

After-Session Pack

The activities and lessons in this After-Session Pack can be used following the *Religious Diversity in the Classroom: Applications for Elementary Educators* webinar or as a stand-alone set of resources. They develop many of the key skills listed in the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy, and they meet the standards established by the National Council of Teachers of English and the National Council for the Social Studies.

We hope that all of the resources provided in this pack will support your important work creating safe classrooms where all students feel welcome.

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Dear Reader,

For over 15 years, Tanenbaum has worked on the question that confronts educators across the U.S.: what to do about 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 parents or 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 noticing and talking about differences based on religious and secular traditions, and if we only give attention to other 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 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 this need through the delivery of a five-part collaborative webinar series entitled *Religious Diversity in the Classroom*. The third webinar, “Applications for Elementary Educators,” and the accompanying After-Session Pack give educators practical resources and strategies for

including religious content in elementary lessons.

Students learn best in environments where they feel safe, supported and respected. By implementing the key ideas outlined in this webinar, and by using the frameworks and instructional activities provided in the following pages, educators will have the tools to create classrooms that inspire curiosity about religious and other types of differences. They will also gain an understanding of how to incorporate explorations of religious diversity into their curricula so that both socio-emotional and academic goals can be met simultaneously.

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 and editor@tolerance.org, or by phone at (212) 967-7707.

Sincerely,

Joyce S. Dubensky, CEO

Lesson Plans From Tanenbaum

The lesson plans in this section come from Tanenbaum's elementary level curriculum entitled *Religions in My Neighborhood: Teaching Curiosity and Respect about Religious Differences*. For more information about this curriculum, or to purchase a copy, please [click here](#).

The beginning of each lesson indicates which national English language arts and social studies standards the lesson fulfills. You can find a complete list of these standards here:

[National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association Standards for the English Language Arts](#)

[National Council for the Social Studies Thematic Standards for Social Studies](#)

My Identity in My Learning Community

BIG IDEAS

- Exploring and expressing my identity affirms me in who I am and helps me imagine who I can become in my ever-changing growth.
- Exploring and expressing my identity opens up my understanding of the identity of others and how their identities also change.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- Who am I?
- How do I identify?

NATIONAL STANDARDS

- English Language Arts: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 11, 12
- Social Studies: 1, 3, 4

Rationale: Why teach this lesson?

Most children in grades K-4 do not often spend a great deal of time pondering the question "Who am I?" Their everyday world shapes their perspectives on their identities, which are taken for granted. Starting to unpack the multiple components of identity can help young children begin to reflect upon the many different aspects of their lived experiences. This lesson is developed with the understanding that as children become more aware of who they are and how they became who they are, the more they can appreciate the differences in who their peers are and how their peers became that way. In K-4 children's terms, "The more I understand myself, the more I can understand you."

Think ahead:

The concept of identity is rather abstract for K-4th grade students. Helping students express a "sense of self" will require helping them to conceptualize the larger notion of identity. Engaging students in guessing about identifying factors about fictitious characters may be helpful to launch the discussion as pointed out in the "procedure" below. It is critical to launch the discussion with fictitious characters, or examples of people from history and current events, so that children in the class do not inadvertently become objects of discussion or the spokesperson for an identity group with whom they may, or may not, identify.

After introducing the concept of identity in this way, children may eventually (and quite naturally) chime in, "Michael Phelps likes to swim like I do!" or "Barack Obama is black (or mixed, or biracial) like me, and a strong leader." Or, if discussing fictitious characters, "Dora the Explorer is bilingual like Tatyana!" This is a natural, healthy response in a dialectical classroom and is appropriate as long as children are not being "named" against their wishes. Affirming children in naming themselves is essential. In the case of Dora and Tatyana, one affirming response would be, "Yes, we are fortunate to have many languages spoken in our class. Tatyana, are there other ways that you would describe Dora or yourself? In addition to Dora's and your terrific language skills, what else do we know about Dora, or about you? You can tell us in the group, or you can put it on your work sheet."

Objectives for this lesson - Students will:

- Guess about identity components of fictitious characters to become more aware of the topic of identity.
- Brainstorm the many aspects of their lives that help make them who they are.
- Brainstorm lists of experiences with their classmates to generate their own thought process and make them more cognizant of others' experiences.
- Create a self-portrait that includes images of their faces as well as images of components of their identities.
- Become more thoughtful about the multiple influences on their identities.
- Become more cognizant of, and respectful toward, the similarities and differences in their learning community.

Materials needed:

- Book: *Just Like Me: Stories and Self Portraits by Fourteen Artists* edited by Harriet Rohmer (1997).
- List of fictitious characters with whom your students will be able to identify
- Drawing paper
- Art materials such as pencils, markers, oil pastels, and if possible and available, tempera paint or watercolor with brushes and water cans for brushes
- Clean-up materials such as sponges, paper towels, hand washing sink area or buckets/bins for hand washing

Time needed:

2 or 3 class meetings, 45 minutes each

Setting the lesson:

Make a list of fictitious characters with whom your students will be able to identify some characteristics, and who are relevant to your students' age groups and your students' contexts. For example, Dora the Explorer, Pirate Jack Sparrow, Curious George, Kermit the Frog, Zoe Muppet on Sesame Street, Willy from the Ezra Jack Keats book *The Snowy Day*, Grace from the Mary Hoffman book *Amazing Grace*, etc. If possible, provide pictures of the character from books or internet sources.

Collect art materials and consider your work-space for your students. Working with paint is not required for this lesson, but it can be very enriching and exciting as long as you have a space that can be forgiving of a few splashes or spills and has a water source for clean-up.

Procedure for the lesson: Day 1:

Lead a group discussion in which children name the characters you have considered and for which you gathered pictures. List one character on chart paper, and discuss the character's identity.

For example, Dora the Explorer. What do we know about her? We know she is Latina, (although we do not know from which Latin American country her family originates), she is bilingual in Spanish and English, she is adventurous, she likes animals (especially Boots the monkey), she is athletic (especially in baseball in which her father is a coach, and also in soccer), she is a girl and she has a family: Marni, Papi, sister Alicia, cousin Diego.

Many things make up her identity. List the things: Race/ethnicity, language, favorite pets, sports, family life, gender. Consider some other characters and what we know about them. Then ask: *What do we want to know about Dora? What do we want to know about the other characters?*

After discussing several characters (or people from history and current events) lead students in considering the components of identity. Encourage them to consider all the notions that were discussed in the group dialogue about characters. Also encourage them to add aspects of self that you may not have discussed yet. Explain that they do not have to fill in all the blanks; say, "Pick the ones that are most important to you and feel free to add some that we may not have discussed."

They can answer the question in picture form or text form on the following worksheet.

Note: If religion is raised by students, treat it as a part of identity, like other parts of one's identity. If it isn't raised by the students, wait until Chapter 2 where it is raised directly.

Name _____

My Identity Has Many Parts

My learning community:

--

My language(s):

--

My family members:

--

People who live with me:

--

Where I live:

--

Where other family members live or used to live:

--

Places I have been:

--

My friends:

--

My favorite activities:

--

My favorite sports:

--

My pets:

--

My religious beliefs:

--

My sex/gender:

--

More ideas about me:

--

Day 2:

Revisit worksheets from yesterday. Discuss how you could show all these pieces of your identity in artwork. Discuss self-portraits. If available, look at examples from the book *just Like Me: Stories and Self Portraits by Fourteen Artists* edited by Harriet Rohmer (1997).

This book provides examples of self-portraits by artists who represent a wide range of racial and ethnic heritages. The artists also include pictorial clues about their identities in their paintings. The book provides a one-page narrative written by each artist in kid-friendly language accompanied by two photographs of the artist: a current photo and a photo from early childhood. The book provides a valuable model of self-portraiture on many levels. Children see that the paintings do not look identical to the artist's photo. There is lots of room for artistic expression, which encourages students who may be less confident to dive in and try to express their ideas in visual art. It also connects the world of ideas and notions of identity with pictures.

You do not have to be an art teacher to lead a vibrant self-portrait lesson. One way to get students started on drawing a self-portrait is to instruct students to draw a simple oval on the page, which will serve as the face. They can fill in the features, as they like. Then encourage students to add various symbols and pictures in the background, in their hair or as part of their faces. Most students in grades K-4 are still confident enough to tackle a self-portrait without overly detailed instruction from the teacher. Typically, their developmental perspective still allows them to be pleased with their work.

Encourage them with specific comments such as, "I like the choices you made by putting that shape in this corner and that color on your shirt; it really tells me a lot about you." These specific details will be much more encouraging than the more superlative "It's beautiful!" The specificity will help them to expand on what they have already done. Some students get discouraged because of social pressures on what art "should look like." For these children, it helps to say, "If I wanted it to look like a

photograph, I would have handed you a camera. This is about expressing your identity! Let's look at the other artists' work and learn from their ideas."

Allow ample time for work and for clean-up.

Day 3:

Continue with the art making process on the self-portraits. Encourage students to talk about their work and their symbols of identity as they engage in the art — that is, what do they use to symbolize various aspects of who they are. They can talk about each other's work as well as their own. As they finish, help them create "artist statements" to be displayed with the portraits as explained below, in Closure.

Closure for the lesson:

Invite K-1 children to dictate to you, or to a helping adult, their narrative about their self-portraits. Write down their dictation to post with their artwork. Another more ambitious and technologically- dependent strategy is for each child to talk to a video camera while explaining his or her work, and to screen the video on TV near the art display. Some children may not be allowed to be captured on film due to the cultural or religious beliefs of their family or community. You can also allow for a "Meet the Artist" session where each child can present her or his self-portrait to the group.

Children in grades 2, 3 and 4 can write their own artist's statements. Revisit the narratives from the *Just Like Me* book and notice some of the ways in which the professional artists told their stories. Complete artists' statements, and prepare artwork and statements for an art display. Invite members of the larger learning community and family members to view the exhibit.

Assessment for the lesson:

- Do students reveal self-knowledge in their artwork and writing?
- Can students explain diversity in their own identities and the identities of their peers?

Extensions about identity

Exhibit the artwork and poetry of each student in a public place such as a bulletin board or display case. Develop a community event or celebration to highlight the work. Consider the possibility of each student reading his/her narrative about the work at the event. This might be a great activity to do for your first Parents Night or other occasion where parents/guardians can see their children's work.

Consult the [National Gallery of Art website](#) for lesson plans and student activities on the theme of *Who Am I?: Self Portraits in Art and Writing*.

A Garden of Questions and Answers about Beliefs

BIG IDEAS

Beliefs respond to some of our questions about the "big" issues of life, such as: *How was life created? Where did we come from? What is the meaning of life? What are our responsibilities to each other and to the world around us?*

Responses to these questions may develop out of curiosity about the world around us, scientific investigation or what we learn about them from our families, friends, religious teachers, or our various experiences.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What are some of the "Big Questions" that have led to our various beliefs?
- What are some of the different beliefs that different people have about some of the "Big Questions?"

NATIONAL STANDARDS

- English Language Arts: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 11
- Social Studies: 1, 3, 4, 5

Rationale: Why teach this lesson?

A big part of affirming children's diverse experiences and teaching children to be empathetic of one another's differences involves their understanding that people may have many different beliefs. Some beliefs are rooted in religious frameworks and some are not. This lesson helps students recognize the wide range of beliefs that they may notice among other children and in their communities. This wide range of beliefs contributes to the rich diversity of society. As such, it encourages critical inquiry and curiosity.

By using the metaphor of a garden, students can take note of the human experience of questioning and appreciate how some questions are answered through religious understandings, some are answered through scientific understandings and some are answered with both religious and scientific perspectives. A garden grows from many seeds into many species of plants and vegetables and uses many different nutrients in the soil. Thus, this is a powerful metaphor to help cultivate the garden of ideas in your learning community. Using this garden metaphor, students can picture this wide range of perspectives living in a big metaphorical garden of human experience with lots from which to choose. Moreover, they can learn that some questions go unanswered.

Think ahead:

The students in your learning community may bring a wide range of perspectives to the act of questioning including scientific, religious, philosophical and more. This activity takes note of questioning and also of a range of diverse religious experiences. It does not cover every experience. One book or one lesson is never enough. This lesson can be used in connection with other lessons in this book.

It will be essential for the educator to affirm children who bring perspectives that may be unfamiliar to children from mainstream society or that may be unique within your learning community. When in doubt, it is useful to follow classroom ground rules, such as those that you can establish with your students through Tanenbaum's [Respecting Each Other lesson](#). Consider the metaphor of a garden with many seeds, many species of plants and vegetables and many different nutrients in the soil as a way to help cultivate the garden of ideas in your learning community.

Objectives for this lesson – Students will:

- Think metaphorically with the garden as a metaphor for human diversity.
- Develop a "Community Garden Mural" with images of plants and written questions.
- Collectively brainstorm a list of "Big Questions" about life.
- Consider how to seek answers to "Big Questions."
- Ponder whether or not all questions can be answered.
- Notice that some people bring religious perspectives to answering questions.
- Notice that some people bring scientific perspective to answering questions.
- Notice that some people bring both scientific and religious perspectives to their answers.
- Practice implementing your learning community's Rules of Respect.

Materials needed:

- Books:

Grandma's Garden by Mercer Mayer (2001).

Faith by Maya Ajmera, Magda Nakassis, & Cynthia Pon (2009).

The Three Questions by Jon J. Muth (2002).

- Chart paper and markers
- Roll of long craft paper
- Scissors and coloring materials such as markers, crayons or oil pastels

Time needed:

5-6 class meetings, 45 minutes each

Setting the lesson:

Welcome students into the new topic of "A garden of questions and answers about beliefs." Ask students what they already know about gardens. Has anybody ever helped plant a garden? Harvest a garden? If yes, when and where? Has anybody ever visited a public garden, places like parks? What are some of the many different purposes of gardens? What are some of the many different plants that can be found in gardens?

Procedure for the lesson:

Day 1 & 2:

Read the book, *Grandma's Garden* by Mercer Mayer. Discuss the many different species of plants that go into Grandma's garden! Take note of the wide variety of vegetation that can grow in harmony and share the nutrients of Grandma's garden. This will serve as the foundation of the metaphor throughout the lesson.

After reading and discussing the story, lead an art activity to make a garden mural on long craft paper. Each student makes one item for the garden on a piece of construction paper by drawing, coloring and cutting out a vegetable, plant or flower. You may want to have a general description of the vegetables, plants or flowers that you are giving to the students. After students make their construction paper vegetable, plant or flower, they describe their plant, vegetable or flower to the class and then they bring it to the large Community Garden Mural to attach it with glue, staples or push-pins.

Lead the class in a discussion about the range of diversity in the garden. Notice that all the plants share the soil, sun and water, but each has something different to offer including different colors, shapes, smells, sizes.

Have fun with the students, completing the garden with details such as sun, rain, soil, insects, various textures for dirt, etc.

Day 3:

Study the Community Garden Mural. Lead a discussion with questions and thoughts such as: How can a garden be like the many different questions in our learning community? If each plant, each vegetable and each flower had a question to ask, what would the garden look like and sound like?

Read aloud the book *The Three Questions* by Jon J. Muth. Scholastic Inc. (2002).

Discuss the book and how Nikolai asks, "When is the best time to do things? Who is the most important one? What is the right thing to do?"

We all bring Big Questions to the world, but we answer them in

different ways. Use chart paper to brainstorm some "really big questions" about life. Note the questions on chart paper. Start with Nikolai's questions:

- When is the best time to do things?
- Who is the most important one?
- What is the right thing to do?

Here are some other Big Questions that may arise:

- How did life begin?
- How are people different from other mammals?
- Why does anything exist?
- Where was I before I was born?
- What happens after people die?
- What am I supposed to do while I am alive?
- How can I be a good person?
- Why do bad things happen?

Also provide an anonymous message box for questions that students want to address but prefer to do so anonymously. For pre-writers, provide an opportunity to talk privately with educators about a range of issues and where they can then raise questions privately.

Day 4:

Revisit the list of questions from the previous class meeting. Invite students to think of one Big Question they would like to know more about. It can be from the chart paper list or it can be a new question.

Give each student a paper with a cartoon word bubble on it, so they can write their questions.

Each student writes their question in the word bubble (or dictates it to an adult) and cuts out the word bubble. Each student adds the word bubble to the garden mural.

Study the Community Garden Mural with the questions on it. Lead a discussion about the community garden of plants and questions.

Think about the many factors that help plants grow: sun, water, atmosphere, insects and, for some plants, shade. Think about the many factors that help people answer questions.

Day 5:

Read aloud the book *Faith* by Maya Ajmera, Magda Nakassis, & Cynthia Pon (2009). Make a chart paper list of all the various religions represented in the book.

In a review of the book *Faith* for Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier, Inc. (2009), Margaret R. Tassia of Millersville University, Pennsylvania wrote:

This book explores through full-color photographs the many ways in which the world celebrates and practices religious belief, highlighting the common threads—praying and meditating, chants and songs, holy books, cleansing, holy places, holidays and festivals, important events, dress, food and drink and helping others. Spare text accompanies the pictures of children and identifies the specific religion and practices. Concluding notes for adults to share with youngsters provide more information on each one. The excellent photographs are dear and colorful and invite careful observation. A world map showing the various homes of the children depicted is included. As stated in the book, "Faith highlights the common threads that bring people together in reverence and joy."

Lead a discussion about the book *Faith* while studying the community garden of plants and questions.

Closure for the lesson:

Think again about the many factors that help plants grow: sun, water, atmosphere, insects, shade (for some plants), etc. Think about the many factors that help people answer questions. Notice that there may be some questions that are answered by religions, some by science, some by both religion and science and some that go unanswered.

Assessment for the lesson:

- Can students explain that our questions and answers are like a growing garden—that many different plants grow from different seeds and yet they can share the same soil, nutrients and atmosphere?

- Did students reveal self-knowledge about their own questions—that they do have Big Questions of their own?
- Can students apply basic skills of listening attentively, questioning respectfully, and participating thoughtfully?
- Do students see in perspective different points of view on where different questions come from and how religious beliefs may respond to some of these questions?

Extensions

1. Have students choose 1 or 2 questions that they did not write from the garden. Ask them to keep a journal and write their answers to the question(s) over the course of one school week (Monday- Friday). Invite those who would like to share the questions they chose and their answers and how they came up with the answer.
2. Have students research the geographical origin of a flower or vegetable that is in the garden.

EXPLORING BELIEFS ABOUT CARING AND SHARING WITH PEOPLE

BIG IDEAS

- Many people have shared ways of caring for, sharing with and helping each other, even if they have different beliefs.
- Many people have shared understandings about the responsibilities they have toward each other and toward their shared community, even if they have different beliefs.
- These common understandings are for the collective well-being of all people in the group or community.
- The well-being of all people in a group or community depends on their caring for each other: showing concern, helping, sharing, and rejecting selfishness.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

- How do people learn about caring, sharing, and helping?

NATIONAL STANDARDS

- English Language Arts: 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 11, 12
- Social Studies: 3, 5, 6, 10

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Rationale: Why teach this lesson?

The Golden Rule — treat your neighbor as you would like to be treated — is not unique to Christianity, Judaism, Islam or any other single religion. Instead, it's shared by many religious traditions in the world — as well as non-religious philosophies. It is an important part of all communities and cultures. And, it is important for students to learn that people need to be as good to other people as they expect others to be good to them. This "rule" of mutual goodness has been taught for centuries. This knowledge will enable students to treat each other with compassion and empower them to work toward the common good in the future.

Think ahead:

Many students will want to share stories of their own acts of goodness or kindness, or conversely, of experiences when goodness or kindness was lacking. Classroom discussion about goodness, kindness and/or learning strategies to choose caring behaviors requires the teacher to be alert and focus on potential learning experiences in their learning community.

While it is critical to honor all student voices and to affirm their understandings, it is important to structure time appropriately. Refer back to classroom guidelines, which you can establish through Tanenbaum's [Respecting Each Other lesson](#), to organize and balance student commentary.

Furthermore, if students divulge information about dangerous or personal high-risk experiences that disclose or allude to abuse, it is critical to get assistance immediately for that child. Go to your supervisor for prompt intervention. Before beginning these lessons, you may want to review your school or district's policies on reporting such matters. The classroom should never become a group therapy session. That work must be reserved for appropriate professionals such as social worker and licensed therapists.

Having said that, when students feel that the classroom is a safe place to share, the topics in this unit and throughout this curriculum will emerge in a natural way. As a teacher, rather than avoiding serious discussions, be well-informed about support structures to consult and help guide the discussion to empower

students for future action.

Objectives for this lesson – Students will:

- Develop understandings of human goodness, kindness, and caring and what they mean in everyday life.
- Think about why we need guidelines to remind us of caring and sharing.
- Compare various "golden rules" and notice similarities and differences.
- Reflect on their daily life in acts of caring and sharing.

Materials needed:

- [Tanenbaum's Golden Rule poster](#). The poster contains a number of different religions' versions of the Golden Rule.
- Markers
- Colored slips of paper (for the extension activity)

Time needed:

3 class meetings, 30-45 minutes each

Setting the lesson:

Welcome students to this new activity. Ask students how they would explain the following words: kindness, goodness, and caring. Post their comments on white board, chart paper or an overhead projector. Explain that many different groups of people expect kindness, goodness, and caring from everyone and that this is the topic for today's lesson.

Procedure for the lesson:

Day 1:

To deepen understanding, follow up with questions and activities that help to understand "rules":

- What is a rule in your family?
- Have you made any rules when you play with your friends?
- What are some of the rules in our learning community?

(Encourage students to refer back to the class's Rules of Respect.)

- Why do communities need rules?
- What are some of the rules in your community?

Consider various examples of community rules, such as: The Eightfold Path of Buddhism, The Ten Commandments (observed in Judaism, Islam and Christianity) or The Sermon on the Mount (in the New Testament). Also review your classroom Rules of Respect. Lead the children through a discussion on the similarities and differences between these various community "rules."

Revisit the Community Garden Mural from the previous lesson. What are some of the rules of "caring" or "kindness" we need to follow to make a flourishing garden? Some comments may include:

- Look at each plant to see what it might need, such as water, or plant food, or space for sunlight or shade?

Others might be:

- Be sure to provide enough water for all plants in all parts of the garden. Too much or too little water can be harmful.
- Do not crowd plants; leave room for them to grow and flourish.
- Be sure all plants can get enough sunlight.
- If some plants need support, add structure to support them.
- Harvest the fruit, vegetables and flowers when they are ready.
- Keep predators out.

Discuss with children how these "rules" for growing a healthy garden can apply as well to a healthy human community. Look at each of the rules above, and apply it in some way to what the students feel they need in a learning community. All members of healthy communities need to learn rules and guidelines for the benefit of all.

Days 2 & 3:

Read aloud each section from the Tanenbaum Golden Rule poster. If students are old enough to read, have students take turns reading

aloud. If they are emerging readers, ask them to find any word they might recognize and invite them to place their finger on the word and read it aloud.

After reading each line, ask the student if they know what it means and ask them to give an example from everyday life. For example, if the student says, "be nice to everybody," prompt them to illustrate an everyday experience.

- What does it mean to be nice to everybody in the lunch line?
- What does it mean to be nice to everybody — even the kids on the opposing kickball team?
- What does it mean to be nice to people in the school hallway, even if you do not know them?

Work your way through the entire poster with student-generated definitions, understandings, questions and storytelling. Ask students whether they have ever taken a stand because they wanted someone to be treated as well as they were being treated (i.e., the same as they were being treated in order to be fair). Ask them whether they have ever wished that someone would stand up for them. This portion of the lesson may take more than one class period to complete.

As an extension, you can have students write their goodness and/or kindness rules on colored slips of paper to share with other students in the school.

After working through the entire poster with this dynamic, student-based discussion, you might also work with the students to find words, phrases and ideas that are common to each religious belief about caring and sharing with people. Some examples include: "you;" "other(s);" "do;" "peace;" and "treat." Circle those phrases on the chart paper or transparency, or post sticky-notes on the original poster. Whatever your method, utilize a graphic indicator of words so that the students visualize the words and ideas that are similar or share common understandings.

Closure for the lesson:

Make connections between the Golden Rule and students' daily lives. Keep the poster or chart paper on display in your classroom or learning space for several weeks. Keep a tray nearby with post-it notes and pencils. Invite students to jot down (or draw an illustration of) ways in which they have lived the Golden Rule in

their daily lives. They can stick those post-it notes to the big chart paper or Golden Rule poster close to the sentence that matches their own actions.

Assessment for the lesson:

- Can students explain the reason for having community rules and guidelines?
- Do students reveal self-knowledge about their own responsibilities toward each other?
- Can students interpret similarities and differences between various versions of the Golden Rule?
- Do students demonstrate empathy for others in their learning community actions and behaviors of caring and sharing?

Extensions for group mural activity:

- Each student draws a portrait of themselves engaged in a caring or sharing activity. Cut out the figure and add it to a large paper or bulletin board to demonstrate a community of caring and sharing.
- Have the goodness or kindness rules be a gift for students who visit the garden of questions and answers about beliefs!

Extensions about our own learning to care:**Discussion Questions:**

- What are your responsibilities for caring and sharing at home?
- What are your responsibilities for caring and sharing in our classroom or learning community?
- How do we learn to care for one another?
- Do we have younger siblings, elders, or family pets to care for?
- How do we learn to share?
- Where did you learn what you are responsible for?
- Can you take on more things to be responsible for? Give an example. Do you need permission to do this?

Extensions with literature:

- *Kindness: A Treasury of Buddhist Wisdom for Children and Parents* by Sarah Conover (2000).

- *Voices of Hope: Adolescents and the Tsunami* by UNICEF (2005).
- Parable of the "good Samaritan" from the Christian tradition (Christian New Testament in the King James version, Luke 10:29-37). The parable of the good Samaritan is followed by the Golden Rule. This is the story of a stranger, perhaps an "enemy" (someone from Samaria, which would be an "outsider" for people who told this story) who stops to care for someone from a different community. In the U.S., we have a "good Samaritan" law which supports people's efforts to help strangers in distress.

Extensions with drama activities

Collect students into small groups. Help students to think of, remember or imagine a time when it was difficult to care or share. Assign each group to develop and perform a short skit to demonstrate a real struggle with caring or sharing. Discuss each skit. You can even consider doing the skit two or three times with two or three different endings, depending on how the characters decide to care or share.

EXPLORING BELIEFS ABOUT RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCE

BIG IDEAS

- Religious communities can be distinguished by their different beliefs, which are often expressed through their different traditions and rituals.
- Sometimes religious differences lead to conflict between different religious communities.
- Sometimes these religious conflicts between communities get magnified by other big questions such as: *Where can people live or pray? Who has enough to eat or drink? Who are the rulers and how do the rulers treat these different religious communities?*

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How can we respect religious difference between religious communities?
- If I believe differently than another, can I also be caring and respectful?
- How can we figure out whether a conflict between religious communities is about religious beliefs or about other big questions?

NATIONAL STANDARDS

- English Language Arts: 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12

- Social Studies: 1, 3, 5

Rationale: Why teach this lesson?

The perspectives of young children are shaped by their experiences with the people with whom they spend the most time: people in their family, their home and their learning communities. Whether a child is taught a religious belief at home, or alternatively, has no exposure to religion at home, it is likely that the child may believe that their home experiences are the "norm." They are likely to expect all of their peers to have similar experiences and beliefs. When children learn from a very early age that their beliefs are valid and can be affirmed, while simultaneously validating and affirming the beliefs of others, they may be more prepared to develop perspectives that are inclusive and fair for all members of a democratic society.

Instructors can think about this chapter as the culmination and synthesis of the learning activities from the earlier chapters.

Think ahead – What to be prepared for:

When children learn about differences for the very first time, they may form stereotypes about those people or practices that are different. As children explore different religions or non-religious beliefs, rituals, practices and traditions, it is critical that they realize there is much more underneath these different practices and that this lesson just begins to scratch the surface of depth and breadth of diversity within and among differences of religions, belief, traditions and practices.

As we have said many times in this book, it is essential that children and families understand that the learning community is studying about different belief systems, NOT learning how or what to believe. It is critical for the educator to communicate to families that when young children study diverse major world religions, spiritual traditions, and systems of belief practiced in the United States, they have a firm foundation to grow into adults who can lead conflict resolution and engage in full participation in a democratic society.

Objectives for this lesson – Students will:

- Expand understandings of religious diversity.
- See the points of view from diverse religious perspectives.
- Make connections between family life and religious practice.
- Work in small groups to craft "paper people" that represent a range of religious beliefs.
- Work with a large group to build an "inter-religious neighborhood" out of cardboard.
- Learn from peers in the learning community about various religious and non-religious beliefs.
- Heighten awareness of religious beliefs with which they were previously unfamiliar.

Materials needed:

- Overview of Major World Religions, Spiritual Traditions and Systems of Belief Practiced in the United States (at the beginning of *Religions in My Neighborhood*).
- Books:
 - Kids Book of World Religions* by Jennifer Glossip (2003). (The watercolor illustrations in this book are especially captivating for very young children who are still emerging readers.)
 - Children just Like Me: Celebrations!* by Anabel Kindersley, Barnabas Kindersley (1997). (Informative photographs throughout this book.)
 - A Faith Like Mine* by Laura Buller (2005) (Informative photographs throughout this book).
- Drawing paper or oak tag approximately 9" x 12"
- Crayons, markers
- Craft sticks/popsicle sticks
- A wide selection of "skin color" crayons or "skin color" markers
- Tape, cardboard
- Collection of boxes: shoe boxes, shipping boxes (many brown cardboard boxes can be collected from the school cafeteria each day) or folded cardboard.

Time needed:

3-4 class meetings, 45 minutes each

Setting the lesson:

Gather students in a discussion circle. Ask students what they can remember from previous lessons regarding world religions. On chart paper, make a list of all the world religions that students can remember. If the list is brief, consult the Overview of Major World Religions, Spiritual Traditions and Systems of Belief Practiced in the United States at the beginning of *Religions in My Neighborhood* and add some more religions to the list.

Procedure:**Day 1:**

Students work in small groups of 2 or 3. Each group will have one of the books listed above or photocopied pages from the books. Each group will read about various religious practices and beliefs and study the illustrations that accompany the text. Very young children will need to work with reading buddies from an older age-group or volunteer adults from the community.

Each group selects at least two or three religions in which the families of their "paper people" will participate. Make a list of the two or three religions for each group. Give each group a manila folder and print the list clearly on the folder for each group. The students may collect information about their selected religions to study and keep the information in the group folder.

The goal is for each small group to learn about two or three religions from these sources. Each group will make a collection of "paper people" to represent the religious groups they are studying. They will make two or three families with as many individual paper people as the group chooses to craft.

Day 2: Make the "paper people"

Encourage the children to make families of paper people that represent each religious group they are studying. Students should work at the appropriate developmental level to draw human figures, color the skin, features and clothing, cut them out and attach a folded piece of cardboard to help the figure stand-up.

This means that children in the fourth grade may draw fully detailed human features, while kindergarten children may make little "blobs"

with arms sticking out (often called "tadpole people" by educators who are discussing developmental drawing skills). These are all appropriate expressions of the human figure across grade levels and developmental learning levels.

Another approach is to provide very young children with photocopies from the books and teach the children to cut out the photos and add color with markers and crayons. This is a more adult-pleasing approach, but it loses the opportunity for children who are emerging from the scribbling stage to develop motor skills that are connected to their cognitive understanding of human diversity.

Also encourage the students to consider inter-religious families that may be headed by adults who have created a union from two different religious backgrounds. If their paper families represent an inter-religious family, what may be the children's different experiences in those families?

Day 3: Make an inter-religious neighborhood

Students will use boxes to construct a neighborhood in which all these families can reside peacefully. They can use shoe boxes to stack together to make apartment buildings, or individual boxes to make single family homes.

Make paper props to accompany each family. Encourage the children to make a place for the family to gather inside the box: a kitchen, or a family room and all the accoutrements. Instruct students to include evidence of the family's religious beliefs and practices. Will that be evident in their clothing, in a wall decoration, in a special book or other objects?

Day 4:

Gather the small groups together back into a discussion group. Each small group shares information about their paper families and about each family's religious experiences. Lead the group in a discussion about what else is needed in the neighborhood to support each family's religious practices. What kinds of space do these families need for their religious practices? Do they need special foods on an everyday basis, or for special rituals or holy days? Are there religious leaders for different religious communities who live in the community? What other needs might families have to practice their different religious beliefs in a shared inter-religious neighborhood for everyone?

Closure for the lesson:

Set up a display area for the inter-religious neighborhood they constructed (Day 3). Gather students in a discussion group in front of the inter-religious neighborhood. Use chart paper to make a list of each student's ideas about what they think will be needed in the neighborhood to support each family's religious practices.

Assessment for the lesson:

- Can students explain that religious diversity is a normal part of U.S. society?
- Do students exhibit respect for religious difference among their peers in the learning community?
- Can students interpret differences, including religious differences, through respectful curiosity, in a way that promotes respect and inclusion?
- Do students demonstrate empathy for religious differences and accept that religious difference is normal in the U.S. and in their own families, neighborhoods, classrooms, schools, and extended communities?

Extensions:

Make more buildings for the inter-religious neighborhood. Each small group collaborates to make specific and appropriate places of worship for each religious practice in the inter-religious neighborhood, as well as public community centers for ecumenical and inter-religious events. This will involve finding images for temples, synagogues, churches or cathedrals, gurdwaras, sacred spaces (mountains, for example) in nature — as well as materials for home altars or public prayer spaces.

Resources to develop background information:

A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation by Diana L. Eck (2001).

Encountering God: A Religious journey from Bozeman to Banaras by Diana L. Eck (2003).

Taking Religious Pluralism Seriously: Spiritual Politics on America's Sacred Ground by Barbara A. McGraw & Jo Renee Formicola (2005).

Lesson Plans

from Teaching Tolerance

[The Rich Tapestry of Religion in the United States](#)

This lesson series contains three lessons that help students access the religious diversity of the United States, explore different religious and non-religious worldviews and consider how freedom of religion relates to their own lives and the lives of others.

[Lesson One: One Nation, Many Beliefs](#) introduces students to several different religions and asks them to examine data to determine how many people across the United States follow those religions as well as how many people do not have a religious affiliation.

[Lesson Two: My Way Is Not the Only Way](#) asks students to identify similarities and differences between different belief systems.

[Lesson Three: Free to Believe](#) introduces freedom of religion to students and asks them to consider how they might respond in an authentic situation related to religious freedom.

[Understanding Religious Clothing](#)

In this lesson, students will explore how articles of clothing are linked to different religions. First they will research issues around some common

articles of religious clothing, such as the hijab and the yarmulke. Then students explore misconceptions and stereotypes associated with those articles of clothing.

Understanding other Religious Beliefs

In this lesson, students define and understand religious freedom and learn to communicate about religion with sensitivity through exploring answers to:

- What is religious freedom?
- Why should you show respect for other people's religious beliefs?

Teaching and Learning About Religions: Establishing a Foundation

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.

Tanenbaum's pedagogy, [The Seven Principles for Inclusive Education](#), offers strategic frameworks for considering addressing the topic of religion and religious diversity from the perspectives of the student as well as the educator.

When discussing sensitive topics like religion with your students, it's important to establish Ground Rules for respectful communication up front 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 cursing, slurs, or accusatory language)
- Be respectful toward one another

[This lesson](#) is recommended for grades K-12. Students will explore why respect is important and consider what respectful behavior looks like, sounds like and feels like.

Make sure that there is verbal agreement to the Ground Rules before you proceed with the conversation. You can periodically remind students of the Ground Rules and refer back to them when confronted with difficult behavior.

Teaching and Learning about Religions: Lesson Planning

This information was originally included in the After-Session Pack for our first webinar in this series, “What’s law got to go with it?” We believe that it remains useful in thinking about creating learning environments where students feel safe, respected and appreciated. We have highlighted three key areas for consideration: 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

Key Idea: “Teachers must remain neutral concerning religion, neutral among religions, and neutral between religion and non-religion.”¹ 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, favouring 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)”)

¹ <http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/madison/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/teachersguide.pdf>, Page 6

religion always do (y).")

- o 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.²
 - o 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.
 - o 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."³

Furthermore, exploring primary sources creates an opportunity for students to "relate in a personal way to events of the past."⁴ 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.
- If using religious texts (e.g., scriptural writings) - They are presented and studied from an academic perspective, rather than for the purpose of learning religious doctrine.

² Adapted from <http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/madison/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/teachersguide.pdf>, Page 4

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

⁴ *Ibid.*

- Do not seek to indoctrinate students in a particular religious or non-religious belief.
- 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.

Teaching and Learning about Religions: Making Common Core Connections

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, 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.”

- o 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)."
 - o 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.

Teaching and Learning about Religions: Communicating with Families

The recommendations below 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.

The separation of church and state is a complex issue, one with which our nation's courts and citizenry continue to grapple. In public schools, however, it essentially boils down to a single rule: Don't promote a specific religion, show favoritism for one faith over another or even promote religion in general over atheism. Teaching students *about* diverse faiths and their influences on societies and cultures is constitutional, indoctrinating students or encouraging them to participate in faith activities is not.

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 religion or religious belief, or the lack thereof.

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 the previous section 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 ("spokesperson syndrome"). 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."⁵

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 school 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 Christianity.

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

⁵ <http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/publications/parentsguidereligion>

forms.

Student participation in extracurricular activities and special events that have a religious theme, 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.

Teaching and Learning about Religions: Conducting a Self-Assessment

This self-assessment will help you identify what aspects of teaching about religion you currently do well and what requires greater focus as you move forward. The left-hand column contains guidelines for teaching about religion effectively. Please follow the instructions in the second and third columns and fill out the notes column if you wish to elaborate on your responses.

When I teach about religion, I...	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")	Please rate, on a scale of 1-5, how you will prioritize these factors in the future (1 being the biggest priority, 5 being the least)	Notes:
meet educational goals.			
teach from a factual and secular perspective.			
do not blur secular values with religious values.			
am mindful of the developmental stage and maturity of students.			
give equal emphasis to minority and majority religions and to the perspectives of non-believers.			
am cautious and aware of "spokesperson syndrome." (when an			

individual is inappropriately asked to speak on behalf an entire group)			
Do not favor religion over no religion.			
Do not attribute any religious viewpoint to the school.			
align content to the classroom rules of respect.			

Religious Diversity in the Classroom Webinar 1: What's law got to do with it?

There's a lot of misinformation about what teachers are allowed to do when it comes to discussing religion in public school. But the truth is—it's both legal and important to teach about religion and the diversity of religious and non-religious worldviews. This webinar will help you understand the legal parameters around teaching about religions so that you can feel more at ease when religion surfaces in classroom materials and discussions.

[Click here](#) to access the webinar recording.

Click below to read the blog posts that were written in response to questions from webinar participants:

[*You CAN Teach About Religion in Public School!*](#)

[*What Does the First Amendment Say About Displaying Religious Symbols?*](#)

[*Can I Say That? Can I Wear That?*](#)

[*Is Silence Golden? Giving Students a Choice in Matters of Faith*](#)

Religious Diversity in the Classroom Webinar 2: Fostering a Culture of Respect

This webinar aimed to help educators create learning environments where students feel supported and respected across all their identities, including their religious identities. After watching this webinar, you will be able to:

- Assess the physical space in your classroom setup and structure.
- Co-create classroom norms with students.
- Audit your classroom for messages conveyed.

[Click here](#) to access the webinar recording:

Click below to read the blog posts that were written in response to questions from webinar participants:

[How can I coach students to respond to others with empathy and respect?](#)

[How can I encourage students to respectfully ask questions about identities different from their own?](#)

[How can I include religiously unaffiliated students in classroom content about religion?](#)

December Dilemma Webinar

The December Dilemma webinar addressed 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-Session Pack.

[The 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.

[The December Dilemma After-Session Pack](#)

The activities and lessons included in the December Dilemma After-Session Pack can be used following the webinar or as a stand-alone set of resources. 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 into curricula. Additional articles, lesson plans and guides from Teaching Tolerance and the First Amendment Center are also included.

Recommended Reading for Elementary Students

On Exploring and Expressing Identity

Grades K and Up

- *Just Like Me: Stories and Self-Portraits by Fourteen Artists* by Harriet Rohmer, Ed. (1999).
- *I Like Myself!* by Karen Beaumont (2004).

On the “Big Questions,” Religion, and Spirituality

Grades K and Up

- *Faith* by Maya Ajmera, Magda Nakassis, & Cynthia Pon (2009).
- *The Three Questions* by Jon J. Muth (2002).

Grades 3 and Up

- *Children Just Like Me: Celebrations!* By Anabel Kindersley & Barnabas Kindersley (1997).
- *A Faith Like Mine* by Laura Buller (2005).
- *Kids Book of World Religions* by Jennifer Glossip (2003).

On Different Viewpoints on the Origin of the Universe and the Beginning of Life

Grades K and Up

- *Anansi the Spider: A Tale from the Ashanti* by Gerald McDermott (1972).
- *Indian Children’s Favourite Stories* by Rosemary Somaiah & Ranjan Somaiah (2006).
- *Krishna: The Cowherd Prince* by Soumya S. Ayer (2006).
- *Old Turtle and the Broken Truth* by Douglas Wood (2003).
- *One Hand Clapping: Zen Stories for All Ages* by Rafe Martin (1995).
- *The Origin of Life on Earth: An African Creation Myth* by David A. Anderson (1991).

Grades 3 and Up

- *In the Beginning: Creation Stories from Around the World* by Virginia Hamilton (1991).
- *Big Bang! The Tongue-Tickling Tale of a Speck That Became Spectacular* by Carolyn Cinami DeCristofano (2005).

On Different Beliefs about a God or Gods

Grades K and Up

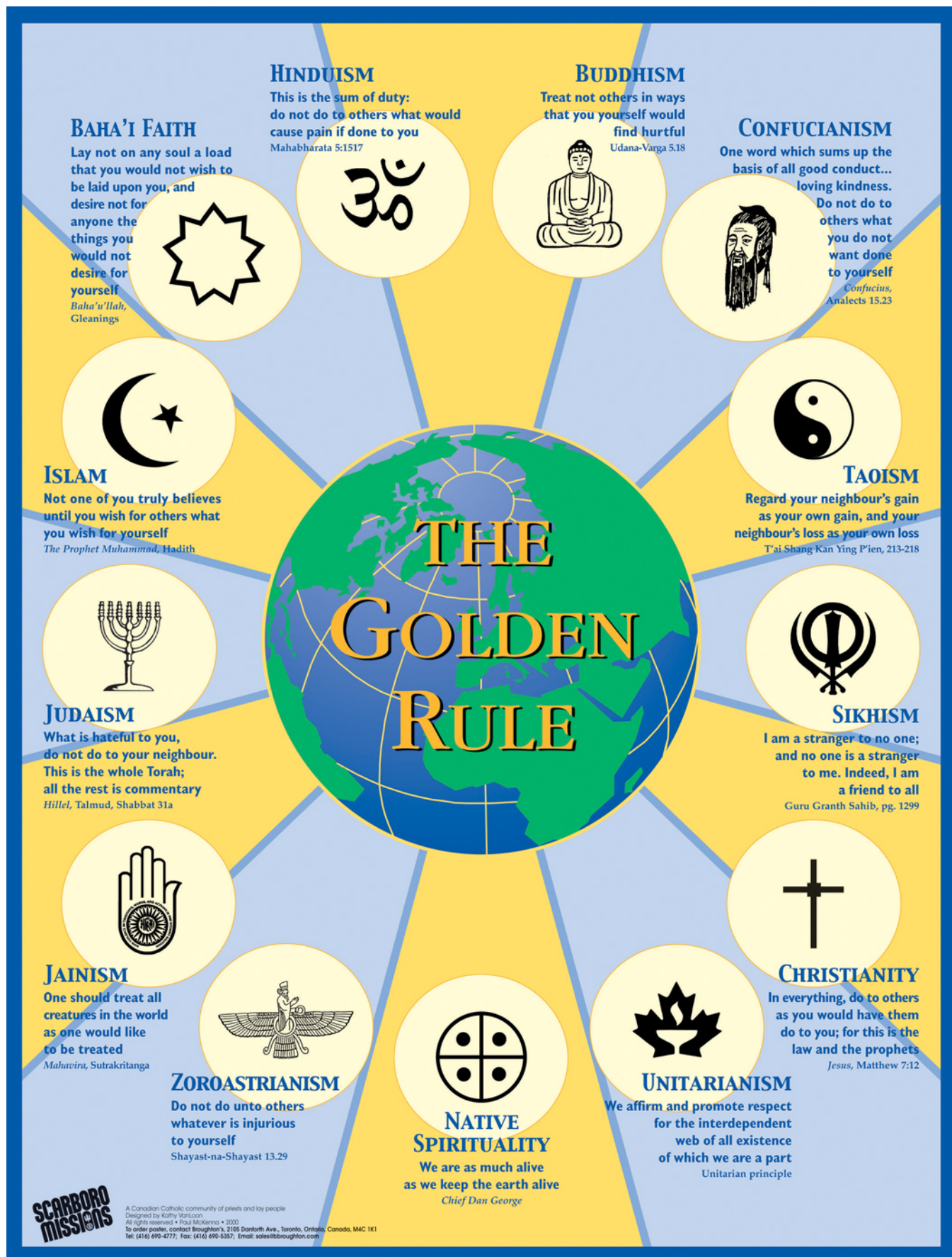
- *What is God?* By Etan Boritzer (1990).

Grades 3 and Up

- *D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths* by Ingri d'Aulaire & Edgar Parin d'Aulaire (1992).
- *Humanism, What's That? A Book for Curious Kids* by Helen Bennett (2005).
- *Kindness: A Treasury of Buddhist Wisdom for Children and Parents* by Sarah Conover (2000).
- *The Little Book of Hindu Deities: From the Goddess of Wealth to the Sacred Cow* by Sanjay Patel (2006).

The Scarborough Missions Golden Rule Poster

The poster on the following page features texts of the Golden Rule, also known as the *ethic of reciprocity*, as found in 13 of the world's religion. It is an effective tool for helping students explore commonalities among different traditions, as well as the role that rules, values, and moral principles play in their lives. The poster's engaging visual elements, such as the many circles that represent unity and equality, help develop students' understanding of symbolism and metaphors. [Click here](#) to order a copy of the poster.



Additional Resources from Teaching Tolerance

[Perspectives for a Diverse America](#)

Perspectives for a Diverse America is a FREE K-12 anti-bias, literacy-based curriculum. The heart of the curriculum is the Central Text Anthology, a carefully curated collection of rigorous texts that exemplify anti-bias themes and meet the requirements of the Common Core State Standards.

The texts encourage students to question common understandings, consider multiple viewpoints, analyse and critique power relationships and act to change unfair and unequal conditions. Each text within the Anthology has been quantitatively analysed for CCSS grade level and mapped to *Perspectives* themes and anti-bias standards. Use the advanced filters to identify texts in the appropriate grade level and lens for your classroom.

Perspectives is FREE, but many of the texts are being offered through arrangements with publishers who require that we house the texts behind a registration page. Registration tells us a little about who is using *Perspectives* (e.g., middle school teachers, counsellors), which helps us make useful enhancements and updates. Your information is never shared externally.

I Start the Year with Nothing [article](#) and [toolkit](#)

When invested and empowered, students can be equal partners in creating a productive and meaningful learning environment. This feature story and toolkit provides an inventory to allow you to reflect on how student voices and input are integrated into your classroom and school community.

Professional Development: [Democratic Classrooms](#)

Educators possess different philosophies and styles for their teaching. Some work from an authoritarian perspective, leveraging their power as the teacher to control student behavior and dictate classroom participation. Others employ a more democratic approach, sharing power with students and supporting them in managing their own behaviors.

Professional Development: [Controversial Subjects in the Classroom](#)

Invariably, issues are raised in classrooms that bring charged responses from students. How can educators set the stage for safe, respectful dialogue and learning? How to move from taboo to teachable moment and constructively discuss controversial issues.

Professional Development: [Critical Practices for Anti-bias Education: Classroom Culture](#)

Practical strategies for creating a space where academic and social-emotional goals are accomplished side by side. Valuable advice for implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and bring anti-bias values to life.

[Teaching Tolerance's Anti-bias Framework](#)

The anti-bias framework (ABF) is a set of anchor standards and age-appropriate learning outcomes divided into four domains—identity, diversity, justice and action (IDJA). The standards provide a common language and organizational structure: Teachers can use them to guide curriculum development, and administrators can use them to make schools more just, equitable and safe. The ABF is leveled for every stage of K-12 education and includes school-based scenarios to show what anti-bias attitudes and behaviors look like in the classroom.

Other Helpful Web sites

[American Academy of Religion](#)

The American Academy of Religion's mission is to promote ongoing reflection upon and understanding of religious traditions, issues, questions, and values through excellence in scholarship and teaching in the field of religion. They have published helpful [Guidelines for Teaching About Religion in K-12 Public Schools in the United States](#).

[Project Interfaith](#)

Project Interfaith was born out of a desire to combat the growing tension and conflict between people of various spiritual and cultural identities; conflict that is perpetuated by cultural and religious ignorance, stereotyping, and marginalization. Project Interfaith's programming and educational resources create spaces in communities and online where people can share their personal experiences and connect with others of diverse beliefs and cultures to dispel common myths and stereotypes that cause prejudice, violence, and hate.

Project Interfaith offers a complete [calendar of cultural and religious holidays and observances](#) to help you learn what festivals are going on throughout the world.

[RavelUnravel](#)

Developed by Project Interfaith, RavelUnravel.com explores the tapestry of religious and spiritual identities that make up our communities through video interviews of a diverse cross-section of individuals. Each individual is asked the same set of questions:

- What is your religious or spiritual identity and why do you identify as such?
- What is a stereotype that impacts you based on your religious or spiritual identity?
- How welcoming do you find our community to be to follow your religious or spiritual path?
- Is there anything else you would like us to know about you and your religion or belief system?

These videos introduce students to different belief systems from the perspectives of regular community members. They highlight the diversity and complexity within each belief system, thereby helping to reduce misconceptions and stereotyping.

[Americans United for the Separation of Church and State](#)

This organization offers a joint statement of existing law, signed by groups as diverse as the Baptist Joint Committee and the American Humanist Society.

[The First Amendment Center](#)

[Finding Common Ground: A Guide to Religious Liberty in Public Schools](#) focuses on the rights and responsibilities of schools, educators, students, parents/guardians and communities pertaining to teaching about religion in public schools.

[The Anti-Defamation League](#)

The ADL works to secure justice and fair treatment for all, fights anti-Semitism and all forms of bigotry, defends democratic ideals and protects civil rights for all. The [Religion in Public Schools](#) guide tackles everything from school prayer to holiday observances to religious clubs.

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