***Teaching about World Religions using the AAR Pedagogical Competencies***

***“Scavenger Hunt”***

The objective of this modified “Scavenger Hunt” is to familiarize you with the World Religions identified in the OACS, understand the key issues and challenges faced with teaching about this content in public schools, and identifying appropriate resources, best practices and skills to effectively teach about World religions. We will use the Pedagogical Competencies outlined in the AAR document

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| ***Pedagogical Competencies*** | ***Explore/Research/Reflect*** | ***Application*** |
| * ***Station 1 (20 points)*** * Identify the OACS that focus on World Religions * Be able to find and recognize appropriate resources about religion when needed, on the Internet or in more traditional media. | * ***Identify the OACS. Then develop an annotated bibliography: Identify 3 Resources for each of the world religions(incl. young adolescent literature): Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism***   Theme: **Regions and People of the Eastern Hemisphere**  **…**  Content Statement: **#8 Modern cultural practices and products show the influence of tradition and diffusion, including the impact of major world religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism).**  **Hinduism:**  Ramayana: Divine Loophole by Sanjay Patel  Patel, S. (2010) San Francisco: Chronicle Books  *This story is one of Hindu mythologies best-loved tales. It has powerful deities, love-struck monsters, and flying monkey gods, among others. This book is recommended for ages thru grade 6.*  The Essentials of Hinduism by Swami Bhaskarannanda  Bhaskarannanda, S. (2002) Arlington: Viveka Press  *A comprehensive overview of the World’s Oldest Religion*.  The Power of Dharma by Stephen Kovapp  Kovapp, S. (2006) Bloomington: iUniverse, Inc.  *An introduction to Hinduism and the Vedic culture.*  Islam:  Extraordinary Women from the Muslim World by Natalie Maydel and S. P. Riaki  Maydel, N. and Riaki, S. P. (2008) Toronto: Global Content Publishing  *Stories about 13 Muslim women in history. Recommended for grades 5 and up.*  A New Introduction to Islam by Daniel W. Brown  Brown, D. (2009) New York: Wiley-Blackwell  *A fairly recent book about the basics of understanding Islam.*  DK Eyewitness Books: Islam by Caroline Stone  Stone, C. (2005) London: DK Publishers  *The DK Eyewitness books take on complex topics and make them understandable.*  Buddhism:  Twenty Jataka Tales by Noor Inayat Khan  Khan, N.I. (1985) Rochester: Inner Traditions Publisher  *A story of the former lives of Buddha. Highly dramatic adventures that are resolved by non-violent and compassionate means.*  Buddhism by Alison Cooper  Cooper, A. (2004) Los Angeles: Hodder Wayland Publishers  *Facts about Buddhism presented in a positive and understandable way.*  Wide Awake: Buddhist Guide for Teens by Diane Winston  Winston, D. (2003) London: Perigee Trade Publishers  *A guide for Teens (and adults) as the book is written for 18 and up about Buddhism.*  Judaism:  The Remnant – The Jewish Resistance In WWII by Othniel J. Seiden  Seiden, O. (2008) Parker, CO: Books to Believe In Publishers  *A true story for young adults about members of the Jewish Resistance during WWII*.  The Jewish Book of Why by Alfred J. Kolatch  Kolatch, A. (2007) New York: Jonathan David Publishers  *A book answering major questions of and about the Jewish faith.*  Essential Judaism by George Robinson  Robinson, G. (2001) New York: Atria Books  *A complete guide to beliefs, customs and rituals of Judaism.*  Christianity:  Stolen Secrets (Red Rock Mysteries #2) by Chris Fabry and Jerry Jenkins  Fabry, C. and Jenkins, J. (2005) Chicago: Tyndale Kids Publishers  *A young adult fiction book – part of a mystery series. Action packed with a Christian family theme.*  DK Eyewitness Books: Christianity by Philip Wilkinson and Michael Tambini  Wilkinson, P. and Tambini, M. (2006) London: DK Publishers  *Matter of fact and factual presentation of the Christian religion.*  The One Year Christian History Book by E. Michael Rusten and Sharon Rusten  Rusten, E. M. and Rusten, S. (2003) Chicago: Tyndale House Publishers  *A day by day history account of Christianity. Part of the One-Year Books series.* | ***Write a short description highlighting key points of each religion***  Buddhism:  Buddhism is a path of practice and spiritual development leading to insight into the true nature of reality. The teaching of Buddha is that life is permeated with suffering caused by desire, that suffering ceases when desire ceases and that enlightenment obtained through right conduct, wisdom and meditation releases one from desire, suffering and into a rebirth.  Hinduism:  Hinduism is a diverse body of religion, philosophy and cultural practice native to and predominant in India. It is characterized by a belief in reincarnation and a supreme being of many forms and natures and by the view that opposing theories are aspects of one eternal truth, and by a desire for liberation from earthly evils.  Islam:  Islam is a monotheistic religion characterized by the doctrine of submission to God and to Muhammad as the chief and last prophet of God. The Qur’an is a text considered by its adherents to be the verbatim word of God (Allah).  Judaism:  Judaism is a monotheistic (one God) religion of the Jews, tracing its origins to Abraham and having its spiritual and ethical principals embodied chiefly in the Hebrew Scriptures and the Talmud.  Christianity:  Christianity is a monotheistic and abrahamic religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus as presented in gospels and other New Testament writings. It also considers the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) to be divinely inspired. |
| ***Station 2 (15 points)***   * Develop skills in leading students in discussion regarding their religious beliefs and practices, as well as the beliefs and practices of others. * Be aware of examples of best practices in teaching about religion. * Develop the ability to present multiple religious perspectives in a fair or neutral way. | ***Highlight at least 2 key points from the reading that addresses each of these competencies***  With regard to developing skills in leading students in discussion I would cite (pg. 19) the *Appropriate* *Attitudes/Postures* suggested. Listed as number 1, “Teachers should never try to coerce students to accept or reject any particular religious tradition, belief, or practice, as well as non-belief or atheism.” This would be incredibly important to have an atmosphere of acceptance in a classroom. If anyone was to feel threatened for their beliefs (whether in a divinity or not) would be completely detrimental to any true learning that could take place. Equally as important would be the disrespect that would be fostered if tolerance was not strictly adhered to in a classroom.  #2. Teachers should not give any particular religious belief, practice, or tradition inappropriate (or unfair) emphasis. Again, I believe in a public school all religions and beliefs should be given equal acceptance.  *Pedagogical Competencies*: (pg. 19)  “Being aware of examples of best practices in teaching about religion” and “being able to find and recognize appropriate resources about religion when needed, on the Internet or in more traditional media” are two competencies I think would be imperative to a public school teacher. Our goal as educators is to present material in both a factual and current manner. Knowing best practices in the area of religion as well as staying current with unbiased material is a must. The abundance of what purports to be ‘accurate media’ can be misleading, particularly with regard to religion. One need only to flip TV channels with the coming election to know ‘biased and inaccurate’ is more common than not.  I would cite page 20 to help develop ways of present religions in a fair manner. “…it is also important for educators to learn about the legal and pedagogical dimensions of teaching about religion in the schools.” “What seem like clear guidelines in abstraction often become quickly muddled in practice.”  Also, while as an undergraduate making at least one religious studies course a requirement would be helpful. Another would be for current teachers to have the opportunity to attend workshops or seminars to strengthen their literacy about religion. | ***How can incorporate this into your teaching of world religions? Provide at least 1 example for each competency***  As part of a “Cultural Awareness” series of activities (having followed a presentation by myself about historical perspectives of each religion – including using video clips), I would do the following for each of the three:  Everyone would draw a number corresponding to a religion (i.e. Buddhism would be assigned a #1, Hinduism #2, etc.). They would then form their random groups and be given a packet. Each packet would have the group researching the **history** of that religion, the **major beliefs** of the religion, **important holidays** of the religion, **something special** about the religion and each member of the group offering **something they didn’t know** before doing the research.  Following the 3 days (in which we would be researching this (at the Media Center) we would then gather together and share what was learned {on a huge chart – to be filled in by each group (the key points)} by giving a short (based on the blocks they filled in) presentation of their assigned religion. As a teacher I would be continually monitoring the research as well as the verbal communication as information is gleaned about the different religions – reminding the groups (as needed) that we are all respectful members of a learning community.  The huge chart would be hung in our room as we learned about the countries and cultures which embrace(d) those religions and how they impact those societies today. |
| ***Station 3 (15 points)***   * Understand the difference between the secular academic and devotional approaches to religion, and consistently use the secular academic approach. * Be able to address in a constructive way religious disagreements and conflicts that arise in the classroom. * Be aware of, and manage effectively, religious diversity in the classroom. * Create an environment of respect and tolerance—a safe environment in which students feel free to talk about religion. | ***The AAR guidelines outlines 4 Approaches to teaching religion (see pages 10-11). Which approach do you think you will follow? Why?***  I would follow the Cultural Studies approach. Citing page 10, “…*it* is well suited for area studies classes or classes that incorporate multicultural lens of analysis…its emphasis on recognizing the ways that religion is embedded in culture and cannot be understood in isolation from its particular social/historical expressions.”  An example would be the Aztec’s and human sacrifices. If we just focus on the sacrificing of humans without learning it in perspective of their belief system and perceiving the need to appease the Gods for good crops, etc. we would entirely miss the point of the action.  ***What do you understand by the competencies in Station 3?***  Citing page 11, “the distinction between the study of religion and religious devotional expression is rarely understood by those who have never been exposed to religious studies….it will help them (the student) realize that learning ABOUT (my emphasis) religion is a legal and appropriate undertaking for public schools and help them (the student) realize that the aim of teaching ABOUT religion is to better understand the religious dimensions of human experience, not to promote religion or a particular religious perspective.”  Citing page 12, “Therefore, it is imperative to foster a climate of tolerance, respect, and honesty by encouraging students to – move away from making generalizations – examine how their judgments may impact others – and, explore ideas and ask questions without fear…Not everyone in the class is expected to agree. But students should understand that – the goal is developing awareness and understanding; - and, accurate representations of traditions reduce the misunderstandings arising from false generalizations, bigotry, or valorization of a particular religious or non-religious world view.”  Again, I think taking the study of religions in terms of a cultural studies approach helps keep the information factual and the presentation unbiased and fair. No one is right, no one is wrong, this is just what is believed. | ***How will you implement your approach/understanding of competencies into practice? Provide at least 2-3 specific examples.***  From the very start of school making the expectation that “Our classroom is a safe place to be. People are respected, differences are respected, learning will take place here. We may disagree, we may not always see eye-to-eye, but we will accept each other and grow together.” This will be my expectation and I will work to have this behavior internalized (at least when they are in our room).  I would also, personally become much better educated in my understanding of the different world religions. My daughter and I spent a month last summer in the Middle East and I grew to have such a better understanding of the Muslim faith as well as the Jewish faith. I also found myself so enjoying talking to other women about their faith and their lives. It was easy to begin a conversation with another Mom, no matter how differently we might be dressed, and that would open the door to a delightful ½ an hour or so, sitting on a park bench, learning about each other. Incorporating more of the human side to religion would make for a much greater understanding – and less fear of the unknown. |
| ***‘Station 4 : Final Reflection***  ***10 points*** | ***Reflect on the AAR document –what impact did these guidelines have on your professional development and pedagogy?***  This document was extremely simple to understand and yet very powerful in its presentation of some-nuts-and-bolts about teaching religion.  Citing page 7, “The school’s approach to religion is academic, not devotional. The school strives for student awareness of religions, but does not press for student acceptance of any religion. The school sponsors study about religion, not the practice of religion. The school may expose students to a diversity of religious views, but may not impose any particular view. The school educates about all religions, it does not promote or denigrate religion. The school informs students about various beliefs; it does not seek to conform students to any particular belief.  I think those statements above are what it is really all about. Our goal as educators are to educate. These guidelines offer a logical (and legal) perspective in which to educate. I thought these few short pages were excellent! | ***How will you take all of the information you have gained from AAR and your research and make it comprehensible to your 6th graders? This is your “snapshot of practice” - provide at least 1 specific example of practice.***  I think a snapshot of one way to get 6th graders to actually THINK about religion – in terms of a political and cultural example is to take a look, prior to our Thanksgiving break, at the Pilgrims. We all know the story of how they came to America in search of religious freedom, but wait a minute…they were Christians, they believed in Jesus and the Bible … they left England, a Christian kingdom, where they also believed in Jesus and the Bible…what’s this “religious freedom” stuff? What were they being persecuted for? Or were they? What did they believe that made them want to leave? What else was going on that had them hop aboard a boat for an arduous journey into basically the unknown? Moving past what the student ‘thinks’ they know into a different plane of thinking. How did their own brand of religious thinking fit into the culture of the times? Take talking about ‘religious freedom’ to another direction. Maybe even venture into the notion that the Pilgrims didn’t believe in ‘religious freedom’ for those that didn’t believe as they did…hmmmmm, or maybe wait for that discussion once they get to Middle School. |
| ***Total: 60 points*** |  |  |