



## After the Session Pack

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The activities and lessons included in this *After the Session Pack* can be used following the “Religious Diversity in the Classroom: What’s Law got to do with it?” webinar or as a stand-alone series of units and resources. They address many of the key skills listed in the Common Core Standards for English-Language Arts. The lessons described on pages 12-23 will help prepare students both academically and socially for their lives as citizens of our globally diverse 21st-century world.

Additionally, we have provided links to further resources from other organizations doing work in this area, including the First Amendment Center, the American Academy of Religions (AAR) and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). We also list several recent news articles that highlight the intersection of legal issues and religious diversity in schools. We hope that all of the resources provided in this pack will support your important work of teaching about religious diversity in a responsible, legally sound manner.

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# A Letter from Tanenbaum's CEO

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Dear Friends,

For over 15 years, Tanenbaum has worked on the question that confronts educators across the U.S.: what to do about teaching religion in the classroom? We know that many educators are challenged when they need to teach about religious differences. And we know that this discomfort is exacerbated by the widely held – but incorrect – belief that it is either illegal or simply not appropriate to do so. How often do we hear that teachers must not teach “about” religion? Or that by doing so, they are appropriating a role best left to families?

Our response is clear. Today, there are 50 million children in U.S. schools, and they are the most diverse group in our nation's history (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). They come from different ethnicities, backgrounds and countries, with religious practices and various beliefs that are an important part of students' many identities.

If we avoid talking about differences based on religious (and secular) traditions, and if we only give attention to differences such as race, gender, and sexual orientation, are we – by omission – suggesting that religion is not worthy of inquiry? Or that religion is somehow a frightening problem that we must avoid mentioning? By not addressing religion, and not assisting our students in learning about the many different ways that people believe, do we risk perpetuating stereotypes based on misinformation, bias and ignorance?

The Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding and Teaching Tolerance believe the answer is easy. Teachers need the resources to teach “about” religion – without in any way supporting or denigrating different beliefs. That's why we have teamed up to address religious diversity in the classroom through the delivery of a five part collaborative webinar series entitled *Religious Diversity in the Classroom*. The first webinar, “What's Law Got to Do With It?”, and the accompanying after-session pack are designed to help educators discover usable, and constitutionally sound, methods for teaching about religion in the classroom.

Educators can legally teach “about” religious differences, and classroom activities can help meet these goals. By implementing the key ideas outlined in the webinar, “What's Law Got to Do With It,?” and by using the frameworks and instructional activities provided in the following pages, educators will have the tools to facili-

tate appropriate discussions about religious differences without fear and without endorsing any specific religious practice.

Tanenbaum is a secular, non-sectarian non-profit organization that combats religious prejudice and builds respect for religious diversity through practical strategies and resources. At the foundation of our educational initiatives is the premise that multicultural education must not stop at the threshold of religion. We are enormously grateful to our partners at Teaching Tolerance for their expertise in anti-bias education, and for their leadership in helping communicate the value of addressing religious difference in the classroom.

We encourage you to contact us for any support that you may need in implementing these resources. We can be reached by email at [education@tanenbaum.org](mailto:education@tanenbaum.org) or by phone at (212) 967-7707 and [editor@tolerance.org](mailto:editor@tolerance.org).

In partnership for preparing the next generation,

Joyce S. Dubensky  
CEO, Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding

# Teaching and Learning about Religions: Considerations for Lesson Planning

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The checklists here are designed to help you assess your educational goals, lesson plans and units to ensure that you are teaching about religion in a constitutionally sound and academically responsible manner. We have highlighted three key areas for consideration, to ensure that your instruction is a) neutral and objective, b) non-devotional and c) neither promoting nor denigrating religion, non-religion nor a particular religious practice. These guidelines can also serve as a resource as you plan lessons to address religious diversity. As always, you should keep in mind your own students' learning priorities, as well as any instructional goals and educational policies set by your school and/or district.

## **Neutrality and Objectivity**

"Teachers must remain neutral concerning religion, neutral among religions, and neutral between religion and non-religion."<sup>1</sup> In other words, it is a teacher's job to present information, not opinions, and to refrain from giving more attention or value to any particular religion/non-religion over another.

Lessons that discuss religion are **neutral and objective** when they:

- Present facts in a balanced manner, favoring no particular religion or perspective and sharing comparable information about multiple traditions.
- Do not make generalizations about a group of people or stereotype.
  - Avoid language of "all" or "always" (e.g., "all members of (x) religion always do (y).")
  - Remember that there is diversity within diversity.
- Discuss several different religions, including those that are not part of the majority present in a school or classroom.
- Include critical thinking about historical and/or current events involving religion and religious traditions.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.freedomforum.org/publications/first/teachersguide/teachersguide.pdf>, Page 6

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from <http://www.freedomforum.org/publications/first/teachersguide/teachersguide.pdf> - Page 4

- The use of primary sources will allow students to consider questions of point-of-view and author's bias, deepening their understanding of how religion affects individuals and has contributed to the development of culture, society and politics.
- Regarding primary sources, the Library of Congress writes: "Primary sources provide a window into the past - unfiltered access to the record of artistic, social, scientific and political thought and achievement during the specific period under study, produced by people who lived during that period. Bringing young people into close contact with these unique, often profoundly personal, documents and objects can give them a very real sense of what it was like to be alive during a long-past era."<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, exploring primary sources creates an opportunity for students to "relate in a personal way to events of the past."<sup>4</sup> The use of such first-person accounts encourages deeper student connection to real, human stories and experiences, while also developing the important, Common Core-aligned skills of active reading, critical thinking and consideration of multiple perspectives.

### **Non-Devotional**

Lessons that discuss religion are **non-devotional** when:

- They aim for student awareness of religious diversity without imposing any religious or non-religious viewpoint.
- Religious texts (e.g., scriptural writings) are presented and studied from an academic perspective, rather than for the purpose of learning religious doctrine.
- They do not seek to indoctrinate students in a particular religious or non-religious belief.
- They do not include participation in any religious rituals or practices, including any form of prayer or worship.

### **Neither Promoting nor Denigrating Religion**

Lessons that discuss religion **neither promote nor denigrate religion** when they:

- Make no value judgment regarding whether one is or is not religious.
- Discuss religion/non-religious beliefs as an aspect of identity and as a component of multiculturalism and diversity.
- Include a variety of different religions, expanding beyond the majority present in a classroom or school.
- Respect students' rights to hold their own religious or non-religious/secular beliefs.
  - Teachers can model for students how to communicate about their beliefs respectfully and in a manner appropriate for the school environment.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/whyuse.html>

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

# Educator Assessment: Teaching about Religion

For the **Understanding** column, please rate, on a scale of 1-5, how well you think you do this (1 being "I need to focus more attention on this", 5 being "I do this well")

For the **Priorities** column, please rate, on a scale of 1-5, how you prioritize these factors (1 being the biggest priority, 5 being the least)

<u>Specific Factors</u>  <i>My lesson(s) or project(s):</i>	<u>Understanding Rating</u>  <u>1-5</u>	<u>Priorities Rating</u>  <u>1-5</u>	<u>Notes and Next Steps for Specific Factor:</u>
Is relevant to educational goals			
Is taught from a factual and secular perspective			
Does not blur secular values with religious values			
Is mindful of the developmental stage and maturity of students			



Gives equal emphasis to minority and majority religions and the perspectives of non-believers			
Is cautious and aware of “spokesperson syndrome” (asking someone to represent all people of a particular group)			
Does not favor religion over no religion			
Does not attribute significance of any religious viewpoint to the school			
Is aligned to the classroom rules of respect			
Resources			
General Notes			

# Teaching about Religion and Common Core Connections

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The skills students gain through learning about religion and religious diversity in an unbiased, academic manner overlap with the skills identified in the Common Core State Standards as essential for College and Career Readiness. These skills include:

- Analyzing the development and interaction of ideas
- Assessing different points of view
- Integrating information from diverse media sources
- Crafting substantial arguments bolstered by strong supporting evidence grounded in informational texts
- Conducting research based on meaningful questions
- Conversing with diverse partners
- Using language thoughtfully

Below is an overview of how teaching about religion helps meet Common Core standards across grade levels.

## Elementary School, Grades K-5

- Speaking and Listening, Standard 1a, Kindergarten: “Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others and taking turns speaking about the topics and texts under discussion).”
  - When developing rules for discussions, teachers should be sure to emphasize the skills and dispositions necessary to speak with peers respectfully. Creating and adhering to these rules for discussion will help ensure that all diverse voices are heard and respected. We recommend involving students in the process of developing these rules for discussion.
- Reading Standards for Literature, Standard 9, and Grade 4: “Compare and contrast the treatment of similar themes and topics (e.g., opposition of good and evil) and patterns of events (e.g., the quest) in stories, myths, and traditional literature from different cultures.”
  - It is important that students read stories/literature representative of diverse cultures, including diverse religions. Seeing oneself reflected in what one reads can be an important and validating experience for children. Furthermore, reading a diverse array of literature will help students recognize similarities and differences between various cultures and religions – thus helping to add understanding to their experience of diversity in their communities.

- Writing Standards, Standard 7, Grade 2: “Participate in shared research and writing projects (e.g., read a number of books on a single topic to produce a report; record science observations).”
  - This standard emphasizes an important aspect of the research process: consulting multiple sources of information – which helps to counteract bias and ensure that a diverse array of perspectives is represented. Collaboration with peers also allows students to build skills in communication and cooperation.

### Middle School, Grades 6-8

- Reading Standards for Literature, Standard 9, Grade 8: “Analyze how a modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths, traditional stories, or religious works such as the Bible, including describing how the material is rendered new.”
  - The AAR (American Academy of Religions) notes that religion is embedded in culture, and also that religion is fluid, dynamic, and changing over time (from AAR). Careful reading and analysis of both literary and informational texts will allow students to better understand these elements of religion as an aspect of one’s identity and factor in society.
- Language Standards, Standard 5a, Grade 7: “Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings. Interpret figures of speech (e.g., literary, biblical, and mythological allusions) in context.”
  - An understanding of religion’s role in history and society will enable students to better understand and appreciate allusions to religion that come up in common figures of speech, as well as elsewhere in literature and conversation. Better understanding of religious allusions will help students recognize language that may be pejorative or biased and help to develop better self-awareness of when they might be saying something offensive, thus helping them regulate their own word choices in order to be more respectful.

### High School, Grades 9-12

- Reading Standards for Informational Text, Standard 8, Grades 9-10: “Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.”
  - Students can develop their skills in critical media literacy by looking at how religion is portrayed in the media and other sources, and using knowledge of different religions to debunk stereotypes and assess information about religion and religious diversity for accuracy, bias, and/or point of view.
- Speaking and Listening Standards, Standard 1d, Grades 11-12: “Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.”
  - Through this standard, students can engage in the important work of community-building and make sure that all voices and perspectives are heard and respected – including those that reflect religious diversity. They will also come to recognize that the quest for understanding can, and often does, go beyond a single conversation – enabling students to be critical thinkers about our diverse world.

# Fostering Respect: A Foundational Approach

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Creating a space where academic and social-emotional goals are accomplished side by side can ensure classrooms are inclusive of all students. The following are important areas to consider when doing this work:

- Supporting students' identities and making it safe for them to fully be themselves;
- Using instructional strategies that support diverse learning styles and allow for deep exploration of anti-bias themes;
- Creating classroom environments that reflect diversity, equity and justice;
- Engaging families and communities in ways that are meaningful and culturally competent;
- Encouraging students to speak out against bias and injustice;
- Including anti-bias curricula as part of larger individual, school and community action.

Teaching Tolerance's Critical Practices for Anti-bias Education [guide](#) recommends practices, includes helpful explanations and suggests specific strategies you can try in your own classroom.

When discussing sensitive topics like religion with your students, it's important to establish ground rules for respectful communication upfront so that everyone feels comfortable sharing. These ground rules form the foundation of inclusive classrooms that encourage students to be fully themselves. Students can come up with a list of behaviors that make them feel safe and respected. We recommend that the following ground rules also be included on the list:

- Listen when others speak (i.e., not busy planning your response)
- Participate fully
- Keep an open mind (i.e., assume you can learn from everyone in the room)
- Consider different points of view
- Listen/participate from what's important to you
- Use "I" language (we can only speak for ourselves, not for a group)
- "One mic" – One person speaks at a time
- Confidentiality – It may be very important for participants to know their opinions will not be shared broadly
- Everyone has a chance to speak
- Use positive language (no accusatory or disparaging language)
- Be respectful toward one another

## Lessons:

This classroom [lesson](#) is recommended for grades K-6. Students will explore why respect is important and consider what respectful behavior looks like, sounds like and feels like.

Middle and high school educators can establish Ground Rules for Discussion using this [resource](#) from Teaching Tolerance.

# Exploring the First Amendment: Freedom and Equality for All?

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This lesson is intended for grades 6-8, to act as an introduction to understanding the First Amendment's Free Exercise Clause and Establishment Clause, as well as to introduce the freedoms this clause protects, and how it may need to be improved upon. This lesson includes breaking down the components of the First Amendment, utilizes poetry and national icons to further define equality and freedom. Lower grade extensions are available at the end of the lesson.

Note: The standards refer to the Anchor Standards for ELA. Please refer to your grade-level standards for more specific alignment.

This lesson meets the following Common Core Standards:

## Reading

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1 – Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2 – Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4 – Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6 – Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.9 – Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

## Writing

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.9 – Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

NOTE: While there is no formal writing activity for students in the lesson plan below, the above

standard can be accomplished through class discussion. Additionally, the teacher may choose to create a short writing assignment in lieu of, or in addition to, the full-class conversations.

### Speaking and Listening

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1 – Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2 – Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

### Language

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.3 – Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.4 – Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analysing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.5 – Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

## Lesson Components:

### OBJECTIVES:

- Introduce students to the First Amendment, and the various freedoms guaranteed therein.
- Define “Freedom of Religion” and consider if/how this freedom plays out in U.S. society today.
- Explore connections between “freedom” and “equality,” considering what students can do to better promote both.

**TIME NEEDED:** 1-2 hours; 2.5-3 class periods

**WHAT YOU NEED:** For this lesson you will need:

- A picture of the Statue of Liberty
- A white board and markers, or laptop/projector and screen, or smart board
- Printed copies of the First Amendment with room to write down definitions, and preferably written on the board as well
- The scenarios described below, printed and posted around the room
- A copy of the poem of your choosing (see below)

**TRIGGER/INTRODUCTION:** Show students a picture of the Statue of Liberty on either a handout, board or

via screen projector. Ask the students if they know what the picture is of and the location of the statue. Ask the students what they think the statue represents, i.e. what comes to mind when they see it. Summarize students' responses on the board.

Briefly explain the different components of the statue:

- The robed figure is Liberatus, the Roman goddess of freedom.
- The tablet has the date of the American Declaration of Independence (Ask the students if they know what that date is - July 4, 1776).
- The broken chains at Liberatus' feet symbolize breaking away from oppression and into freedom.
- The poem on the base is "The New Colossus," written by Emma Lazarus in 1883:

*"Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame, With conquering limbs astride from land to land; Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand, A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame, Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name, Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command, The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame. "Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she, With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

- The torch in her hand, symbolizing a pillar of light and signaling a welcoming sign to those arriving from overseas.

## Part I

Ask the students: If the Statue of Liberty is a symbol of freedom. Where do our freedoms come from? How are our freedoms guaranteed?

Use the following discussion questions to help students begin to make connections between the Statue of Liberty, the Constitution, and the First Amendment:

- What is the Constitution? Why do you think the United States has a Constitution?
  - **The Constitution** is a legal document listing a "body of fundamental principles or established precedents according to which a state or other organization is acknowledged to be governed."
- What is an amendment? What is the First Amendment? What types of freedom are covered in the first amendment? Why do we have amendments?
  - **An amendment** is a change or addition to a document (in this case, to the U.S. Constitution).

Hand out copies of the First Amendment, (and have it on the board, or a copy for yourself) and have a volunteer read it aloud.

***FIRST AMENDMENT: “ Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people to peaceably assemble, and to petition the Government for redress of grievances”***

Review the First Amendment slowly, defining the difficult words and phrases. These words may include, but are not limited to:

- “Establishment of religion”- Congress cannot decide that one specific religion is the national religion of the United States (i.e., cannot establish a national religion), or the preference of one religion over any other (or none) by the United States government.
  - Example: There is no required religion in order to be a citizen of the United States. Citizens can practice any religion, or no religion.
- “free exercise thereof”- The government cannot affect or restrict religious beliefs or opinions.
  - Example: People in the United States are allowed to practice any religion they want. No law can be passed that limits what religion people can/cannot practice, or how they can practice it.
- “abridging the freedom of speech”- Translates to “shortening” or “limiting.”
  - Example: The government cannot alter what people choose to say.
    - Example of abridged : If you have a shorter lunch period one day, you could say that your lunch period has been “abridged.”
- “peaceably assemble”- An “assembly” is a grouping of people, or people coming together (“assembling”) for a specific purpose or cause. Something that is “peaceable” is non-violent. Together the words, “peaceable assembly” refers to a non-violent group of people coming together for a specific purpose.
  - Example: If a group of people decided to protest high car tolls in a non-violent way such as a silent demonstration, it would be considered a peaceful assembly.
- “petition”- A request for something to be done, generally a written document signed by a large number of people demanding some form of action.
  - Example: If a group of people from a town collectively wrote a letter to the head of the transportation committee of that town to request lower parking rates, their letter would be considered a petition.



- “redress of grievances”- “Grievances” are wrongs of some kind. “Redress” means to correct, or to set right. As used in the First Amendment, the phrase “redress of grievances” refers to the protection of one’s right to petition through a peaceful assembly *without fear of punishment or harm*.
  - Definition: “A redress of grievances” is the right to make a complaint to, or seek the assistance of, one’s government, without fear of punishment.
  - Example: If the people of a town were charged unfair taxes, they would have a right to a redress of grievances of their town’s government and be given a refund.

Once you have reviewed the text of the First Amendment, ask students to identify the five specific freedoms that the First Amendment guarantees. (They are: religion, speech, press, assembly, and petition.)

Reread components of Freedom of Religion of the First Amendment:

1. **Establishment:** the government cannot establish any religion, meaning that no religion will have more importance over any other.
2. **Exercise:** everyone has the right and the freedom to believe in and practice whatever religion they want.

Ask the students if they think that people in the United States fully experience Freedom of Religion. How? Have students generate 2-3 examples as a large group. If students need guidance generating ideas one example may include asking students if they can celebrate a religious holiday without fear of the government trying to stop you from doing so. Or, ask students if people in the United States are allowed to not have a particular religion without fear of the government trying to change their practices.

## **Part II**

Below are several scenarios, based on real events, involving a lack of, or presence of, religious freedom. Print them out and post them around the room, keeping the outcomes hidden.

Have students take a gallery walk and read each scenario.

Have students individually write down a response to the following question in their notebooks. Remind students that this is an individual task.

Is this scenario fair to everyone in the school? Why or why not?

1. Scenario 1: Muslim students in public schools, who wish to observe the holiday Ramadan (which involves fasting during the day), are not given any extensions on tests or projects that are assigned during the time period of Ramadan.

Outcome: After some families and parents call the principal, the school allows for extensions for all tests and assignments to be completed in the same amount of time that all other students were allowed.

2. Scenario 2: One student named Zack was bullied for being an atheist (not believing in God). He was called names in class and in the hallway and received threatening notes over email

from other students.

Outcome: The teachers at this school created a “Secular Safe Zone”, where students who identify as non-religious can discuss their viewpoints without fear of retribution or intimidation.

3. Scenario 3: When students were asked to choose someone they look up to and create a report, a girl named Karen chose to write about God as her assignment. The teacher told Karen that she couldn’t write about God and that she should choose someone else to write about.

Outcome: After talking to the parents and the principal, her teacher changed her mind, and allowed the student to continue with the report about God because it related to the assignment of writing about someone the students look up to.

4. One student named Andrea could not attend soccer practice at school on Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. The coach allowed for Andrea to make up practice. The next day at lunch, one student named Beth tells her that she can’t sit at their lunch table anymore because she doesn’t have a ‘normal’ New Year and said to Andrea, “Too bad... If you snooze, you lose.”

Outcome: Andrea told the school counselor about what happened at lunch. The school counselor met privately with Beth who later apologized to Andrea for being disrespectful about her religious holiday.

Once every group has had a chance to read the scenarios, come back together, break the class up into 4 groups and have each of the four groups choose one scenario to focus on. The groups should work collaboratively responding to the following questions for their assigned scenario:

- Group 1- Scenario 1: Muslim students in public schools, who wish to observe the holiday Ramadan (which involves fasting during the day), are not given any extensions on tests or projects that are assigned during the time period of Ramadan.
  - Questions for student groups:
    - Should students be allowed to make up assignments if they miss class for a religious reason? Why or why not?
    - If a student misses an assignment for religious reasons, is the absence protected under the First Amendment? If yes, how?
  - Considerations for educators:
    - Free Exercise Clause: By not allowing students reasonable extensions on tests and projects in order to observe religious holidays, schools may be infringing on the students’ right to free exercise. Note: different state laws apply.
    - Establishment Clause: By closing schools for religious reasons alone, the school might violate the establishment clause.

- Group 2- Scenario 2: One student named Zack was bullied for being an atheist (not believing in God). He was called names in class and in the hallway and received threatening notes over email from other students.
  - Questions for student groups:
    - If someone is bullied for their non-religious beliefs, customs or practices, does it violate their Freedom of Religion? Why or why not? If so, under which clause?
    - Why should students be respectful of each other's religious or non-religious world views?
  - Considerations for educators:
    - While Zack's practices are not being violated directly by the school officials, his sense of security at school is infringed upon because of his non-religious practices. Teachers should make every effort to ensure that all students feel respected and that they are not bullied. Once Zack tells an adult or someone he trusts at school about the name-calling and threats, the school should take the appropriate disciplinary action in accordance with their anti-bullying policies. Since his classmates triggered a disruption of Zack's feeling of safety, the disparaging remarks most likely won't be protected under as free speech. Furthermore, it could be argued that by not addressing the bullying and threats, the school could be held responsible for overlooking the intimidation and harassment.
- Group 3- Scenario 3: When students were asked to choose someone they look up to and create a report, a girl named Karen chose to write about God as her assignment. The teacher told Karen that she couldn't write about God and that she should choose someone else to write about.
  - Questions for student groups:
    - Can students write about their religious or non-religious worldviews in assignments? Why? And, if so, when?
  - Considerations for educators:
    - Free Exercise Clause: By not allowing students to write about their religious beliefs in the form of *relevant* artwork, homework and oral reports, they are interfering with student's rights under the free exercise clause.
- Group 4- Scenario 4: One student named Andrea could not attend soccer practice at school on Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. The coach allowed for Andrea to make up practice. The next day at lunch, one student named Beth tells her that she can't sit at their lunch table anymore because she doesn't have a 'normal' New Year and said to Andrea, "Too bad... If you snooze, you lose."

- Questions for student groups:
  - Can students miss practice for an afterschool activity such as soccer, for religious reasons?
- Considerations for educators:
  - Free Exercise Clause: Since the coach allowed Andrea to make up the practice, the school did not violate her First Amendment rights under the Free Exercise Clause. However, teachers should make every effort to ensure that all students feel respected and that they are not bullied. Furthermore, it could be argued that if the intimidation accelerated and the student was harassed or threatened, the school could be held responsible for disregarding the bullying.

Now have students read the outcome of each scenario and determine how similar or different their suggestions are to the actual outcome. In a large class discussion or journal assignment, have students respond to the following question.

1. What could have been done differently in order to ensure respect for religious freedom in your scenario?
2. What can you do to promote freedom of religion in your school or community?

### **Part III**

The First Amendment intends for all religions to be viewed and treated equally. What would that look like? (Refer back to scenarios) What is the relationship between “equality” and “freedom”? Define quality and freedom as a class. What would it look like for everyone in the United States to experience both “equality” and “freedom”?

Hand out a poem that addresses the notions of “equality” and “freedom” in American society and culture. The poems “[Let America be America Again](#)” by Langston Hughes (upper grades), or “This Land is Your Land” (lower grades) by Woody Guthrie offer interesting perspectives on whether and how the United States has achieved its vision of freedom and equality. Lead students through reading the poem and discussing how the author writes about the concepts of “freedom” and “equality.”

- What is the author’s perspective on freedom? How does the poem view equality? Does the author interpret these two concepts as the same?
- Does the author of the poem think that people are treated equally and given freedom? If yes, what evidence or examples does the author bring to demonstrate this? If no, what does the author see instead?
- How does the First Amendment of the Constitution give us freedom and equality?

## LOWER GRADE EXTENSION

Younger students will be introduced to the concept of “Freedom of Religion,” and define what this might look like, sound like and feel like in practice. You can use the chart template from the Respecting Each Other activity (on page 3 linked in this [lesson](#).)

1. Begin with a word web around the word “freedom.” Ask students what they think of when they see or hear this word.
  - Depending on the age and maturity level of your students, you may choose to do the Statue of Liberty section featured in the first part of the lesson.
2. Next, introduce students to the phrase “Freedom of Religion.” You should write this phrase on the board or on a poster, as well as read it out loud to students (for older students, you could ask a student to read it). Lead a discussion that helps students develop their understanding of this concept:
  - We have talked about what “freedom” means. What does “religion” mean? Can you think of different religions that you may have heard of or seen? Students may list several different religions, or only know of two or three. Help them come up with as many religions as possible; you might have to list several for them.
  - Tell students that in the United States, there are laws that guarantee that people who practice any of these religions (listed in the previous step) – or who don’t practice any religion – are able to do so. This is “Freedom of Religion.”
  - What do you think it means to have “Freedom of Religion?” What does it look like, sound like, feel like? Lead the class in brainstorming different ideas using the Respecting Each Other activity linked [here](#).

**CONCLUSION:** Have students take a few moments to create a poem or brief monologue about how they envision equality and freedom, either in their own personal lives, nationally, or any other extent. They should describe their personal vision for freedom and quality based on their own opinions. Students can use the following as a basis for their poems:

- Poems featured above as inspiration or basis
- Ideas generated in class about the statue of liberty
- Text or ideas from the study of the First Amendment.

# Teaching Tolerance Resources

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## [In Good Faith article](#) and [toolkit](#)

The study of comparative religions is critical to our understanding of history and the diverse communities we live in today. But the Pew Research Center's 2010 *U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey* revealed that, due to a lack of knowledge about the world's religions and—perhaps—our individual faith-based experiences, most Americans lack broad awareness of diverse religious traditions.

## [Lesson: The First Amendment and Freedom of Religion](#)

What is religious freedom? Is religious freedom an absolute? Does freedom of religion require respect for other religions? The exploration of these essential questions will help students understand that the spectrum of religious diversity is an integral part of United States culture as a whole. Understanding the religious beliefs of others is a key element of tolerance since people's faith traditions often define a significant part of their identity.

## [Religion in the Locker Room article](#) and [toolkit](#)

Religious minorities in public schools face exclusion regularly, and student athletes face it nearly every day. Why? In part because the conservative culture of many athletic programs is slow to accept legal changes—or the increasing religious diversity of the United States. *Religion in the Locker Room* illustrates that the law requires public schools to remain neutral.

## [Lesson: Free to Believe](#)

The most basic liberties guaranteed in the United States are outlined in the 45 words of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The Amendment includes the following words: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Religious liberty includes the right to freely practice any religion or no religion without government coercion or control. Within the First Amendment, there are two clauses related to religion. The Establishment Clause prohibits the government from creating an official or established church. The Free Exercise Clause prohibits the government from interfering with the practices of any religion except in the "compelling interest" of the greater society. For example, you can't be married to two people at the same time in the United States, even if your religion allows it.

Understanding the religious rights of others is a key element of tolerance. The United States is a religiously diverse nation, with hundreds of different religions and a rapidly growing segment of the population that does not believe in any religion at all. That diversity extends to many of the nation's classrooms, where students with different belief systems are expected to learn side by side while respecting each other's beliefs.

### [Lesson: Inaugural Prayers in History](#)

As Donald R. Kennon, Chief Historian of United States Capitol Historical Society has noted, "the role of clergy in our inaugural ceremonies is a recent development that began in 1933, when Franklin Roosevelt had a minister to give a benediction, and then his following inauguration had an invocation and a benediction. And it has involved Catholic priests. It has involved Protestant ministers. It's involved Jewish rabbis. So there has been a little bit more diversity. ... [But we should remember that] religion supports the government. The government doesn't necessarily support or favor any specific religion or Christian denomination."

Is Kennon right? When a President-elect invites a minister to pray at an inauguration, does that represent an endorsement of a particular religious view – or an expression that some views are legitimate and others are not? Who has not been represented at the inauguration? In this lesson, students will analyze demographic information about the clergymen who prayed at inaugurations since 1937, look for trends in those choices, and formulate possible reasons for those trends.

### [Lesson: Respecting Nonreligious People](#)

Atheists and others who do not believe in God experience discrimination because of their nonbelief. In this lesson, students learn about episodes of anti-atheist discrimination; and they develop ways to educate others about respecting nonreligious, as well as religious, diversity.

# Sample School or District Policies

Below is sample language taken from existing school or district policies for excusals for religious reasons, religion in classroom content and student prayer. This list is not exhaustive of every law or regional consideration involving religion in schools and cannot be considered legal advice. For the most accurate information on what is permissible in your school setting, please contact your school administration or district office.

## Absences and Excusals for Religious Reasons

- Example A: *“Notwithstanding Education Code 48200, a pupil shall be excused from school when the absence is...For justifiable personal reasons, including, but not limited to, an appearance in court, attendance at a funeral service, observance of a holiday or ceremony of his or her religion, attendance at a religious retreats, or attendance at an employment conference, when the pupil’s absence has been requested in writing by the parent or guardian and approved by the principal or a designated representative pursuant to uniform standards established by the governing board... No pupil shall have his/her grade reduced/lose credit for any excused absence, for missed assignments or tests that can reasonably be provided or satisfactorily completed within a reasonable time. A pupil absent from school for an excused absence shall be allowed to complete all assignments and tests missed during the absence that can be reasonably provided. Upon satisfactory completion of the assignment or test, within a reasonable amount of time, the pupil shall be given full credit. The tests and assignments shall be reasonably equivalent to, but not necessarily identical to, the tests and assignments that the pupil missed during the absence.”*
- Example B: *“Students are entitled to excused absences for the observance of religious holidays. Students who are absent for the observance of a religious holiday must have an opportunity to make up any missed work, examination or assignment. A student who avails himself or herself of the opportunity to make up any work, examination or assignment missed because of the observance of a religious holiday, shall not be penalized based on that absence. A school, through its student handbook, may require parents/legal guardians to notify the principal up to five calendar days prior to any anticipated absence for a religious holiday”.*

## Religion in Classroom Content

- Example A: *“An understanding of the world’s major religions is in the Framework’s cultural literacy strand for all grade levels. The role of religion in the development of civilization is a re-occurring theme in the study of world history. World History units that specifically include the teaching about religion are: The Foundation of Western Ideas: The Ancient Hebrews and Greeks (Judaism); West Meets East: The Early Civilizations of India and China (Hinduism and Buddhism); East Meets West: Rome (Christianity) and the Growth of Islam. There are also units of study within local, state and U.S. history where teaching about religion is appropriate. In addition, music, art, literature and drama with religious themes may be included in teaching about religion, provided that they are presented in a religiously neutral prudent and objective manner and are directly related to sound secular educational goals. Schools may wish to*



*consult authorized textbooks for selections that are appropriate for school use. Increased accountability of site administrators and teachers for high academic achievement signal a need to scrutinize the time spent in preparing for school-wide programs—all such programs must have clear academic objectives. Programs should have clear, identifiable instructional themes that are understood by teachers, students and parents alike. Elements of the program must be clearly identified as part of a secular (i.e., non-religious) program of education...*

- Example B: *“Teaching about religion: Public schools may not provide religious instruction, but they may teach about religion, including the Bible or other scripture: the history of religion, comparative religion, the Bible (or other scripture) as literature, and the role of religion in the history of the United States and other countries all are permissible public school subjects. Similarly, it is permissible to consider religious influences on art, music, literature, and social studies. Although public schools may teach about religious holidays, including their religious aspects, and may celebrate the secular aspects of holidays, schools may not observe holidays as religious events or promote such observance by students.”*

## Student Prayer in Schools

- Example A: *“Students may pray when not engaged in school activities or instruction, subject to the same rules designed to prevent material disruption of the educational program that are applied to other privately initiated expressive activities. Among other things, students may read their Bibles or other scriptures, say grace after meals, and pray or study religious materials with fellow students during recess, the lunch hour, or other non-instructional time to the same extent that they may engage in nonreligious activities...”*
- Example B: *“No policy of the district prevents, or otherwise denies participation in, constitutionally protected prayer in public elementary schools and secondary schools, as detailed in the guidance provided by the U. S. Secretary of Education.*

## Pledge of Allegiance

- Example A: *“A student cannot be compelled to salute the flag, recite the pledge of allegiance, or to stand while the Pledge of Allegiance is being recited. When a student is unwilling to participate...the teacher should instruct the student to remain silent and seated during these exercises if appropriate. A student may not be disciplined solely for refusing to participate in patriotic ceremonies.”*

# Teaching and Learning about Religions: Considerations for Communicating with Families

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The below recommendations are designed to help public school educators, as well as those in independent and parochial schools, communicate about classroom content and extra-curricular educational activities that foster learning about the religious differences and are inclusive of religiously diverse family backgrounds. As always, you should keep in mind your school and/or districts policies when planning and communicating about classroom and school activities.

## Classroom Lessons

Let parents know that it is a school educator's responsibility to teach about religion from a factual, neutral and objective point of view that neither promotes nor denigrates a particular religious belief, no belief or religion, or no religion in general.

Teaching and learning about several different religions and beliefs is important to providing a comprehensive education. Teachers may engage family members for additional information, but should be mindful of not asking someone to represent all people of a particular group ("spokesperson syndrome").

Primary sources can be a useful tool for promoting important critical thinking skills. Using such resources, students can develop a stronger, more nuanced view of historical and/or current events involving religion and religious traditions.

Several of the Common Core standards, across grade levels, align with the goals of teaching about religion and religious diversity. (See page 10, above, for more on the connections between Common Core and teaching about religion.)

It is important to learn about religious holidays throughout the year. Teachers may call upon family members to share about significant holidays that they celebrate in their homes. However, family members should not be asked to represent all people of a particular group. Students' learning can also be enhanced when family and/or community members share primary resources related to their religious traditions. Such resources include, but are not limited to, photos, videos, and letters. Note: any materials should be presented in a non-devotional manner.

Sometimes, parents and family members may prefer that their children not participate in a particular educational activity for religious reasons. “If focused on a specific discussion, assignment, or activity, such a request should be routinely granted in order to strike a balance between the student’s religious freedom and the school’s interest in providing a well-rounded education.” <sup>5</sup>

## School Plays and Concerts

Concerts and school plays present great opportunities for students to learn about history and culture through the arts. The content of schools plays and concerts should always be linked to educational goals and the broader mission of the school. For instance, a school can perform Andrew Lloyd Weber’s *Jesus Christ, Superstar* as part of an educational program designed to learn about the history and development of musical theatre. School plays must have an overall secular and objective theme.

Furthermore, a school can perform classical music with religious themes – for instance, Verdi’s “Requiem” or other compositions that make direct reference to religion. If such works are chosen for study and/or performance, it must be for their educational value, and not in order to send a particular religious message. Studying the religious themes in these various artistic works can help deepen students’ understanding of how religion is embedded in culture and has contributed to the development of theatre and music as art forms.

Student participation in extracurricular activities and special events such as school plays, should be voluntary.

## Field Trips

Field trips to sites of religious historical significance can be a meaningful way to extend learning beyond the classroom and enhance students’ understanding of relevant course content. In order to maintain neutrality, these trips cannot involve any form of religious coercion or proselytizing.

Every effort should be made to provide students with the opportunity to visit a variety of sites or provide students with access to study a variety of materials of significance.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.freedomforum.org/publications/first/religioninpublicschools/parentsguidereligion.pdf>

# The December Dilemma Webinar

The “December Dilemma” highlights the struggles that many educators face regarding religious holidays and traditions in the classroom during the month of December.

Below is a link to the recording of a webinar on holiday inclusion as well as the “After the Session Pack.”

## [December Dilemma Webinar Recording](#)

This webinar recording will help you create deeper understandings of religious and secular holidays, facilitate classroom discussions surrounding inclusion and respect for religious and non-religious differences, and evaluate existing classroom resources and strategies for equity and inclusivity.

## [December Dilemma After the Session Pack](#)

The activities and lessons included in this pack can be used following the “Addressing the December Dilemma in Schools” webinar or as a stand-alone series of units. They address many of the key skills listed in the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts. These activities ask students to interpret and analyze new information, to conduct research and present their findings, to be conscientious speakers and attentive listeners and to think critically about the world around them. This pack also includes several resources for educators, including assessments related to holiday inclusion and incorporation of religious diversity in curricula. Additional articles, lesson plans and guides from Teaching Tolerance and the First Amendment Center are also included.

# Resources

PROVIDED BY THE FIRST AMENDMENT CENTER

In the event that a hyperlink is no longer active, the [Religious Freedom Center of the Newseum Institute](http://www.religiousfreedomeducation.org) should be used as a reference point for the resources below. Visit <http://www.religiousfreedomeducation.org> for more details.

[Overview of Establishment Clause](#)

[Overview of Free Exercise Clause](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions](#)

[Comprehensive Religious Liberty Guidelines from the U.S. Department of Education \(co-written by the First Amendment Center\)](#)

[Religious Liberty in Public Schools](#)

[Evolution & Creationism](#)

[Graduation Ceremonies](#)

[Distributing Religious Literature](#)

[Teachers' Religious Liberties](#)

[Public Schools & Religious Communities](#)

[Religious Clubs](#)

[Pledge of Allegiance](#)

[Bible in School](#)

[Teaching About Religion](#)

[Released Time](#)

[Student Religious Practices](#)

[Religious Holidays](#)

[School Prayer](#)

[Teaching about Religion in American Life: A First Amendment Guide](#)

[A Parent's Guide to Religion in the Public Schools](#)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[American Academy of Religion](#)

["Religion in Public Schools" provided by the Anti-Defamation League](#)

[First Amendment Schools](#)

## RELEVANT NEWS ARTICLES

[Texas Overhauls Textbook Approval to Ease Tensions Over Evolution \(February 2014\)](#)

The Texas Board of Education has decided to limit the use and input of “citizen review panel, and instead give priority to teachers” and professors for subjects in their areas of experience and expertise. This is intended to help ease the fight over the role and teaching of evolution vs. intelligent design in schools.

[NYC Holidays for Muslims Could Be Unconstitutional \(February 2014\)](#)

An opinion piece on how the declaration of school holidays on the Muslim holiday of Eid-ul-Fitr and other religious celebrations by Christians, Jews, Muslims and the Chinese is unconstitutional, and sets up a “hierarchy of religious that belies the equality of citizenship”

### [We Neglect Religious Education At Our Peril \(February 2014\)](#)

An opinion piece arguing that a lack of comparative religious education in schools results in extreme lack of understanding of world issues, and creates a vacuum that could result in intolerance and extremism.

### [Religion in school could be hot topic in Utah Legislation \(February 2014\)](#)

There is a lot of disagreement on the role of religion in schools, which continues to be discussed and debated in legislation, especially regarding a student's ability to speak from a religious standpoint at public events (i.e. graduations, sporting events, etc.)

### [High School Teacher Forced to Remove Religious Poster From Classroom \(February 2014\)](#)

A Texas high school teacher was forced to take down a poster of Bible scripture scrolled into a cross from his classroom, after a student took offense. It was considered a "violation of the establishment clause in the first amendment," although many members of the community disprove of the poster's removal.

### [Sikhs stand up to bullying as they try to build understanding \(January 2014\)](#)

Sikhs have grouped together in order to fight bullying, hate crimes, and torment by those who mistake Sikhs for Muslims, or terrorists. Sikhism, as the world's 5<sup>th</sup> largest religions, is often misunderstood, and Sikh students undergo bullying in public schools.

### [We Must Teach about Religion in High Schools \(January 2014\)](#)

Joseph Laycock's staunch opinion that religions must be included in high school curriculum in order to promote understanding and tolerance.

### [Firecrackers and Absenteeism: When Tradition and School Days Collide \(January 2014\)](#)

Schools in New York's predominantly Asian American neighborhoods have exceptionally low attendance rates on schools days that correspond with the Chinese New Year. Although Jewish, Christian, and Muslim holidays are recognized and incorporated into the school year, many other religious and ethnic groups holidays are not.

### [World Religion class in Columbia high schools broaden student horizons \(October 2013\)](#)

Due to student interest, classes in world religions are on the rise in Missouri towns, where they are trying to take an air of education as opposed to conversion. Districts have been met with extremely positive reviews from students, albeit hesitant ones from communities.

### [Bullied for Not Believing in God \(September 2013\)](#)

An Oklahoma student was bullied for being an atheist. The school responded by creating "Secular Safe Zones," a national trend to "curtail anti-atheist bullying, discrimination, and social isolation."

### [By removing Islam display, Kansas school surrenders to ignorance \(August 2013\)](#)

An opinion piece discussing the value of comparative religious education in schools, and how fear or misunderstanding sacrifices our ability to gain further knowledge and understanding. Teaching comparative faiths is, according to Charles Haynes of the First Amendment Center, "constitutionally and academically sound." To deny students this is to deny them a full education.

### [School Prayer 50 years later: What do Americans Believe? \(June 2013\)](#)

Report on changing perspective of the role of school prayer in public schools, as it was spurned by Roy Costner in his graduation speech. Pew suggests most Americans disapprove of court ruling against school prayer.

### [ACLU of New Jersey Applauds Ruling in Favor of Student's Right to Sing "Awesome God" \(December 2006\)](#)

The American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey supports a ruling by the U.S. District court regarding the right of a student to sing a religious song at a school talent show. The second grader wanted to sing "Awesome God" at a voluntary, after-school talent show, and was told she could not, as it might give the impression that the "school favored religion." The U.S. district court found that the school "had no right to deny her choice of song... as the school allowed students to choose their own songs, they could not reject the student's choice because of religious content."

### [Censoring Jesus hurts schools, violated free speech \(October 2005\)](#)

A court case involving a kindergarten student's environmental poster depicting an image of Jesus is being reviewed. This article argues that denying the kindergarten student his right to include an image of Jesus goes against the First Amendment, and is a restriction of freedom of speech and religion.

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