



RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN THE CLASSROOM:

Applications for Middle Level Educators



After-Session Pack

The activities and lessons included in this After-Session Pack can be used following the *Religious Diversity in the Classroom: Applications for Middle Level Educators* webinar or as a stand-alone series of units and resources. These resources help students develop many of the key skills listed in the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy.

We hope the resources provided in this pack will support your important work of 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 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 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, 2014) 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 religious diversity in the classroom through the delivery of a five-part collaborative webinar series entitled *Religious Diversity in the Classroom*. The five-part series and accompanying resources examine how awareness of religious diversity affects global citizenship, and how teaching about religion across grade levels and subject areas can help meet academic standards.

The fourth webinar, “Applications for Middle Level Educators,” and the accompanying after-session pack give educators practical resources and strategies for including religious content in middle level 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

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 for 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 behaviour looks like, sounds like and feels like.

Krister Stendahl's [*Three Rules of Religious Understanding*](#) provides an effective framework for respectful classroom conversations on religious differences.

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 behaviour.

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 do 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, 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 to (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.²
 - 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 the specific period. Bringing young people into close contact with these unique, often profoundly personal, documents

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

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

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.
- 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.

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

⁴ *Ibid.*

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 (CCSS) 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 teacher about religion helps meet CCSS at the middle level.

Middle Level, Grades 6-8

Reading Informational Text

- RI.1: Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- RI.2: Determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.
- RI.8: Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.
- RI.9: Compare and contrast one author's presentation of events with that of another.

Speaking & Listening

- SL.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on a variety of topics, texts and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- SL.4: Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume and clear pronunciation.

Language

- L.5a: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationship, and nuances in word meanings.

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 religious differences and are inclusive of religiously diverse family backgrounds. As always, you should keep in mind your school and/or district 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.

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 theater and music as art 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.

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

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 favour religion over no religion.			
do not attribute any religious viewpoint to the school.			
align content to the classroom rules of respect.			

Resources from Tanenbaum

[World Religions Fact Sheet](#)

This fact sheet provides demographics and descriptions of several different religious and nonreligious belief systems. Educators can share it with students when leading activities that explore similarities and differences among these belief systems.

[Religion and the Struggle for Racial Justice](#)

This blog post highlights how religion has historically been used both to impede and to promote social justice, drawing a connection between the Civil Rights Movement and recent protests against alleged police abuse. It contains classroom lessons on religion and the civil rights movement, as well as on the events that transformed Ferguson, MO.

Resources from Teaching Tolerance

[Taking a Closer Look at Religions Around the World](#) Grades 6 - 8

This lesson offers a starting point for exploring religions and faith traditions, creating an ongoing respectful dialogue about religious tolerance. By understanding where and how varying faiths began and developed, it's possible to better comprehend the reasons behind divergent national and international origins in religion. Building knowledge and comprehension of context can assist our compassion and consideration for other people and faiths.

Objectives:

- Compare and contrast beliefs of religions and faith traditions;
- Evaluate similarities and differences in belief systems and rituals;
- Encourage research and utilize interactive and experiential activities, pair and group work, debates/dialogues, roundtables and forums with guest speakers;
- Develop speaking, writing and critical-thinking skills, and
- Construct knowledge and understanding of world religions

Essential Questions:

- What is religion? What does religious practices mean to different people?
- How is religion manifested in the daily lives of some people?
- What effects do outward representation of religion and open expressions of religious ritual have on members/non-members?
- What attracts people to one religion or another?

Materials needed:

- Handout 1: Discovering Similarities Between Religions
- Handout 2: Collaborating to Resolve Religious Issues

This lesson includes activities and projects that are easily expanded upon through further research. It is designed to encourage continuous, in-depth study of these topics over a longer period of time.

Glossary

unprecedented |,ən'presə,dəntɪd|

(*adjective*) Never done or known before.

muftis |'məftɪs|

(*noun*) (pl. muftis) A Muslim legal expert who is empowered to give rulings on religious matters.

tenets |'tenɪt|

(*noun*) A principle or belief, esp. one of the main principles of a religion or philosophy

solidarity |,sɒlə'de(ə)rɪtɪ|

(*noun*) Unity or agreement of feeling or action, esp. among individuals with a common interest; mutual support within a group.

signatories |'sɪgnə,tɔrɪ|

(*noun*) (pl. -ries) A party that has signed an agreement, esp. a country that has signed a treaty.

Resources

- “Taking Religion Seriously Across the Curriculum” by Warren A. Nord and Charles C. Haynes. ASCD 1998.
- [Religious Tolerance](#)
- [This I believe](#)
- [Museum of World Religions](#)

Classroom Activities and Projects

1. Write quickly for at least 10 minutes on the essential question: What is religion? After you’ve finished writing, share your responses with a small group. How were your answers similar? Different? Find an example of each: one you consider a religion and another that someone else or media considers a religion but you don’t. Create criteria for what constitutes a religion for your group. Collaboratively, prepare a paper or a presentation on a topic related to the essential question: What is religion?
2. Before you read “A Muslim Letter to Christians” by Emily Flynn Vencat, answer and discuss the question: Is a letter an effective method for bridging differences and recognizing similarities? Why or why not? Why or why not? Add a follow-up question: “When have you written a letter to help to create mutual understanding (i.e., harmony), tolerance or peace?” Form teams of six, with half of you being supporters and the other half being non-supporters of the effectiveness of a written dialogue. Briefly group with your side to share what you know of your position and develop a strategy for the debate. Research and prepare for the debate; but, instead of debating, switch sides and now become supporters of the opposing perspective/position. After your group shares what you already know for the other side’s perspective/position, come together as a group of six again in order to reach an agreement, a compromise. Write a brief summary of your experience in the process of seeing both sides and the outcomes.
3. Read “[A Muslim Letter to Christians](#)” by Emily Flynn Vencat. While reading, circle any unfamiliar details or facts and underline any difficult vocabulary terms. Also, using either a blank world map or the wall map, note where each of the places mentioned in the article are located. Pair up and work together to reach an understanding of the difficult terms

and/or the unfamiliar details/places. Share your reactions. Reread and note at least two deeper or clearer understandings of the text, then share your knowledge with another pair.

4. What else could be done to reduce animosity between religions? What historical precedents exist to show people with diverse beliefs have come to an understanding and practiced tolerance? Write your own letter to a religious leader you consider in a position to promote tolerance or peace between disparate groups or factions. Notice the use of metaphors (e.g., weeks/fruits) by Vencat. Experiment with using metaphors in your letter. In your opinion, what are the most important points to include?

Assessment

Write about what intrigued or interested you most about this topic. Also, reflect on how you and your local community are interdependent/interrelated to other people and religions and faith traditions in the world. Think about “What you can do to make the world a better place for people of all religions.” Finally, write what you would like to know more about, including any unanswered questions you may still have, as the starting point to delve deeper into this topic.

Understanding Other Religious Beliefs Grades 3 – 5

Objectives:

Activities will help students:

- Define and understand religious freedom
- Learn to communicate about religion with sensitivity

Essential Questions:

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

Materials Needed:

- Notebooks
- Chart or poster paper
- Markers and crayons
- Handout: [Speaking with Respect](#)

Framework

Understanding religious beliefs other than one’s own is a key element of tolerance, since faith traditions often define a significant part of a person’s identity. In the United States, the spectrum of religious diversity is a part of our culture as a whole, and religions can sometimes be at the center of political debate. This can happen when certain laws impact the way a person practices his or her religion. For example, Jehovah’s Witnesses are not permitted to recite the Pledge of Allegiance as it violates elements

of their belief system. Another example of religion clashing with politics is at the forefront of debate right now.

Great controversy has swirled around the planned construction of Park 51's Islamic Cultural Center in lower Manhattan. Resistance to building mosques in communities is not new. Many communities around the United States, such as in Sheboygan, Wisconsin or in [Murfreesboro, Tennessee](#), have tried to prevent or forestall the building of mosques in their towns. These incidents have sparked much conversation about the ideas of religious freedom and tolerance. To introduce this topic to younger students, an exploration of religions and of religious freedom can help.

Glossary

Religious freedom [rel-ih-jus frē-dəm]

(noun) the right to practice any religion you choose, or to live without any religion at all

Activities

1. In your notebook, list the names of as many different religions or faith traditions you know about. Share your lists with the class. *(Note: As students recite their lists, create a master list on chart paper. If students struggle with this activity, you may want to add the following to the list: Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, atheism, Baha'i Faith, Sikhism, Jainism, Shinto, Confucianism, Wicca, etc.)*
2. In America, religious freedom is protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. *Religious freedom* can be defined as “the right to practice any religion you choose, or to live without any religion at all, without the government getting involved.” Put this definition into your own words and tell it to a partner. *(Note: You may wish to define “government getting involved” as “the law telling you what you can and can’t do in the way you practice your religion.”)*
3. *(Note: Assign each student one religion from the list above to research. You can have students complete their research online using a site such as [National Geographic for Kids](#). Alternatively you can work with your school librarian to pull selected books on each religion for students to check out.)* Your teacher will assign you one religion to research. Create a poster to present information about that religion. On your poster you may want to include information about some of the following:
 - a. Major beliefs
 - b. Sacred texts
 - c. Festivities and ceremonies
 - d. Clothing
4. Present your poster to the class. After each student presents, the rest of the class should respond using the handout [Speaking With Respect](#).
5. Hang up your posters around the room so that everyone can learn more about different religious beliefs.

Additional Resources

- [National Geographic for Kids](#)
- [First Amendment Schools](#)

Extension Activity:

Organize a “Religious Diversity Day” in your school district where all students, teachers, and administrators can learn about different religious customs and traditions. You can even invite guest speakers from your community to join in a discussion.

Respecting Nonreligious People

Students often learn the importance of respecting people of different religions and of respecting religious beliefs that are different from their own. What about people who do not hold religious beliefs at all? Too often the right *not* to believe is excluded from lessons about tolerance.

The 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 behavior may look like in the classroom.

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 schools. 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 help religiously unaffiliated students feel included in classroom discussions 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.

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

This webinar recording will help you create deeper understanding 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 activities and lessons included in the 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.

Additional Resources

[The Pressure to Cover by Kenji Yoshino](#)

Coined by sociologist Erving Goffman in 1963, the term “covering” refers to the downplaying of stigmatized identities in order to fit into the mainstream. In this article, Yale Law School professor Kenji Yoshino explores the modern implications of covering. Awareness of this concept can help educators create learning environments where members of minority groups, including religious minorities, are comfortable sharing their visible and invisible identities

[Remarks by the President at the National Prayer Breakfast](#)

You may have heard the debate over President Obama's speech at the National Prayer Breakfast. This speech can be used as a primary resource that allows students to develop their own opinions and critical thinking skills, while meeting Common Core State Standards!

[Beautifying Islam by Ahmed Vanya](#)

This article, which is authored by a fellow at the American Islamic Forum for Democracy, addresses recent abuses and atrocities committed in the name of Islam and calls for an Islam that affirms and promotes universally accepted human rights and values. It can be shared with students to increase awareness of the diversity and complexity that exists within this religious tradition and to counteract Muslim stereotypes.

[Learning About World Religions in Public Schools: The Impact on Student Attitudes and Community Acceptance in Modesto, Calif.](#)

This report describes the result of an experiment that required all 9th grade students in the Modesto, Calif. city schools to take a world religions course. The experiment found that the course increased support for the rights of others, promoted a greater understanding of the major world religions, and developed a fuller appreciation of the moral values shared across differences. It also concluded that learning about various religions didn't encourage students to change their own religious convictions. Such well-documented findings can support educators as they explain to families the benefits of teaching about religion.

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