



Religious Worlds of New York • *Curriculum Development Project*

Introducing Religious Worlds

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Abstract:

This project outlines the first class meeting and homework assignment of a seminar exploring Religious Worlds. Seminars at Elysian Charter School are elective courses for 7th & 8th graders that meet twice a week for a semester. They are not graded and generally do not require regular homework (although students may work on projects outside of class as necessary). The Religious Worlds seminar will be designed to introduce students to the concept of the academic study of religion, the concept of “lived religion,” and the connections between religion and culture/ethnicity.

Intro Activity:

Early in the seminar I will lead students through an exercise (drawn from Generation Global materials) to help them identify there are myriad, unrealized forces that influence their perspectives and understandings of the world.

1. Students view a “neutral” image and write down any words/phrases that come to mind. (Generation Global provides some images in a PowerPoint presentation; during the summer institute we used the image of a seashell.)
2. Students pick just one word/phrase from their list and evaluate it by writing a paragraph answering the following questions:
 - a. Why did I pick that particular word/phrase?
 - b. What factors may have influenced me to choose that particular word/phrase?
3. Share the different influences students identified for themselves, either with a verbal go-round or by using post-its on the wall.
4. Create a list (either by recording verbal share or keeping the post-its) of influences. Include a definition of influences (something like: “the power to persuade/sway/affect someone or something.”)

5. After the debrief of this activity (as explained above), note that our experience of religion is one of those influences. Be clear that “experience of religion” does NOT mean, necessarily, belonging to or being involved with a particular religion or tradition -- it means all of our lived experience up through now.
6. In order to take note of, and keep safe, these experiences, we’re going to start class by completing the project below.
7. At this point the teacher will distribute and discuss the following assignment sheet for the “Building Religious Worlds” project.

Religious Worlds Project #1: Building YOUR Religious World

As we learned with our opening activity, we all see the world in different ways for different reasons. To begin our exploration of religions together, we will first celebrate all of the various ways that WE see the world. In the study of religions, we are always aware of where we come from. Our ideas are safe, and they belong here -- but they can’t always guide our conversation about ideas, places, beliefs, and practices that are different from our own. After we create our personal “religious worlds” we will display them in the classroom. We will always have our worlds safely with us even when we need to set them aside in order to step outside ourselves and learn.

Big Question: What do you know/think/believe about religion?

- Does religion play a role in your family life? If so, how?
- How does religion play a role in Hoboken (or any other community where you live or spend time)? In what ways do you notice religion in the community?
- How does religion play a role in the United States as a whole?
- Do you belong to any organizations that you would call “religious”? If so, what role do they play in your life?
- What role does the idea of “religion” play in your life? Whether or not you are religious, does your understanding of religion shape your choices, actions, etc?
- What is your personal opinion of religion?
- What role do you think religion plays for human beings, in general?

To build your “Religious World”, choose the type of project that makes you feel most comfortable. Some ideas:

- ❖ Write a narrative explaining the role of religion in your life and community (addressing questions above that feel appropriate) -- use words to express your personal “religious world.”
- ❖ Create a collage showing your experience of religion -- use images (that you cut from magazines, create from colorful paper, or draw) to answer some of the questions above. Use images to illustrate your “religious world.”
- ❖ Build a 3D model that uses materials of your choice to address the questions above. Literally build your “religious world.”
- ❖ Have another idea for this project? Share it with your teacher. It’s probably fine if it addresses any of the questions above.

***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.***