jewish boys who mistake him as a fellow classmate at their orthodox school, in the neighboring Jewish community. A genuine friendship grows between Daud and Yoav, one of the Jewish boys, and his family. Unable to resist the joy of a camaraderie that he has never felt before, David, as he is known to the kids, is drawn into a complicated dilemma inspired by youthful deceit and the best of intentions.”

After viewing the movie, students should revisit the same Essential Questions from the beginning of this lesson to analyze the issues presented in the film.

Additional questions for discussion

1. Why does Daud initially pretend to be David, and why does he continue to do so? Does he ever try to reveal his true identity before being discovered?
2. What are the commonalities that Daud and Yoav share? How are they different?
3. When Yoav discovers Daud’s true identity, is he more upset that Daud lied to him, or the fact that Daud is a Muslim? Explain fully.
4. Do you think Yoav and Daud would have become friends without the issue of mistaken identity? Why or why not?
5. What does the ending of the movie mean to you? If you could modify the ending, what would you change and why?
6. There is a secondary story in the film about Daud’s sister. What is the conflict she is facing and how does her problem get resolved? What do you think the filmmaker is trying to say about the challenges that some Muslim girls face in modern American life?

Extension Activity: Generation Global video conference

Students can positively address some of the religious conflicts and misunderstandings that young people face throughout the USA and across the globe by participating in a Generation Global video conference. More info: <http://generation.global>

For information about the Religious Worlds of New York summer institute for teachers, and more resources to enrich your teaching on religious diversity, see: www.religiousworldsnyc.org.