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

***“Scavenger Hunt”***

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

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| ***Pedagogical Competencies*** | ***Explore/Research/Reflect*** | ***Application*** |
| ***Station 1 (20 points)***   * Identify the OACS that focus on World Religions   **Grade 6**  **History:**  4. Compare the geographic, political, economic and social characteristics of the river civilizations in the Tigris and  Euphrates (Mesopotamia), Nile (Egypt), Huang Ho and  Indus valleys before 1000 B.C. including:  a. Location;  b. Government;  c. Religion;  d. Agriculture;  e. Cultural and scientific contributions.  5. Describe the characteristics of Maya, Inca, Aztec and  Mississippian civilizations including:  a. Location;  b. Government;  c. Religion;  d. Agriculture;  e. Cultural and scientific contributions.  **People in Societies:**  1. Compare the cultural practices and products of the societies studied including:  a. Class structure;  b. Gender roles;  c. Beliefs;  d. Customs and traditions.  2. Compare world religions and belief systems focusing on geographic origins, founding leaders and teachings including:  a. Buddhism;  b. Christianity;  c. Judaism;  d. Hinduism;  e. Islam.  3. Explain factors that foster conflict or cooperation among countries:  a. Language;  b. Religion;  c. Types of government;  d. Historic relationships;  e. Economic interests.  **Geography:**  8. Explain push and pull factors that cause people to migrate from place to place including:  a. Oppression/Freedom;  b. Poverty/Economic opportunity;  c. Cultural ties;  d. Political conflicts;  e. Environmental factors.  **Government:**  1. Explain reasons for the creation of governments such as:  a. Protecting lives, liberty and property;  b. Providing services that individuals cannot provide for themselves.  3. Explain the ways that countries interact with each other including:  a. Diplomacy;  b. Treaties;  c. International meetings and exchanges (e.g., United Nations);  d. Military conflict.  4. Describe the defining characteristics of democracies, monarchies and dictatorships.   * Be able to find and recognize appropriate resources about religion when needed, on the Internet or in more traditional media. | ***Identify the OACS. Then develop an annotated bibliography: Identify 3 Resources for each of the world religions(incl. young adolescent literature): Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism***  **Buddhism:**  Boeree, G. (2000). *An introduction to buddhism*. Unpublished raw data, Psychology, Shippensburg University, Shippensburg, Pennsylvania. Retrieved from <http://webspace.ship.edu/cgboer/buddhaintro.html>  This resource was created for a college Buddhist psychology class and has a wide array of information on the Buddhist religion. It outlines the life of Siddhartha Gautama, creator of the religion, and also provides information on the history of the religion, hymns and prayers, maps, sutra’s, and the Four Noble Truths, to name a few. The information on Buddhism is nicely organized and easy to decipher making it user friendly.  Reitherman, B., & Gregory, A. (1999). *Basics of buddhism*. Retrieved from <http://www.pbs.org/edens/thailand/buddhism.htm>  This PBS website gives a brief but thorough introduction to Buddhism. It explains the founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha Gautama, and how he renounced his princely title to become a monk, giving up his worldly possessions to make sense of the world around him. Known as the “Enlightened One” Buddha journeyed through India teaching others his understandings. This site also details the Four Noble Truths, the main teachings of the religion that revolve around the truth and cause of sufferings. Karma and the cycle of rebirth are also discussed in regards to the good or bad actions people take during their lifetime and the realms you are reborn into based on the way in which Karma plays out in ones life.  Wangu, M.B. (2009). *Buddhism*. Chelsea House.  This Young Adult book tells the story of how the teachings of the Buddhist founder, Siddhartha Gautama, evolved into its basic belief system. It describes how Buddhism differs from other major religions in that it has no concept of a supreme being. However, it acts as a guide to spiritual discovery through the principles of the Eightfold Path. This edition explores Buddhist traditions as well as the growth and practice of Buddhism in the United States and the revival of Buddhism in Asia.  **Hinduism:**  Klostermaier, K. (n.d.). *Hinduism: a short history*. Retrieved from <http://www.oneworld-publications.com/books/texts/hinduism-a-short-history-ch1.htm>  This site chronicles the unique history of Hinduism. Unlike any of the other major historic religions, Hinduism does not have a known human founder or specific origin in history. It is though to have formed under the influence of the Indus Valley Civilization, one of the great cultures of the ancient world. This site does not just detail the history of Hinduism but also raises questions in regards to the origin and known information on the religion.  Ridley, S. (1997). *Puja guide for educators*. Retrieved from <http://www.asia.si.edu/pujaonline/puja/lesson_contents.html>  This site was developed to go along with the award-winning exhibition Puja: Expressions of Hindu Devotion, featured in the national museum of Asian art at the Smithsonian. This site gives information on the basic beliefs of Hinduism and also explains several of the major Hindu gods and goddesses. The three primary Hindu deities are Shiva, the Creator and Destroyer, Vishnu, the Preserver and Devi, the Protecting Mother. Teachers can access or request more information in order to receive a complete packet for Educators with lessons, videos and posters.  Krishnaswami, U. (2005). *The closet ghosts*. The Children's Book Press.  *The Closet Ghosts*, by Uma Krishnaswami is a fictional children’s book story about a young girl named Anu. Anu has just moved and is scared of the ghosts in the closet at her new house. The Hindu monkey god, Hanuman is called upon for his abilities to change shape in the blink of an eye and chase goblins and demons away with his booming voice. Hanuman comes to the rescue but Anu soon realizes she has nothing to be scared of. This picture book twists the Hindu religion with real life tribulations and is nicely accompanied with acrylic paintings.  **Islam:**  Afghan Network. (n.d.). *Islam*. Retrieved from <http://www.afghan-network.net/Islam/>  This site offers information pertaining to the number of Muslims worldwide, approximately 935 million in 1990, as well as the core beliefs, holidays and interpretations of the Quran. The Islamic faith was founded by the Prophet Muhammad and is the youngest of the three monotheistic world religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The five pillars of Islam are also discussed as the actions Muslims do to please Allah, the transcendent to Muhammad. Muslims have holidays including id al-fitr, which is the breaking of the fast of Ramadan. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and is the month of fasting, where Muslims refrain from eating or drinking to teach them about patience, humility and spirituality.  BBC. (2011). *Islam*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/>  This comprehensive website from the BBC channel gives information on the many aspects of the Islam religion. The sections include art and culture, beliefs, history, holy days, ethics, practices, prayer and worship, rites and rituals, subdivisions and texts. In the arts and culture section the site details various forms of Islamic art. Islamic art includes all Muslim art not just explicitly religious art. However, since reality begins and centers on Allah, Islamic art focuses on the spiritual representations of objects and beings and not just their physical qualities. Islamic art also has a common feature of covering surfaces with geometric patterns, thought to reflect the language of the universe and help to reflect on life and the greatness of creation. In addition to art, the site discusses the typical dress for woman, the hijab. This means the barrier or partition and it is the principle of modesty for both males and females. There are various rules for woman wearing the hijab and these are discussed farther in the document. Lastly, there are interviews and journals from various women in regards to their life and the rules of their marriage and polygamy. This detailed site offers insight into many aspects of the religion.  Jolin, P. (2008). *In the name of god*. Square Fish.  This Young Adult novel is about a 17 year olds determination to follow the laws of Islamic faith. Nadia lives in Damascus, Syria and although she is an excellent student and daughter she is conflicted about how westernized her peers and culture is becoming especially in face of the economic, social and political struggles of her country. When her cousin is arrested for speaking out about his beliefs, Nadia becomes involved in an unknown world of Islamic fundamentalism and is asked to consider sacrificing her own life to stand up for her people and religion. This novel takes modern day issues and presents them in a way that calls for understanding.  **Christianity:**  Borrow, M. (2008, November). *Christianity*. Retrieved from <http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/Homework/religion/christian.htm>  This website was created for a schools purposes and gives a plethora of information on Christianity. The information is presented in a student friendly manner and is easily understandable and user friendly. The site is broken into sections and each section answers a question about the religion. For example, questions include what do Christians believe, who are Christians, what are the 10 Commandments, how is Christianity similar to other religions, etc. This site also discussed Christianity as the world’s biggest religion. Jesus Christ, the Son of God was crucified around A.D. 30 in Jerusalem and is considered to be the founder of Christianity. Christians believe that God sent his Son to earth to save humanity from the consequences of its sins and that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day after his Crucifixion. These facts along with many more give an introduction into the Christian religion.  Gandolfo, A. (2007). *Faith and fiction: christian literature in america today*. Greenwood Publishing Group.  Anita Gandolfo is a U.S. Military Academy professor who writes about the recent explosion in the market for fiction on religious topics and themes, specifically Christian fiction. Gandolfo examines Christian literature in American culture today and explores the cultural meaning and significance of the fiction available. The variety of Christian literature has social and political implications and is emblematic of contemporary America. Gandolfo sees literature as something that reflects the society that produces it and illuminating the values and interests of that society. These ideas are explored for example with the phenomenon surrounding Dan Brown’s “The Da Vinci Code”, to name one book specifically and she discusses how this has had an impact on peoples understanding of religion in both positive and negative ways.  BBC. (2011). *Christianity*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/>  This detailed website from the BBC channel gives information on the many aspects of Christianity. Sections include beliefs, Christmas, ethics, history, holy days, people, places, the pope, prayer and study, priests, monks, nuns, rites and rituals, saints, subdivisions, symbols and texts. Each section offers an abundance of information pertaining to the title of the section. For example, in the people section Martin Luther King Jr. is discussed in relation to his involvement as the president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1957. The subdivisions section does a nice job of giving details of different groups of Christians. For instance, Quakers are featured and discussed as a group of members with Christian roots that began in England in the 1650’s. Quakers emphasis direct experience of God rather than ritual and ceremony. Some Quakers do not see themselves as Christians, although their movement is regarded as a Christian denomination. Rather some believe they are members of a universal religion that has many Christian elements.  **Judaism:**  (2000). *Religions of the World: Judaism* [Web]. Available from <http://player.discoveryeducation.com/index.cfm?guidAssetId=FB47D28C-EAD8-43AB-BFEC-3EEA945DBFE3&blnFromSearch=1&productcode=US>  This Discovery Education video about Judaism is from the ‘Religions of the World’ series presented by the Discovery Channel. The video is shot in Israel, Egypt and the United States giving pertinent information on the history, development, and beliefs of the Jewish faith. The video discusses the Torah, the holy book, practices of Judaism and the Holocaust, to name a few.  American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise. (2011). *Yom kippur*. Retrieved from <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/holiday4.html>  This website gives information on one of the most important Jewish Holidays, Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is known as the Day of Atonement and is one of the holiest days in the Jewish religion. This day falls on the 10th day of the Hebrew month of Tishrei, 10 days after Rosh Hashanah. Yom Kippur is a day of reflection and repentance when Jewish people atone for their sins from the past year. The holiday is marked by a day long fast and many attend the synagogue services throughout the day.  Spinelli, J. (2003). *Milkweed*. Random House.  *Milkweed* is a historical fiction novel about a young boy surviving in the times of the Holocaust. He does not have a home and is a gypsy wandering the streets and scavenging to get by. He is taken by a group of Jewish orphans and soon realizes he must avoid the German troops in order to stay alive. While stealing food and goods from people in town he eventually is given a name and meets a girl Janina who he becomes extremely attached to and part of a family he has never had. This story shows the life of a young orphan boy during the time of the Holocaust and his identity becomes the difference between life and death. | ***Write a short description highlighting key points of each religion***  **Buddhism** is a religion attributed to the beliefs and practices based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama. The key points of the religion include Karma, which is the force that drives the cycle of suffering and rebirth for all beings. Good, honest deeds and actions will be rewarded in life or in rebirth, helping one to be reborn into one of the three fortunate realms instead of the three unfortunate realms which will lead to a life of suffering. The Four Noble Truths were the first teaching of Gautama Buddha after attaining Nirvana. They are considered to be the essence of Buddha’s teachings. These truths revolve around suffering and offer a plan for dealing with the suffering of human life.  **Hinduism** is an ancient religion with no founder or known date of origin. Most Hindus worship one or more deities, believe in reincarnation, the authority of the Vedas, the oldest Indian sacred texts, and the law of karma that determines ones destiny in this life and the next. Hinduism is unique in that a specific belief about God is not considered one of the essentials of the religion however most Hindus are devoted followers of some of the Gods like Shiva, Vishnu or Shakti, to name a few.  The **Islam** religion believes in one God, who is called Allah. Allah is the descendent of the Prophet Muhammed and worshippers of the Islamic faith are called Muslims. Muslims believe that if you do things to please Allah, you will have a good life on Earth and also after you die. Adhering to the Five Pillars of Islam will help you to reach this good life. The Five Pillars are believing in one God, Allah, praying to him five times a day, giving charity to the poor, making a trip to Mecca sometime in your life and fasting during Ramadan, the holy month. Muslims base their laws on their holy book the Quran and the Sunnah.  **Christianity** is the most popular religion in the world with over 2 million followers. Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and he was sent to earth to save humans from the consequences of their sins. Jesus have his life on the Cross and rose from the dead on the third day, the Resurrection. Christians believe in one God and the three elements of God, God the Father, God the Son and The Holy Spirit. Christians base their beliefs on the Bible, which consists of the Old and New Testaments and spiritual leaders are called priests or ministers. There are many subdivisions of the Christian faith and each has adopted their own set of beliefs but all have common threads to the basics of the Christian faith.  **Judaism** is the oldest of the three monotheistic faiths. It originated in the Middle East over 3500 years ago and was founded by Moses. Jewish people believe there is only one God with whom they have a covenant. In exchange for the good deeds God has done Jewish people keep God’s law and seek to bring holiness into every aspect of their lives. Judaism is very community oriented and many customs revolve around the home. For example, the Sabbath meal is when families come together to welcome in the holy day. The central document of the Jewish faith is the Torah. |
| ***Station 2 (15 points)***   * Develop skills in leading students in discussion regarding their religious beliefs and practices, as well as the beliefs and practices of others. * Be aware of examples of best practices in teaching about religion. * Develop the ability to present multiple religious perspectives in a fair or neutral way. | ***Highlight at least 2 key points from the reading that addresses each of these competencies***  -It is important for teachers to be able to address and guide students in their questions pertaining to religion and also lead discussion about religions. In the AAR article it discusses how teachers can go about asking questions so that students are not offended. Talking about religion can touch a very sensitive part of student’s identities and therefore it is imperative to foster a climate of tolerance, respect, and honesty by encouraging students to move away from making generalizations. The article states, “for example, “All Christians are intolerant” to “ I have heard that Christians are intolerant-is this true” (p. 12). Teachers should also examine how their judgments can affect others and try to encourage students to think about how they might feel if they were in another person’s shoes. In addition to this competency the article also discusses the importance of addressing students questions in order to spark discussion. As the article suggests teachers may fear that they will cross the line of what is acceptable when they encounter a question they may not have the answer to. When this occurs teachers should help students remember that the goal of the academic study of religion is understanding, not agreement and questions about what is right or wrong are not ones that teachers can answer (p. 15).  -In order to teach religion it is necessary for teachers to be aware and up to date on the best practices in teaching about religion. The AAR article suggests that teachers should have multiple opportunities to take workshops and seminars to strengthen their literacy about religion (p. 20). The more opportunities teachers have to learn about religion the better prepared they will be to teach about the complexities of religion and how it is seen in political and cultural life. The article also discusses how it would be beneficial for teachers and pre-service teachers to even take a college level class on religion. The exposure to the many religion in the world through a college class can help expand ones knowledge on religion. Also it is important for teachers to be aware of the resources they have available to help them teach religion. Consistently researching, discussing and finding the best and most up to date texts and resources will help to teach religion to students in the most beneficial way.  - In order to develop the ability to present multiple religious perspectives in a fair and neutral way teachers must first assess what assumptions they have about all religions. In the AAR article it states, “one of the first challenges for teachers and students alike is to examine what assumptions they harbor about religion generally and religious traditions in particular”(p. 11). If this is not done the materials and discussions that will take place may be biased and one-sided. Giving students the opportunity to assess their own assumptions students can reflect and better think about how their biases can act as a filter on new knowledge. In addition to addressing ones own religious assumptions it is also important that a classroom environment is established and students are aware that not everyone in the class is expected to agree. This will help in the presentation of multiple religious perspectives because students will have an understanding that they do not all have to hold the same opinions and beliefs. In the AAR article it discusses that the goal of the lesson is developing an awareness and understanding and “accurate representations of traditions reduce the misunderstandings arising from false generalizations, bigotry, or valorization of a particular religious or non-religious worldview” (p. 12). In order to set a foundation for further study and assure that students can learn in a fair and neutral way, teachers should understand and relay to students that religions are internally divers, dynamic and embedded in culture. With these understandings multiple perspectives can be assessed and discussed in a fair and neutral way. | ***How can you incorporate this into your teaching of world religions? Provide at least 1 example for each competency***  -For the first competency I thought that in order to help students think about and discuss religion it would be beneficial for students to think about what the know about various religions before, during and after learning. Before posing a discussion question or activity, students could fill out a KWL chart and fill out the part about what they think they know in relation to the religion they will be learning about. They would then fill out any questions they may have and these could also be used in the discussion. Students could watch a video or use some sort of text or resource to research the religion and come back to fill out the last part of their chart. They could then compare the Know and Learned sections of the chart and point out any misconceptions they had about the religion before learning. This would exemplify that misconceptions and assumptions exist and it is pertinent to understand and accept that not everyone will agree on all religions and the discussion that takes place in the class will help clarify these misconceptions in an appropriate way.  -For the second competency in regards to best practices I believe that just as teachers need to be aware of best practices students should also be able to identify and decipher information that is biased vs. unprejudiced and fair. Having students bring in and research texts and resources in relation to the religion you are studying, the whole class or students in groups could compare and contrast the resources and decipher any biases that are presented and how they are presented. This would aid students in their future because they would be aware of how things are presented in the media, on television, etc., and be able to view them with a critical eye, judging the validity of the source.  -In order to develop the ability to accept multiple perspectives in a fair way students can experiment with role-playing. For example, taking a specific time period such as the civil rights movement, students can role-play various religious groups that aided in the movement both in a positive and negative way. Using the children’s book *Through my Eyes* by Ruby Bridges, students could take a section of the story and do a tableau or role play of the event, citing how religion was involved. After role playing discussion could be held on what occurred during the various scenarios and how these groups influenced the movement using religion. This way students can experience the first hand affects of these multiple perspectives and be better prepared to sort out their emotions. |
| ***Station 3 (15 points)***   * Understand the difference between the secular academic and devotional approaches to religion, and consistently use the secular academic approach. * Be able to address in a constructive way religious disagreements and conflicts that arise in the classroom. * Be aware of, and manage effectively, religious diversity in the classroom. * Create an environment of respect and tolerance—a safe environment in which students feel free to talk about religion. | ***The AAR guidelines outlines 4 Approaches to teaching religion (see pages 10-11). Which approach do you think you will follow? Why?***  I feel that each approach has important aspects of instruction but overall I believe I would follow the cultural studies approach. As the AAR article states, the cultural studies approach incorporates dimensions of all the approaches and is promoted by religious studies and education scholars. I like this approach because it builds upon and enhances the other three approaches while recognizing the importance of religion and its relationship with the development of certain cultures. The cultural studies approach emphasizes that religion is embedded in culture and cannot be understood without looking at social and historical contexts. I feel that this is a more all-encompassing approach and with this approach you could easily incorporate literature or other resources into this approach to help students make connections and expand their knowledge. I believe this approach would be the most beneficial for students because it also addresses the fact that teachers and students have assumptions about certain religions and these assumptions influence the way in which one receives and interprets information. Keeping this in mind I think students will better be able to assess when they may be holding on to assumptions and when they are truly learning the facts in an unbiased way.  ***What do you understand by the competencies in Station 3?***  I feel that the competencies in this station outline the importance of how a classroom is set up in order to learn about religion. The teacher must be aware of the best practices in religion and understand what he or she is going to be teaching to students, understanding their own opinions vs. what they need to be teaching about. When teaching about religion the teacher must put his or her devotional beliefs aside and separate their own perspectives from the actual perspectives and beliefs of the religion they are teaching. With this in mind, the teacher must understand and make it known that not all students will agree with all of the statements and beliefs of the religions discussed. Conflicts may arise but keeping the goals of the lesson visible and clear and referring back to them when necessary, discussions can continue to flow and students can continue to learn. When conflicts do arise the teacher must make sure they are not being biased and taking one students side, rather he or she must address the conflict in a neutral way. In addition to dealing with conflicts I understand that in order to have discussions and learn about religion a classroom community must be established where all members are valued and respected. Accepting differences and viewing these differences as a positive thing rather than a negative, students can begin to respect the diversity of the classroom and understand the differences and how these differences help to make each student unique and special. Once this environment is established it will become easier to address religion and the conflicts that may arise. Also, knowing each one of your students and how a lesson may affect their self-efficacy is important to keep in mind. There may be much religious diversity in the classroom and teachers and students must be aware of this diversity and not make assumptions prior to learning about the religion. Overall a sense of acceptance and understanding should be established in the classroom among both students and teachers so that all can learn in an unbiased and fair way. | ***How will you implement your approach/understanding of competencies into practice? Provide at least 2-3 specific examples.***  In order to implement a cultural studies approach in my classroom I would have students act as explorers to research the diverse cultures of people of a certain religion. Having students first find out the different geographical locations where the religion is popular or highly followed and then taking each location and finding out what distinct cultural features make up that group and location. As an explorer they could keep a journal to take note of their discoveries.  Another lesson idea for the cultural studies approach is for students to research the beliefs and practices of a religion from different time periods. Putting information on a timeline and using a Venn Diagram to compare and contrast the cultural, historical, social and political differences from the differing time periods would help students to see how the religion has evolved and changed over time, shaping the lives of the people who follow the religion. |
| ***Station 4 : Final Reflection***  ***10 points*** | ***Reflect on the AAR document –what impact did these guidelines have on your professional development and pedagogy?***  I think that the AAR document was helpful in understanding how to go about teaching religion and the specific guidelines as to how teachers can begin to address this tricky subject area were helpful in assessing my pedagogy. I felt that this article made me realize how embedded religion is in standards across disciplines and by not addressing these aspects of the curriculum students may continue to harbor assumptions about a certain religion, which they may carry with them for a long period of time. These assumptions may prove to be detrimental to the students knowledge and just by having safe discussions about religion and its relationship to the content, students may learn important facts and knowledge that could change their feelings and attitudes about various cultures, rituals, beliefs and traditions, assisting in students becoming knowledgeable, problem solving citizens of our world. This article also gave plenty of ideas and suggestions as to how teachers can implement lessons revolving around religion. Using historical texts, literature, discussion, group work and projects students can have the opportunity to view the ideas of the religion through multiple perspectives. | ***How will you take all of the information you have gained from AAR and your research and make it comprehensible to your 6th graders? This is your “snapshot of practice” - provide at least 1 specific example of practice.***  I feel there are many examples of practice from the AAR document that I can use in a 6th grade classroom. I feel that in order to best give students the knowledge they need to understand multiple religions I would first identify misconceptions and assumptions that students may be harboring about a particular religion. Once this is done, I would like to look at a religion in multiple ways, using texts, videos, research, group projects and discussion, to name a few. I feel that studying the content area more in-depth and possibly at a slower rate, will provide students with a more thorough base of knowledge to form their opinions and thoughts off of. One example would be to have students research various practices, beliefs, traditions, rituals, followers and events that have shaped the religion and have students create their own representation of the knowledge they have learned. Giving them this freedom they would be able to use their creativity and take ownership over their knowledge. |
| ***Total: 60 points*** |  |  |