
World Religions A Voyage of Discovery Teacher Guide

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The content in this resource was acquired, developed, and reviewed by the content engagement team at Saint Mary's Press. Content design and manufacturing were coordinated by the passionate team of creatives at Saint Mary's Press.

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Printed in the United States of America

100311

ISBN 978-1-59982-358-4

Contents

An Introduction to *World Religions* 4

Teaching Strategies

1. Studying the World's Religions 21

2. Indigenous Religious Traditions..... 33

3. Hinduism 56

4. Buddhism 87

5. Jainism 122

6. Sikhism 139

7. Confucianism 156

8. Taoism..... 176

9. Zen Buddhism 193

10. Shinto 217

11. Ancestors of the West..... 232

12. Judaism 251

13. Christianity 278

14. Islam 301

15. Religion in the Modern World 325

Appendix: For Further Reading 349

Acknowledgments..... 364

An Introduction to *World Religions*

The Academic Study of Religions

World Religions: A Voyage of Discovery, is an introductory survey of religious traditions. Along with chapters on the major religions of the world, the student book includes a chapter describing some representative small-scale, or indigenous, traditions: those of the Aborigines of Australia, the Yoruba of West Africa, the Native Americans of the Northern Plains, and the Aztecs of Mesoamerica. Another chapter presents the religions of ancient Iran, Greece, and Rome, partly to provide the background for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

This comprehensiveness is intended to allow you ample flexibility in course planning. Not all the chapters need to be covered to provide a balanced introduction to world religions. For instance, Jainism could be omitted if time is short; though it is a fascinating example of religious asceticism and the ethic of nonviolence (*ahimsa*), it has a relatively small following and is similar to Buddhism. Zen Buddhism could be considered within the larger scope of Buddhism, although its specific aspects and great appeal in the West warrant a separate presentation for it. The chapters can be read independently of one another, with the following exceptions: Jainism should be preceded by Hinduism and Buddhism; Sikhism should be preceded by Hinduism; and Zen Buddhism should be preceded by Buddhism.

The student book chapters explain the main aspects of each tradition in a clear manner. Peripheral aspects and overly sophisticated explanations are avoided. For students interested in further study, whether in college courses or through independent research, the student book should be a helpful springboard. "Appendix: For Further Reading," in this guide, suggests additional reading materials for each chapter, most of which are suitable for high school students.

Chapter 1 deals with two issues that deserve some further comment here. The first has to do with each chapter's content. Chapter 1 charts the seven dimensions of religious traditions: experiential, mythic, doctrinal, ethical, ritual, social, and material. The student book attempts to cover these basic dimensions evenly in its account of each religion. In some cases, however, such balance is not easily achieved, or even desirable. The chapter on Taoism, for example, focuses intentionally on philosophical aspects, and therefore emphasizes the experiential and doctrinal dimensions. The scheme of basic elements used in this course is similar to and much indebted to Ninian Smart's dimensional approach to the study of religions. For lucid and helpful discussions, see his *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs* or see the introductory chapters of his *World's Religions: Old Traditions and Modern Transformations* and *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, third edition.

The second issue that chapter 1 deals with briefly involves the perspective this course takes on the world's religions. In a word (mercifully left out of chapter 1), it is *Religionswissenschaft*, literally the "science of religion." *Religionswissenschaft* is the academic study of religion begun mainly in Germany at the end of the nineteenth

century. As of the last three or four decades, *Religionswissenschaft* is a significant field in most universities and colleges throughout North America, Europe, and Australia. The field is now usually referred to as history of religions, comparative religion, phenomenology of religion, or simply religious studies.

Whatever its name, the academic study of religion attempts to approach the subject matter scientifically, through empirical observation and objective consideration, thereby striving to arrive at value-free descriptions of religious phenomena. In other words, it sets out to explain the truth *about* religion rather than the truth *of* religion. It is therefore not theology, or any other religious activity. Unlike theology, religious studies is a *second-order* approach because it is one step removed from its subject matter. In this sense, it is analogous to political science, which endeavors to explain the truth *about* political systems and viewpoints rather than the truth *of* those systems and viewpoints.

This is not to say that religious studies is not concerned with theology or other religious activities. Indeed together those activities make up the subject matter that the student of religion attempts to understand and interpret. But the process of understanding and interpreting theology differs qualitatively from actually *doing* theology. A biologist studies nonhuman life-forms but does not attempt to be one of those life-forms, at least not in the capacity of biologist.

Because it avoids the *doing* of religion, this course—a religious studies approach to world religions—is not about interfaith dialogue or understanding other religions from the vantage point of Christianity. Rather, this course attempts to present each religion from a position of neutrality. It is hoped that this approach has not stifled a sense of enthusiasm for the religions. To describe the religions enthusiastically seems appropriate owing precisely to empirically observable data, namely the many enthusiastic adherents of these religions through their often long and colorful histories.

Although the study of religions is *nonreligious*, it is by no means *antireligious*. The scientific study of religions should not intentionally violate or alter its subject matter. A word of caution is in order on this point: Religion, by its very nature, tends to be a deeply personal aspect of life. The study of religion, no matter how scientific, can and does affect the religious perspectives of those who undertake it. For most people, the study of world religions is a positive opportunity, providing both a healthy challenge to their own understanding of reality and a new set of possibilities for enhancing that understanding. For some people, however, the challenge might prove difficult.

A few words about the methodology of religious studies might shed some further light on the field's perspective. For one thing, religious studies is cross-cultural, or pluralist. The study of world religions is an especially helpful approach to understanding religion in general because it presents a rich array of religious phenomena from various cultures. For another thing, religious studies is polymethodic, drawing from several academic disciplines, especially history, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and psychology. The pluralist and polymethodic nature of religious studies helps to account for its growing popularity as an academic field. Through the multiple lenses of the humanities and social sciences, religious studies explores, across cultures and through time, the central human phenomenon of being religious.

The Contents of This Course

Course Goals

The goals of this course are as follows:

1. That the students strive to become knowledgeable about the answers each of the religions offers to the religious questions outlined in chapter 1 of the student book
2. That the students become better acquainted with the basic dimensions of the world's major religions, through their study of abundant examples of each dimension
3. That the students emerge from this course with a greatly enhanced understanding of the people who adhere to the world's various religions

Major Concepts

The following major concepts correspond largely to the major sections in the chapters of the student book. This teacher guide is also organized according to these major concepts. This list serves as an outline of the course contents.

Chapter 1

Studying the World's Religions

- A. The Nature of a Religious Tradition
- B. Some Challenges and Rewards of Studying the World's Religions

Chapter 2

Indigenous Religious Traditions

- A. Religion of the Australian Aborigines
- B. An African Tradition: The Religion of the Yoruba
- C. Religion of the North American Plains Indians
- D. A Mesoamerican Religion: The Aztecs and Their Legacy

Chapter 3

Hinduism

- A. Human Destiny: From Worldly Realms to the Divine Beyond
- B. Hindu Society: Mapping the Individual's Identity
- C. Three Paths to Liberation
- D. Hinduism in the Modern World

Chapter 4

Buddhism

- A. The Life of Gautama
- B. The Dharma: Buddhist Teachings
- C. Three Rafts for Crossing the River: Divisions of Buddhism

Chapter 5**Jainism**

- A. Makers of the River Crossing
- B. Knowing the Universe: Cosmology and Salvation
- C. The Religious Life

Chapter 6**Sikhism**

- A. The Development of Sikhism: From Guru Nanak to Shri Guru Granth Sahib
- B. Religious Teachings: God, Humans, and Salvation
- C. The Religious Life: Worship, Ritual, and Lifestyle

Chapter 7**Confucianism**

- A. Great Master K'ung: The Life and Legacy of Confucius
- B. Learning to Be Human: Confucianism's Central Project
- C. Self, Family, Nation, Heaven: Confucian Harmony

Chapter 8**Taoism**

- A. Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu: Legendary Sages, Mystical Texts
- B. The Philosophy of Tao

Chapter 9**Zen Buddhism**

- A. Transmission of Zen Teachings
- B. Zen Teachings
- C. Zen Life

Chapter 10**Shinto**

- A. "Way of the *Kami*"
- B. Shinto in the Religious Life of Japan

Chapter 11**Ancestors of the West**

- A. Religion in Ancient Iran: Zoroastrianism
- B. Religion in Ancient Greece
- C. Religion in the Roman World

Chapter 12**Judaism**

- A. Judaism's Central Teachings: On God and Torah
- B. The History of the Chosen People: Blessings and Tribulations
- C. The Sanctification of Life: The Way of Torah

Chapter 13**Christianity**

- A. Christ: Son of God, Savior
- B. Creed: What Christians Believe
- C. Church: The "One Body" of Christ

Chapter 14**Islam**

- A. The Foundations of Islam
- B. Basic Practices and Social Teachings
- C. The Expansion of Islam

Chapter 15**Religion in the Modern World**

- A. Modernization
 - B. New Religious Movements
 - C. Religion and Science
-

Multiple Intelligences Theory and This Course

Most world religion classes are composed of students with varying academic abilities and backgrounds. Multiple intelligences theory is an excellent tool for teachers to use in shaping classroom activities that will reach a diversity of students. The theory centers on Howard Gardner's belief that each person has a unique cognitive profile. In *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books), his 1983 book about how we perceive and learn, Gardner, a Harvard psychologist, proposes that there are at least seven types of intelligence: linguistic and logical-mathematical (the two traditional ones found in schools), plus bodily-kinesthetic, visual, musical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Gardner has also added an eighth type: naturalist intelligence.

Moving Gardner's multiple intelligences theory into methodology and strategies for the classroom is a dynamic and exciting proposition. It seems to go hand in hand with Saint Paul's teaching in First Corinthians: "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit" (12:4). It recognizes that students are gifted in different ways.

The activities suggested in this teacher guide—particularly those in each chapter under the heading "Additional Activities" (that is, additional to the activities provided in the student book)—appeal to the varied intelligences that students have. By using an assortment of activities, you will give your students the opportunity to learn in meaningful, interesting, and challenging ways. Most important, you will offer them each a better chance to learn in the ways that are most effective for them. This can affirm your students and help to build a positive and interactive classroom.

Many of the additional activities in this guide are student centered. They employ active learning strategies, which is another way of saying they engage students through a variety of intelligences. It has become solid educational practice to design lessons and assessments that challenge students in more than a lecture or "paper and pencil" format. Of course, lectures and writing have their place, and this guide also employs those methods where appropriate. By tapping into the widely varied ways that students learn and know things, this course attempts to involve the whole person.

Tools for Teaching

During the brief explanation given here, you may find it helpful, periodically, to glance at one of the chapters in the student book and its corresponding chapter in this guide to see examples of the teaching tools described.

Major Concepts

As mentioned earlier in this introduction, each chapter of the student book and teacher guide is organized according to its major concepts. The major concepts for a given chapter of the student book correspond to the thematic divisions within the chapter. Thus the major concepts are the organizing principle for teaching the material. Most chapters have two or three major concepts, and these can be helpful tools for scheduling and organizing your lessons.

At the beginning of each chapter in this guide, the major concepts for that chapter are listed and described, providing a summary of the chapter. Then each concept is treated, in turn, with a major subhead accompanied by an icon identifying the related pages in the student book, followed by review questions and activities on the concept.

Review Questions

The review questions that end each chapter in the student book are repeated in this guide, and a suggested answer is provided for each question. The intent of the review questions is simply to check whether the students have retained the basic information for the given concepts. It is hoped that by using other course tools, they will go beyond that level to analysis, reflection, and application.

Student Book Activities

In the student book, activities accompany the chapter content. Those activities are repeated in this guide and may be assigned as homework or as class work. The students will not be able to do all the activities in a semester, the time normally allotted for this course, so you will need to select from those activities to fit the needs of your class. You might suggest that the students read all the student book activities, even those that you do not assign for completion. Just reading a particular activity can help them to see the accompanying content in a new light—perhaps a more personalized light. The student book activities should be viewed not as burdensome assignments but as intriguing reflection starters.

Additional Activities

For each major concept, you will find one or more additional activities. These are most often classroom activities that suggest small-group or large-group discussion. They occasionally require handouts that must be photocopied and then distributed to the students. Those handouts appear at the end of the respective chapters in this guide and are also available online at www.smp.org/resourcecenter/books.

Appendix

The appendix to this guide offers additional resources for teaching.

Appendix: For Further Reading. The resources recommended in this appendix are suitable for your own preparation as well as for student research projects.

Other Resources from Saint Mary's Press. The student book and leader's guide for *Primary Source Readings in World Religions* (Saint Mary's Press, 2009) offer foundational readings in various world religions as guidance for looking at the readings with the students. *Teaching About Other Religions* (Saint Mary's Press, 2006) offers ideas and strategies for teaching about Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism in the classroom.

Strategies for Presenting the Course Material

Sometimes you may want to use a suggested lesson exactly as it appears in this guide. At other times, you may want to skip, adapt, or even expand on a particular concept or activity. The following general ideas and suggestions may help you to create meaningful experiences tailored specifically to your students' needs, abilities, and levels of interest.

Journal Writing

A journal is a written record of a person's inner dialogue—the thoughts, feelings, questions, impressions, and connections that come to mind over a period of time. You may wish to direct the students to record their reactions in a journal as they study the world's religions. The student book activities and ideas from the additional activities can provide starting points for reflection. Encourage the students to write in their journals not only what they understand about the course material but also what they think and feel about it. For example, does a particular religious practice or concept shed light on their own beliefs? Does it give them insight into the people of another tradition? Does it make them uneasy or cause them confusion?

Journal keeping is a deeply personal adventure. All of us are wonderfully unique, so journal entries, even about the same subject, will differ vastly from one person to another. Some students will jump into keeping a journal; others will write only grudgingly. In either case, they will be remembering, reflecting, analyzing, and sometimes creating. On the process of writing, students can discover much about what they think, feel, and believe that they might never have recognized before.

If the students are to be accountable for their journal assignments, you will need to collect the journals periodically to review them. This brings up the necessity of emphasizing to the students that their disclosures in the journals will be confidential—that their reflections will not go beyond you, the teacher. Be sure to mention one exception to this confidentiality: If students write about situations in which they or others are in danger, you will have to involve other professionals or school officials as needed for their protection.

It is recommended that you take time at the beginning of the course to emphasize the importance of the journal. Encourage the students to design a cover; for example, they could draw symbols of themselves, their interests, their relationships,

and their faith (or who God is to them). Perhaps at the beginning of the semester, you could dedicate or bless the journals, also calling God to bless the thoughts, imaginings, and reflections of the students.

Discussion

Many of the additional activities in this guide provide questions designed to prompt discussion. In addition, although most of the student book activities and several of the additional activities ask the students to respond in writing, you may tell the students that they can accomplish those activities through conversation. Here are some techniques for generating discussions:

Quiet collection of thoughts, followed by discussion. Ask the students to spend a few minutes thinking about the question or task presented in the activity, rather than writing about it. Giving them time to collect their thoughts beforehand often yields a more fruitful class discussion than would inviting off-the-cuff remarks. The follow-up discussion to the quiet time could be done in pairs, in groups, or with the whole class.

Paired exchanges. Allow the students to quietly collect their thoughts, or have them write down their response to the question or task. Then direct the students to form pairs and discuss their reflections. After this initial sharing, a whole-class discussion could draw further insights from those who volunteer their thoughts. Before starting the whole-class discussion, caution the students not to bring up what their partners said unless their partners give permission.

Thought museum. Write four or five quotations from various scholars on sheets of newsprint and post them around the classroom. Give each student two sticky notes. Direct the students to write a brief comment or question about two quotations they find interesting or confusing. Have them post their notes on the corresponding newsprint. Ask for volunteers to be curators for one of the quotations and instruct them to arrange the comments or questions in some particular order. They may choose to group questions together or to separate the comments based on their level of understanding. This activity allows every student to critically evaluate an idea or thinker in an anonymous manner while enabling a few to demonstrate their critical reasoning skills by organizing questions and comments and providing a summative explanation of how the quotation fits within the religious viewpoint.

Socratic seminar. Pose an open-ended question to the class that relates to a primary source from a religious tradition. Divide the class into two groups: active participants and non-participant observers. Members of the first group can provide possible answers to the question and ask for clarification from one another. They are not allowed to critique one another but are encouraged to cite the student book to support their points and to assist one another. Members of the second group can monitor the activity of the other students by tracking what kinds of interactions occur. You might consider developing a rubric to give the second group an idea of what to look for in the discussion and how to qualify the points being raised and the number of times individuals respond to one another. This type of class discussion encourages well-informed reasoning and rigorous critical thought. The teacher serves as a guide to redirect the focus to the reading and to facilitate student-centered questions. The objective is not to present direct answers but to clarify the values and beliefs reflected in the writing. The students are given the opportunity to reflect on their course readings and written work during this seminar. A positive seminar environment is one geared toward creating meaning rather than mastering content. This type of discussion is more appropriate at the end of a unit, when the students will have more familiarity with the vocabulary and major themes of the tradition being studied.

Skits or Role-Plays

Activities that call for examples from the students' experiences might be extended into skits or role-plays. If those stagings are to be successful, you must have willing students who are comfortable letting their experiences be the subject of dramatization. If you ask the students to portray their own responses to a dilemma or a "what would you do?" incident, either the student who offered an example or another student could play the principal role and try to resolve the situation.

Some activities call the students to write imaginary dialogues between two people. To heighten their impact, those dialogues could be composed in pairs and then read aloud by two students.

The students' dramatizations can be performed live; produced as radio or TV programs, documentary films, photo essays, and so on; presented on the Internet; or offered in some other format.

Art

Each chapter of the student book contains maps, photographs, and examples of art from the tradition being studied. Those selections are designed to invite the students into the material of the chapter. You might encourage the students to consider the graphic material and discuss its meaning before studying each chapter or upon completion of each chapter. You might also bring in your own visual examples.

Post images from a religious tradition around the classroom and allow the students to take notes on what they see and how the images reflect the particular religious and philosophical beliefs. Use a different part of the classroom for each type of visual you display. For example, you could have groups each examine a specific group of images, such as worship spaces, landscapes, deities, and ritual objects. When the groups are done taking notes, have someone from each group report to the rest of the class what the group observed and how the group sees the images within the context of the respective faith tradition. You may want to provide the students with a summary of the significance behind the images. You can then divide the class into another set of groups, with each group having an informed leader from each category of images who teaches the small group the importance of those images. This jigsaw method allows the students to teach one another and allows the teacher to monitor discussions and answer questions.

Music

Music has a tremendous effect on human beings. Perhaps that is most evident during adolescence, when people feel that certain artists, groups, and songs can exactly express what they are experiencing. In this course, music can help the students to further appreciate the religious traditions they explore. You may want to use a particular song or songs to introduce or conclude a chapter or concept. Or you might allow the students to bring in their own songs to use as part of prayer or to emphasize a point discussed in the student book. Ask students who are musically talented if they would like to share their gifts.

Guest Speakers

If you invite speakers to visit your class, be sure to prepare the students with some background about the speakers and their topics. It may be helpful to introduce the topic during the class period before a speaker visits, and to direct the students to prepare questions to ask the speaker. Collect those questions and use them if needed during a discussion following the presentation. After the presentation and discussion, make time for the students to process what they heard.

Meditation

This guide includes a few reflection experiences, which you may present as directed or adapt for your class. The meditations allow the students to become more self-aware by quieting their minds and focusing inward. They may also help the students to tap into their religious imagination. The following directions can help you to lead a successful meditation:

- Know your group of students. Some groups are simply too rambunctious to sit quietly for more than a few minutes. On the other hand, most students appreciate the relaxed, stress-free time that guided meditations provide.
- Choose the appropriate time for the reflection. Meditations are best done when the students have been talking about, and have received some input about, a particular topic—when they have reached a point at which they need time to reflect, ponder, and integrate all the ideas into their own experience.
- Before a meditation, inform the students of its purpose.
- Consider using soft music to aid in relaxation. Several recording companies (including Narada and Windham Hill) produce reflective, stress-reducing music.
- Begin the meditation with a period of physical relaxation. Instruct the students to close their eyes, relax their muscles (you might lead them through this: start with their toes, ankles, and calves, and work up through the neck and face), and breathe deeply throughout the process. Do not overlook this part of the experience. An additional benefit of guided meditations is that they teach the students a means of stress reduction.
- Open the reflection with a call to focus. For example:

Feel the warmth [or coolness] of the air moving around you. Listen to the sounds in the room. Listen to the even sound of *[name the quiet, soothing sounds of the room, pausing after each and allowing the quiet to sink in]*. Now listen to your own sounds, your even, relaxed breathing. Take a long, deep breath. Breathe in. . . . Breathe out. . . . Breathe in. . . . Breathe out. . . . *[Repeat this breathing sequence until you sense that the students are at ease.]*
- Read the meditation slowly and clearly, speaking in an even, restful tone of voice, pausing for a few moments after phrases or sentences as indicated. The flow of the meditation should be gentle so that the students can settle into a relaxed and reflective state.
- After the meditation, allow some time for the students to write in their journals or discuss their insights. Ask questions related to the religious tradition you are studying, encouraging responses about feelings and other insights the students had during the meditation.

Cross-Curricular Connections

Often what is going on in one subject or class can have broader connections to another subject or class. You may want to speak to other teachers about doing a cross-curricular lesson or unit. Because the students may not all take the same courses, and because the course sequences might not match, this can be difficult to do. Still, it can be valuable for the students to see how insights from one subject area can affect their understanding in a different subject area. For example, you might ask the students how an issue raised in a novel for English parallels a topic you have been discussing in religion.

You may want to introduce the students to various genres of literature from major religions. Reading different types of narratives allows the students to practice empathy across the various disciplines they are studying. Indigenous myths and native books from China or India, for example, can teach profound lessons through images and elementary ideas while reflecting the ways indigenous people learn about their faith.

The ideas and themes discussed in this course can easily be applied to history, geography, literature, and science. Making connections across subjects also encourages the students to go beyond mere comprehension to synthesis and application.

A Method of Planning and Scheduling

One attractive but potentially frustrating feature of this teacher guide is that generally more classroom strategies are offered than you can use in your teaching. Each chapter in this guide is set up like a smorgasbord from which you will need to select those activities that best meet the needs of your class. The need to make such decisions is a major reason for presenting here a method of planning and scheduling your teaching of the entire course. It is wise to do the planning at the beginning of the course and to set realistic goals, but each school calendar is different and has its own set of variables.

1. **Identify the total number of class periods available for this course.** If you are teaching the course within one full semester, you might start with approximately eighteen weeks, and then exclude vacations, holidays, special school functions, test days, and so on. Identify the days that are not available for teaching, and estimate how many weeks you have left for the course. Then estimate the number of class periods you will have during the semester. For example, if your classes meet in 50-minute periods, five times a week for sixteen weeks, you have eighty class periods to work with. For schools that use block scheduling, this may be altered because the classes typically last between 75 and 90 minutes and meet less often.
2. **Assess for the entire course the approximate number of class periods needed for each major concept.** To assist you in this step, the major concepts are listed and described at the beginning of each chapter in this guide. It may be immediately clear that some concepts will have to be treated briefly, perhaps in one class period or less. Other concepts may require several class periods.

If your school uses block scheduling, you will need to plan for 75- to 90-minute periods. When introducing new content in a block-schedule format, focus on depth as opposed to breadth. The additional activities in the teacher guide can help you to plan meaningful and interesting lessons for your students.

You may decide to skip certain major concepts or even whole chapters. Such choices should be made at this preliminary stage of planning. The primary objective is to take a broad view of the course to ensure that you will cover all that you intend to cover. Consciously planning to omit parts of the student book is one thing; simply running out of time at the end of the course is another. This step of the planning should help you to avoid such surprises.

3. **Divide the course into approximately two-week blocks of time. Before each two-week block, make more specific decisions regarding which major concepts to present during that block. Determine how many and which class periods will be devoted to each of those concepts.**

Right before each two-week block begins, you will be ready to make more immediate plans for your teaching. Attempting to look ahead more than two weeks in your selection of specific concepts and teaching strategies could reduce necessary flexibility. Your choices of what and how to teach a month from now will be based on your students' responses to material in the interim. One exception to this guideline applies to audiovisuals. A number of additional activities in the guide suggest video and sound recordings as teaching tools. You will need to order those materials well ahead of time if you are relying on national distributors or a diocesan resource office.

4. **For each major concept you will be teaching during a given two-week block, select the pages in the student book that you will cover and the teaching strategies from this guide that you will use, keeping in mind the number of class periods you will be devoting to that concept.**

You may have two class periods available for teaching a major concept, but this guide and the student book offer enough material and strategies to fill several periods. How do you decide what to do?

Begin by considering these questions: What approaches have the students responded well to in the past? What kinds of strategies seem ineffective with them? How can you touch on all the different intelligences in the activities for this chapter? What are you comfortable doing in class? Which strategies feel right to you? How much time do you have? How much time is required by each available strategy?

5. **After each class period, briefly evaluate, for future reference, your experience with the strategies selected.** Ongoing evaluation may be one of the most talked about and least practiced virtues of effective teaching. We are usually so caught up with preparing for our next task that we simply do not take the time to look back on classes we have successfully completed—or maybe only survived! The task of ongoing evaluation can seem so tedious and time consuming that we feel oppressed by it before even attempting it.

In this planning process, the step of evaluation is so simple that it can quickly and consistently be included in your teaching. For further explanation see point 6 of the next section.

A Lesson Planning Chart

On pages 17 and 18, you will find two copies of the lesson planning chart for this course. One includes examples of how the chart can be filled out. The other is blank and can be photocopied for use in your planning. You may want to complete the chart in pencil rather than pen, knowing that you will have to make at least minor adjustments, given the students' responses to the material, missed class periods, and so on.

This is how to use the chart:

1. In the first column, write the number or date of the class period. That is, identify the class periods in the semester from say 1 to 80, or specify each session by the date on which you will teach it.
2. In the second column, write the major concept that you will teach during the class period. Use an abbreviation of the concept title listed in this guide.
3. In the third column, list the pages of the student book that you will cover in class or that you will have assigned in advance as homework reading. If you are covering one complete concept in a class, simply copy the page numbers from the icon beside that concept in this guide. If you are teaching one concept over several class periods, identify the specific pages in the student book that you will cover for each of those periods. (See also point 5 in this section.)
4. In the fourth column, specify the teaching strategies or activities that you will use during the class. Use the student book activity page numbers or additional activity titles to complete the column. Also describe briefly any modifications or additions you make to an activity.
5. In the fifth column, specify the student book pages to be read, the student book activities to be completed, or any other task that you want to assign as homework for the next class period.
6. In the last column, after teaching a class, jot down your evaluation of it, concentrating on the strategies you identified in the fourth column. You will likely develop a shorthand of your own for this. You might simply state, "Effective as described in guide; repeat next time." Or you might write, "Too much material; drop page 45 student book activity." Brief statements like these may be all you need to refresh your memory when teaching the course in the future.

Sample Lesson Planning Chart

Date, Class	Major Concept	Text Pages	Activities	Homework Assignment	Evaluation
Mon. 9/7	Chap. 2: Intro	21–22	Provide basic overview of primal religious traditions.	Read pp. 22–27. Do student book activities on pp. 25, 26, and 27 in notebook.	Students seem to have lots of interest in this chapter after seeing film.
Tues. 9/8	Chap 2: A Religion of the Australian Aborigines	22–27	Go over applicable review questions on p. 41 of student book. Do activity “Understanding Taboo” (teacher guide, pp. 37–38) to check understanding of concept.	Read pp. 27–29. Do student book activity on p. 29 in notebook.	Discussion of taboo went longer than expected; spend less time on review questions.
Wed. 9/9	Chap 2: B An African Tradition	27–29	Discuss activity on p. 29 in student book in small groups; move to large-group sharing. Go over applicable review questions on p. 41 in student book.	Read pp. 29–34. Do student book activities on pp. 31 and 34 in notebook.	Good discussion about worship of ancestors. Could be a good setup for “Día de los Muertos” activity.
Thurs. 9/10	Chap 2: C Religion of the North American Plains Indians	29–34	Go over applicable review questions on p. 41 in student book. Read handout “What Harm Is in Our Sun Dance?” (Document #: TX003764) together. Assign questions in activity “Outlawing the Sun Dance” (teacher guide, p. 44) for written reflection and allow students to begin them in class.	Read pp. 34–40. Finish Sun Dance essay to turn in.	Some difficulty with concept of <i>axis mundi</i> ; review in next session. Strong opinions about Sun Dance.
Fri. 9/11	Chap. 2: D A Mesoamerican Religion	34–40	Collect reflections on Sun Dance. Go over applicable review questions on p. 41 in student book. Discuss student book activity on p. 36 as large group. Begin activity “A New Aztec Ritual for the Head and Heart” (teacher guide, pp. 47–48). Plan to present rituals next Tues.–Wed.	Bring in items needed for rituals.	Reflection question difficult in large group—assign as homework? One session is not enough time for groups to settle into activity.

Lesson Planning Chart

Date, Class	Major Concept	Text Pages	Activities	Homework Assignment	Evaluation

Teaching Strategies

Chapter 1: Studying the World's Religions

Overview

Religion influences everyday life around the world. As citizens of an increasingly interconnected global community, we have a responsibility to develop a basic understanding of the world's religions. This chapter explains that religion begins with mystery. That is, the world's religions respond in different ways to the mysteries of existence, including questions about the human condition, the nature of the cosmos, ethical behavior, salvation, and ultimate reality. This chapter also introduces seven dimensions of religion: experiential, mythic, doctrinal, ethical, ritual, social, and material. These core concepts will guide the exploration of specific religious traditions in subsequent chapters.

Major Concepts

- A. **The Nature of a Religious Tradition.** All human beings have the capacity for self-reflection. The world's various religions offer answers to life's fundamental questions about the human condition, spiritual perfection, human destiny, the nature of the world, and the nature of ultimate reality, or God. Some religions contend that spiritual perfection can be attained in this life; others teach that perfection must await an afterlife. Nontheistic religions do not hold a belief in a relevant god or gods, but they do, like most other religions, teach that the ultimate reality is somehow revealed to human beings. Most religions share some basic elements, including experiential, mythic, doctrinal, ethical, ritual, social, and material dimensions.
- B. **Some Challenges and Rewards of Studying the World's Religions.** Religion is grounded in mystery and presents many challenging questions about the nature of ultimate reality. To better understand the world's religions, we can compare the dimensions that the different traditions manifest and approach each tradition with empathy.

Additional Online Resources for Teaching This Chapter

For additional resources for teaching the content of this chapter, visit www.smp.org/resourcecenter/books, click on the *World Religions*, and then click on "Chapter 1." Support materials include:

- a PowerPoint presentation
- downloadable handouts
- web links

For reading recommendations that support this chapter, see "Appendix: For Further Reading" on pages 349–363 in this guide.

Key Terms

cosmology	mysticism	revelation
empathy	myth	ritual
ethics	nontheistic	transtheistic
faith	pantheism	transcendence
monotheism	polytheism	

Concept A: The Nature of a Religious Tradition

Student Book
Pages 11–18

For Review

Question 1: What issues do people usually address when they ask questions about the human condition?

Answer: *What is our essential nature? Are we merely what we appear to be—physical bodies somehow equipped with the capacity to think and to feel? Or are we endowed with a deeper spiritual essence, some form of soul? Are we by nature good, or evil, or somewhere in between, perhaps originally good but now flawed in some way? Why do we suffer?*

Question 2: How does spiritual transformation or fulfillment relate to the quest for salvation?

Answer: *Most religions teach that spiritual transformation or fulfillment is closely related to some form of salvation from the ultimate limitation that is imposed by the human condition: death.*

Question 3: Briefly explain how religions differ over the question of destiny.

Answer: *According to some religions, human beings face two possible destinies: eternal life in paradise, or condemnation. Individual destiny is linked to spiritual transformation: the degree to which one has achieved fulfillment corresponds to one's prospects for reward in the afterlife. For religions that teach that human beings live more than one lifetime, the immediate destiny after this life is generally not the final destiny, but another step toward it. Nevertheless, the need to seek spiritual transformation in this life remains vital, because the level of one's transformation tends to determine the nature of one's future life.*

Question 4: Name some ways religions perceive the nature of the world.

Answer: *The world may be real, or a cosmic illusion; living and sacred, or merely matter; a help or a hindrance to the religious quest.*

Question 5: Describe the difference between theistic and nontheistic or transtheistic religions.

Answer: *Theistic religions hold a belief in God or in multiple gods; nontheistic or transtheistic religions do not.*

Question 6: How do most religions teach that the ultimate reality is usually revealed?

Answer: Most religions teach that it is achieved through sacred stories or myths, or through various types of religious experience.

Question 7: Describe in general terms the religious experience of the theistic religions. Then briefly compare it with the religious experience of the nontheistic or transtheistic religions.

Answer: Generally speaking, in theistic religions, God is experienced as a holy presence who is other. This presence evokes both fear and fascination. In nontheistic or transtheistic religions, religious experience usually takes the form of mysticism.

Question 8: Briefly explain the concept of myth.

Answer: Myths are nonhistorical and nonrational sources of sacred truth. Myths are also powerful, for they give meaning to life. Passed along from one generation to the next, myths set forth fundamental knowledge regarding the nature of things and the proper way to live.

Question 9: Identify at least two dimensions of religion, in addition to the mythic, doctrinal, and experiential.

Answer: Any two of the following answers are correct: ethical, ritual, social, and material.

Student Book Activities

Activity 1 (student book, p. 11)

Search newspapers, magazines, the Internet, and other sources for at least three stories that mention religion. Answer this question: How does religion affect people's daily lives in each example?

Activity 2 (student book, p. 12)

The terms *spiritual* and *religious* often mean different things to different people. What does each term mean to you?

Activity 3 (student book, p. 13)

Contemplate the human condition by comparing the situation of humans with that of a favorite animal (it could be a pet). Does the animal have thoughts or feelings, like people do? Does it seem to have a spiritual essence or soul? Does it seem to be by nature good, or evil, or somewhere in between?

Activity 4 (student book, p. 15)

Summarize your personal cosmology—your own understanding of the nature of the world. Focus especially on the following questions: Where did the world come from? Is the world somehow a living, organic entity, or is it merely inorganic matter?

Activity 5 (student book, p. 17)

Like the terms *religious* and *spiritual*, *faith* tends to mean different things to different people. What does *faith* mean to you?

Activity 6 (student book, p. 17)

Myth is not as strong an element in the modern, scientific world as it was in earlier ages. Still, as the Creation account in Genesis suggests, some of our basic perspectives about life are derived from mythic sources. What other mythic truths—truths that are based on neither history nor science, but that give life meaning and direction—are prevalent in your society?

Activity 7 (student book, p. 18)

Identify at least two examples of sacred entities, art, or architecture in your community. Compare the examples in terms of how they express religious ideas and provoke emotions.

Additional Activity

Speculating on Religious Questions

This activity encourages the students to articulate impressions they have about a religion based on images and artwork related to that religion.

1. After the students have read the section “The Nature of a Religious Tradition” in chapter 1, direct them to focus on the religious questions outlined in the student book. Write those questions on the board, and direct the students to copy them into their notebooks:

- What is the human condition?
- What is spiritual fulfillment?
- What is our destiny?
- What is the nature of the world?
- What is ultimate reality, and how is it revealed?

2. Review the material that the student book presents on each question. Then give the students the following homework assignment:

- ▶ Choose two photographs or illustrations of artifacts, pieces of art, or architectural structures related to two of the world’s religions. Your selections can come from the student book, library books, the Internet, or any other resources available to you. One of your choices should pertain to your own religion or the religion you know the most about. The other should pertain to a religion you know little about.
- ▶ Study the photographs or illustrations you have selected and then go through the list of religious questions and jot down what, if anything, the subject of each photo or illustration implies about that religion’s answers to the questions. For example, a Catholic cathedral might imply a majestic view of God, which might lead to further in-

sights on the Christian understanding of ultimate reality and human nature; a Japanese Zen landscape painting could imply great respect for nature and lead to additional insights on the Zen view of the world and human nature.

- ▶ After you have made some notes about the images, write a two-page essay explaining what you have inferred about each religion just by looking at its artifacts, art, or buildings. Observe your images actively and creatively.
3. Collect the essays, and evaluate them on the basis of the students' observations, not on whether their inferences are right or wrong.
 4. When you return the essays, tell the students to keep them and to review them when the class studies the particular religions they worked with. The students may be interested to note the accuracy of their original observations after learning more about the religions.

Variation. Lead a class discussion about one particular piece of art. Examine an image of Paul Gauguin's painting *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* (The same three questions are written in French in the upper left-hand corner of the artwork.) Allow the students time to observe the painting. Direct them to write down the symbols they observe, how those symbols are used, and how the painting affects them personally. After an adequate amount of time, ask the students to share their observations and reactions. Point out that interpreting symbols and using one's imagination are powerful ways of communicating truths that are often larger than the words we have to explain them. Tell the students that this is a type of knowing that will be used throughout the course.

Concept B: Some Challenges and Rewards of Studying the World's Religions

Student Book
Pages 18–19

For Review

Question 10: What is one benefit of using a comparative approach to study the world's religions?

Answer: *Studying many religions of the world should enable us to know each one, including our own, more precisely.*

Question 11: What is empathy, and how is it applied to the study of world religions?

Answer: *Empathy is the capacity for seeing things from another's perspective.*

Student Book Activity

Activity 1 (student book, p. 19)

It is important to cultivate empathy—the capacity for seeing things from another’s perspective when studying the religions of others. Try applying the saying about empathy, that we need to walk in another person’s shoes, to a family member or close friend. What do you think life looks like from that person’s perspective?

Additional Activities

The Comparative Model

This activity helps the students to explore the strengths and limitations of comparison when learning about different religions.

1. Ask the students to select a random category with which they are reasonably familiar—such as food, cars, music, or clothes. Then issue the following instructions:

- ▶ Write your category at the top of a piece of paper or in your notebook. Just below it, create three columns, writing the name of one item from your category at the top of column 1, writing “Both” at the top of column 2, and writing the name of a second item from your category at the top of column 3. In the first and third columns, list what is distinct about the item. In the middle column, list what both items have in common.

You might present this example:

Cars		
<i>Volkswagen Beetle</i>	<i>Both</i>	<i>Ford Explorer</i>
German engineering	Internal combustion engine	American engineering
Compact styling	Manual or automatic transmission	Large SUV styling
Two doors	Four wheels	Four doors

2. After the students have spent a few minutes working on their charts, have them pair up and share their answers. Then lead the group in a discussion about the strengths and limitations of the comparison model of learning, using the following questions as a guide:

- What observations are easily made through this activity?
- What knowledge about your items does not surface from this activity?
- How might this model be helpful in learning about religions?
- What might be limitations of this model?

Learning through Empathy

In this activity, the students are asked to consider the most effective way to learn about and know a person. This will help them to understand how best to learn about other religions and the people who are part of those religions.

1. Direct the students to think of a person they know well—perhaps a family member, a friend, or a coworker. Tell the students to imagine that they have to describe this person to a stranger. Instruct them to make a list of statements that sums up this person. Encourage them to include not only physical characteristics and general personality traits, but revelations about who this person truly is.
2. After the students have had some time to work on their statements, invite them to review their lists while they ponder the following questions. You may wish to discuss these reflection questions in class, if time permits, or you may ask the students to complete them for homework.
 - With just this information, what kind of impression would a stranger have of this person?
 - Would that impression be accurate? Why or why not?
 - Is this information sufficient for knowing your person?
 - How is being told about someone different from actually meeting and interacting with him or her?
 - How effectively can we “walk in someone else’s shoes”? Why might we try?

Chapter 2: Indigenous Religious Traditions

Overview

Since prehistoric times, indigenous (or native) peoples throughout the world have practiced their own forms of religion; some peoples continue to do so. These indigenous religious traditions typically depend on the transmission of oral material from generation to generation, instead of relying on written teachings or scriptures. This chapter examines the religious beliefs and traditions of four specific peoples: the Aborigines of Australia, the Yoruba of Africa, the Plains Indians of North America, and the Aztecs of Mesoamerica.

Major Concepts

- A. **Religion of the Australian Aborigines.** All religions are rooted in the traditions of early peoples. The foundation of Australian Aboriginal religion is the concept of the Dreaming, when supernatural beings called Ancestors roamed the earth, shaping the landscape and creating various forms of life, including the first humans. The spiritual essence of the Ancestors remains in the various symbols they left behind and also within individuals. Totemism is common to many indigenous traditions, including the religion of the Australian Aborigines. Aboriginal religion is a process of recreating the mythic past of the Dreaming in order to tap into its sacred power, primarily through rituals that reenact myths. Aboriginal society is carefully structured on a foundation of taboos. Initiation rituals bring about the symbolic death of childhood to pave the way for spiritual rebirth.
- B. **An African Tradition: The Religion of the Yoruba.** The Yoruba religion of Africa tries to maintain a balance between the human beings of earth and the gods and ancestors of heaven, while guarding against evil sorcerers and witches. The Yoruba believe that their supreme god, Olorun, is the original source of power in the universe, but the lesser gods—the *orishas*—are most significant in Yoruba religious life. Both the *orishas* and the ancestors (deceased humans with supernatural status) possess sacred power that can help or harm the living and that are worshipped through rituals at shrines. Esu, a trickster figure who is both good and evil, mediates between heaven and earth and is universally worshipped among the Yoruba. Trickster figures are common to many indigenous traditions. A number of Yoruba ritual specialists facilitate communication with a particular deity or ancestor. The Yoruba consider divination, through which one's future can be learned, essential for determining how to proceed in life.
- C. **Religion of the North American Plains Indians.** The religion of the Plains is somewhat representative of Native American religion in general. The members of one large Plains tribe, the Lakota, call the supreme reality Wakan Tanka, whose name refers to sixteen separate deities. A trickster figure, Inkтоми, mediates between the supernatural and human worlds. Inkтоми taught the first humans their ways. The Lakota believe that four souls depart from a person at death, some of which may be reborn in new

bodies. The vision quest, common to many indigenous traditions, helps people purify themselves and access spiritual power. Another ritual common to all Plains tribes is the Sun Dance. The tribal members prepare for this ceremony by constructing a lodge around a tree—the *axis mundi*—which is the link between the earth and the heavens and represents the supreme being. The dancers tear their flesh as a sacrifice to the supreme being.

- D. **A Mesoamerican Religion: The Aztecs and Their Legacy.** Aztec religion emphasizes the interrelationship between myth and ritual. The Aztecs built their civilization on the foundation of cultures that had come before them. They believed that the Toltec god Quetzalcoatl had presided over an age of prosperity and cultural brilliance, which his earthly devotee, Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, had ruled as priest-king. The Toltecs provided the Aztecs with a mythic pattern for civilization. Aztecs identified the city of Teotihuacan as the origin of the cosmos. Aztec cosmology featured a close correspondence between time and space, and the Aztecs understood the universe to be built around four cardinal directions plus an *axis mundi*. The Aztecs also regarded the human being as an *axis mundi*, with two divine forces—one in the head and one in the heart—nurturing basic needs. Human sacrifice and mastery of language were two ways of fulfilling religious needs. Though the Aztec empire ended with the fall of Tenochtitlan to the Spanish army, aspects of Aztec culture survive today. In most indigenous religions, including those of Mesoamerica, the boundaries between the supernatural and the human worlds are easily crossed. The sacred and the secular are intertwined. Indigenous religions are constantly changing to adapt to modern life while retaining their ancient foundations.

For reading recommendations that support this chapter, see “Appendix: For Further Reading” on pages 349–363 in this guide.

Additional Online Resources for Teaching This Chapter

For additional resources for teaching the content of this chapter, visit www.smp.org/resourcecenter/books, click on the *World Religions* book cover, and then click on “Chapter 2.” Support materials include:

- a PowerPoint presentation
- points for comparison and contrast
- suggestions for promoting empathy
- downloadable handouts
- web links

Key Terms

Ancestors
axis mundi
 divination
 diviners
 Dreaming, the

orishas
 Quetzalcoatl
 Sun Dance
 taboo
 Tenochtitlan

totem
 trickster figure
 vision quest
 Wakan Tanka

Concept A: Religion of the Australian Aborigines

Primary Source Reading

See *Primary Source Readings in World Religions* (Saint Mary's Press, 2009) for the selection titled "The Birth of the Butterflies," as well as the accompanying leader's guide for suggestions about how to use this reading in your study of Australian Aborigines.

Student Book
Pages 22–27

For Review

Question 1: What themes are shared by the indigenous religions studied in this chapter?

Answer: Indigenous religions tended to come before other religious traditions. They do not depend on scriptures or written teachings; they pass down myths and stories orally from generation to generation; they tend to be the traditions of tribal peoples who dwell in villages, as opposed to large cities, although there are some exceptions; and they are diverse.

Question 2: What elements of the natural and human world did the Ancestors create or establish in the period of the Dreaming?

Answer: The Ancestors gave shape to the landscape and created the various forms of life, including the first human beings. They specified the territory each human tribe was to occupy, and they determined each tribe's languages, social rules, and customs. They also left behind symbols of their presence in the form of natural landmarks, rock paintings, and so on.

Question 3: What survives in the symbols left behind by the Ancestors?

Answer: The spiritual essence of the Ancestors survives. The sites where the symbols are found are thought to be charged with sacred power.

Question 4: Explain the terms *totem* and *taboo*.

Answer: The term *totem* refers to the natural form in which the Ancestor appeared in the Dreaming. A *totem* may be an animal or a rock formation or other feature of the landscape. The term *taboo* refers to the system of social ordering that dictates that certain things and activities, owing to their sacred nature, are set aside for specific members of the group and are forbidden to others.

Question 5: Why is ritual essential if Aboriginal life is to have meaning?

Answer: It is only through ritual that the sacred power of the Dreaming can be accessed and experienced.

Question 6: How did Aboriginal rituals originate?

Answer: Aborigines believe that the rituals were taught to the first humans by the Ancestors in the Dreaming.

Question 7: What purposes are served by Aboriginal initiation rituals?

Answer: Aboriginal initiation rituals awaken young people to their spiritual identity with their totemic Ancestors, and at the same time redefine their social identity within the tribe. The rituals prepare the way for the spiritual rebirth that is a necessary step toward adulthood. Also, during the rituals, young people learn the essential truths about their world and how they are to act within it.

Question 8: Identify two acts of Dieri initiation rituals that symbolize death.

Answer: Any two of the following answers are correct: circumcision, knocking out a boy's two lower middle teeth and burying them in the ground, and inflicting wounds intended to leave scars on a boy's neck and back.

Student Book Activities

Activity 1 (student book, p. 25)

Empathy—seeing something from another's perspective—helps us to gain the insight we need to understand and appreciate the diversity of world religions. Striving to understand the Aboriginal concept of a mythic geography offers a good opportunity for practicing empathy. Think of a favorite outdoor area, such as a place in the wilderness, a beach, a park, or your backyard. Imagine that every notable landmark has great religious significance and that your every move within the area is undertaken as if it were a religious ritual. Now describe the area and your experience of being there.

Activity 2 (student book, p. 26)

Every society has rituals that reenact origins, just as the Aborigines do. Some contemporary rituals are religious in nature, whereas others involve patriotism and other aspects of society. List as many such rituals as you can, briefly explaining how each is a reenactment of an original event.

Activity 3 (student book, p. 26)

To what extent does your society apply restrictions similar to those of the Aboriginal concept of taboo?

Activity 4 (student book, p. 27)

What experiences have served as rituals of initiation for you, marking your passage from childhood to adulthood?

Additional Activities

Choosing a Totem

This activity invites the students to explore the concept of totemism by creating a totem for someone they know well and sharing that totem with a partner.

1. Engage the students in a discussion of totems and totemism. Cover the following points in your own words:
 - ▶ Think of ways that people in families or in society are seen as representatives of a predecessor. For example, a girl might be referred to as the spitting image of her great-grandmother, an environmentalist might be called a contemporary Thoreau, and a civil rights activist could be identified as a modern Martin Luther King Jr.
 - ▶ Think of ways your family members identify with an earlier generation. For instance, some families pass a wedding ring, Christmas ornaments, or recipes from one generation to the next, and American Protestants began a tradition of passing on Bibles with pages for recording births, deaths, and marriages.
 - ▶ Maintaining such connections, which we often take for granted, has much in common with the ideas of totems and totemism (though it is by no means identical with those concepts).
2. Direct the students to complete the following tasks in class:
 - ▶ Choose a relative or friend you know well, preferably someone at least ten years older than you. Spend some time thinking about that person and then list his or her qualities—for example, hot tempered, patient, wise, and silly. Next, think of an animal, plant, inanimate object, or feature of the landscape that seems to strongly represent the character of the person you chose. This will be that person's "totem." Write a detailed description of this totem next to your list of the person's qualities, taking care not to use any of the words from that list. Consider the totem's behavior and surroundings—anything about it that gives it a clear identity—as well as its outward appearance.
3. Instruct the students to choose a partner and to decide which person in the pair will go first. Then tell the first partner to read her or his description of the totem aloud to the second partner. Explain that after listening to the totem description, the second partner is to list the qualities she or he believes might be part of the character of the person for whom such a totem was chosen. Ask the partners to compare their lists of qualities and discuss the similarities and differences noted. Then tell them to repeat the task with the second partner's totem description.
4. Emphasize that this activity merely approximates the concept of totemism, but it may also make it clear that such a concept is not so far removed from the way we think about people, and their characteristics, in our everyday life.

Understanding Taboo

At first glance, the students may consider the concept of taboo to be controlling or elitist. By using analogies of childhood, social, and religious restrictions the students have experienced, the following discussion can help them understand taboo as being protective and beneficial rather than restrictive and detrimental.

1. Ask the students to recall restrictions from their early childhood, such as rules about the use of scissors or sharp knives, limits on the hours spent viewing television, and orders that they not leave the backyard. Raise questions like the following:

- ▶ If you were a young child, how might you describe these restrictions? Would these regulations seem reasonable?
- ▶ From the perspective of your current age, how do you describe these restrictions?
- ▶ If you were a parent, would you place similar restrictions on your young children?

2. Broaden the discussion by encouraging the students to identify restrictions in social and religious contexts. Examples could range from regulations specifying roles that only an ordained clergy member can perform in some worship rituals, to rules identifying who can enter the stage door after a concert or play. Invite the students to evaluate these other restrictions using the insights gained from the discussion of childhood restrictions. Focus on two or three restrictions that many of the students have experienced, and pose questions like these:

- ▶ How do you describe these restrictions? (Possible answers: *elitist, protective, respectful*)
- ▶ Who, if anyone, directly benefits from these restrictions?
- ▶ If one benefits, should all?
- ▶ Do those who do not directly benefit from the restrictions receive any benefit at all? (Possible responses: *Restrictions on who can enter the stage door after a rock concert benefit the audience indirectly, because they help to prevent the stars from being mobbed and injured, thus enabling them to entertain fans at future performances. A clergy member may be the only one who can perform a particular act in worship, but the entire worshipping community benefits directly by observing and responding to that act.*)

Concept B: An African Tradition: The Religion of the Yoruba

Primary Source Reading

See *Primary Source Readings in World Religions* (Saint Mary's Press, 2009) for the selection titled "Creation Myth," as well as the accompanying leader's guide for suggestions about how to use this reading in your study of the Yoruba.

For Review

Question 9: In what part of Africa do the Yoruba live?

Answer: *The Yoruba live in the western regions of central Africa—Nigeria, Benin, and Togo—mostly in cities.*

Question 10: Why has the city of Ife always been the center of Yoruba religion?

Answer: *The Yoruba believe it was there that the god Orisha-nla first began to create the world.*

Question 11: Briefly describe the Yoruba understanding of the cosmos.

Answer: *The Yoruba regard the cosmos as being divided into two separate worlds: heaven (the invisible home of the gods and the ancestors) and earth (the visible home of human beings, who are descended from the gods). Earth is also populated by a perverted form of humans, witches and sorcerers, who can cause disastrous harm if not controlled.*

Question 12: Who is Olorun, and what is his role in Yoruba religion?

Answer: *He is the supreme god of the Yoruba, the primary, original source of power in the universe, to whom all other life-forms ultimately owe their existence. He is distant and not involved in human affairs, so he is hardly worshipped at all, except in prayer.*

Question 13: What are the *orishas*? Explain their significance in the religious life of the Yoruba.

Answer: *The orishas are lesser deities who are sources of sacred power that can help or harm humans, depending on how well the rituals designed to appease them are carried out.*

Question 14: Name and briefly describe at least two of the *orishas*.

Answer: *Any two of the following answers are correct: Orisha-nla is the supreme deity who most Yoruba believe created earth. Ogun, the god of iron and war, was the first king of Ife. He occupies the borderline between the ancestors and the rest of the orishas. Esu, who is both good and evil, mediates between heaven and earth.*

Question 15: What is a trickster figure?

Answer: *A trickster figure is a sort of mischievous supernatural being.*

Question 16: Describe the two types of Yoruba ancestors.

Answer: *The two types of Yoruba ancestors are (1) family ancestors, who gained their supernatural status through having earned a good reputation and having lived to an old age, and (2) deified ancestors, who were once important human figures known throughout Yoruba society.*

Question 17: Describe the role of Yoruba ritual practitioners.

Answer: *They mediate between the gods and ancestors in heaven and human beings on earth.*

Question 18: What is divination, and why do the Yoruba regard it as essential?

Answer: *Divination is learning or interpreting someone's future. It is considered essential for one to determine how to proceed with life.*

Student Book Activity

Activity 5 (student book, p. 29)

Deceased ancestors are worshipped in many religious traditions. Are they worshipped in any way in your society? Explain your answer.

Additional Activity

The Art of Divination

This activity helps the students to understand divination as an important aspect of Yoruba religion as well as of many other indigenous traditions.

1. Explain that although divination takes different forms in different cultures, in most cases it is far removed from what we usually refer to as fortune-telling.

Ask the students what comes to mind when they think of fortune-telling. They are likely to respond with some negative impressions—it is inaccurate, performed by charlatans, not to be taken seriously. Then point out what the student book says about Yoruba divination: “The procedure involves an intricate system of hundreds of wisdom stories, which the diviner knows by memory. The diviner determines which of the stories are relevant for an individual, and from those stories interprets the individual’s future” (p. 29).

2. Give the students the following directions for an essay to be written as homework:

- ▶ Take some time to think about stories you have heard or read recently or as long ago as early childhood. Consider all kinds of stories—such as fiction, nonfiction, news, and family memories. Pick two or three accounts that you consider particularly relevant to you as an individual, and from which you might interpret something about your future. Your interpretation should include events you think might occur, the type of person you would like to become, the kind of life you would like to lead, and so on.
- ▶ In writing, briefly summarize the stories you have chosen. Then write a paragraph about each story, explaining why you believe it is relevant to you. Finally, write another paragraph about each story, describing how it relates to your future.

3. Evaluate the completed assignments, and then return them to the students. Engage the young people in a brief discussion of questions like these:
- ▶ Is the way you predicted your future the same as the way you might expect a typical fortune-teller to do so? In what respects are the two methods of prediction the same or different?
 - ▶ What type of prediction would you be more likely to trust: that of a typical fortune-teller or that of a person who interprets life stories?

Concept C: Religion of the North American Plains Indians

Primary Source Reading

See *Primary Source Readings in World Religions* (Saint Mary's Press, 2009) for the selection titled "On the Ghost Dance," as well as the accompanying leader's guide for suggestions about how to use this reading in your study of the Lakota.

Student Book
Pages 29–34

For Review

Question 19: According to the interpretation of the latest evidence, when and how do scholars think human beings first came to America?

Answer: *Scholars believe humans first came to North America perhaps as early as forty thousand years ago, with significant populations arriving between ten and twenty thousand years ago. They migrated from Asia by crossing over the Bering Strait (between Russia and Alaska), which at that time was dry land.*

Question 20: Why is the religion of the Plains Indians of vital interest among native peoples throughout North America?

Answer: *It serves as the model for pan-Indian religion, a recent and popular movement uniting many tribes from across North America.*

Question 21: What is Wakan Tanka?

Answer: *Wakan Tanka is the Lakota name for the supreme reality, sometimes translated as Great Spirit or the Great Mysterious, but literally meaning "most sacred." It actually refers to sixteen separate deities.*

Question 22: Who is Inktomi?

Answer: *Inktomi is the Lakota trickster figure who mediates between the supernatural and human worlds. He taught the first humans their ways and customs, and he also serves as an example of how not to behave.*

Question 23: Briefly describe Lakota beliefs regarding death and the afterlife.

Answer: The Lakota believe that four souls depart from a person at death, one of which journeys along the “spirit path” of the Milky Way. The soul meets an old woman who judges it and either allows it to continue on to the other world of the ancestors or sends it back to earth as a ghost. Meanwhile parts of the other souls enter unborn children and are reborn in new bodies.

Question 24: What do individuals try to access by going on a vision quest?

Answer: They try to access spiritual power that will ensure greater success in activities such as hunting, warfare, and curing the ill.

Question 25: Briefly describe the structure and function of the sweat lodge.

Answer: The structure of the lodge, a sapling hut covered with animal skins to make it dark and airtight, represents the universe. Heated stones placed in the center and sprinkled with water give off hot steam, causing the participant to sweat profusely, which leads to both physical and spiritual purification.

Question 26: Describe a typical vision experienced by a person who undertakes a vision quest.

Answer: The vision arrives in the form of an animal or some other object or force of nature, and is often accompanied by a message.

Question 27: Among the Blackfeet tribe, who presides over the Sun Dance?

Answer: A woman of outstanding moral character presides over the Sun Dance.

Question 28: What is the *axis mundi* in general? What is the *axis mundi* in the Sun Dance?

Answer: In general, it is the center of the universe. In the Sun Dance, it is a cottonwood tree around which a lodge is constructed so that it represents the universe with its four directions.

Question 29: Why do some participants in the Sun Dance skewer their chests and dance until their flesh tears?

Answer: Because they believe their bodies are the only things they truly own, the dancers regard bodily mutilation as the only suitable sacrifice to offer to the supreme being.

Student Book Activities

Activity 6 (student book, p. 31)

Imagine yourself living in the open wilderness of the North American Plains. Why, do you suppose, did the Lakota understand their supreme reality as being closely related to the four compass directions?

Activity 7 (student book, p. 34)

The Indians of the Northern Plains traditionally lived off the land, depending on hunting and fishing to feed themselves. What elements of the vision quest and Sun Dance rituals are related to that lifestyle?

Additional Activities

The Vision Quest

This activity helps the students begin to understand vision quests by providing an experience similar to a vision quest and then inviting the students to interpret each other's visions.

1. Engage the students in a discussion of the Lakota vision quest. Be sure they have read the section "The Vision Quest," on pages 31 and 33 in the student book, as well as Lone Deer's account of his own vision, on page 32. Focus the discussion on this part of the student book's description:

A vision comes to the quester eventually, usually near the end of the stay. It arrives in the form of an animal or some other object or force of nature. A message is often communicated along with the vision. When the individual returns to camp, the medicine man or woman interprets the vision and the message. (P. 33)

2. When you feel that the students have a basic understanding of the vision quest, instruct them as follows:
 - ▶ In this activity, we will attempt to experience an event analogous to the vision quest. Because we can't spend days fasting on a mountaintop, we need to create another situation in which we receive a vision.
 - ▶ Choose an animal or some other object or force of nature. This will become the vision of one of your classmates, so select something you know well enough to describe thoroughly. Provide a written description that contains a setting for the arrival of the vision, actions and movements of the vision, and the way the vision communicates.
3. When the students have finished writing, collect all the vision descriptions and distribute them randomly. If a student receives his or her own description, he or she should keep it and continue the activity with it. Next, give the class the following instructions:
 - ▶ You are approaching a turning point in your life. It won't be long before you are no longer a high school student but have moved on to higher education or the working world. In view of this turning point, what message might the vision you have received communicate to you? In answering this question, be sure to consider the vision's meaning as a symbol. Think about what sort of analogy it might provide about your future. Write a page-long essay interpreting your vision.

4. You can end the activity here and instruct the students to hand in their essays to be evaluated. Or you might extend the activity by inviting the students to form pairs. It may be best if the partners know each other fairly well, but it is not necessary.

Tell the partners to sit together and read to each other the vision descriptions they received, imagining that the other person's description is a second vision that is coming to them during a vision quest. Then direct the students to verbally interpret their second vision in the same light that they interpreted their first—as a message about the turning point that is approaching in their life. Next, instruct the pairs to read each other's interpretive essays and to discuss the differences and similarities between them. Finally, invite the whole class to discuss the experience, using questions such as these:

- In what ways was the activity helpful? not helpful?
- Did you learn anything new about your own desires and expectations for the future?
- Although this experience was merely an analogy for the actual experience of a vision quest, do you now have a stronger understanding of the goal of the quest? Describe your understanding.

Variation. In step 2, invite the students to draw the setting and the vision, instead of writing about them.

Outlawing the Sun Dance

This activity invites the students to consider whether a government is ever justified in restricting a religious practice, examining the prohibition against the Sun Dance as an example.

1. The student book points out that the Lakota Sun Dance was outlawed for some time by the government in the United States. It was suppressed in Canada as well. The handout “What Harm Is in Our Sun Dance?” (Document #: TX003764) contains the thoughts of an anonymous Blackfoot Indian in Canada, early in the twentieth century, regarding the restrictions against the Sun Dance. Distribute the handout and instruct the students to read it.
2. Base a discussion or writing assignment on questions such as these:
 - Do you believe that it was right for the U.S. and Canadian governments to outlaw the Sun Dance? Why or why not?
 - Under what circumstances do you think a government might be justified in restricting a religious practice?
 - How might you react if your government considered an aspect of your religion illegal?

Concept D: A Mesoamerican Religion

Student Book
Pages 34–40

For Review

Question 30: In what ways does the Aztec tradition differ from a typical indigenous religious tradition? In what ways is the Aztec tradition like other indigenous religious traditions?

Answer: The Aztec tradition differs from the typical indigenous tradition in that its people built a highly developed civilization with a population of about fifteen million people, and many Aztecs were urban. However, like other indigenous traditions, Aztec religion emphasized the interrelationship between myth and ritual, as its practice of human sacrifice makes vividly clear.

Question 31: What geographical area did Mesoamerica include?

Answer: Mesoamerica included most of present-day Mexico, extending southward to present-day Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica.

Question 32: According to Aztec cosmology, what god created and ordered the world? What ancient city is the origin of the cosmos?

Answer: The creation and ordering of the world are attributed to Quetzalcoatl. Teotihuacan is the origin of the cosmos, in terms of both space and time.

Question 33: Who was Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl? What was his significance for the Aztecs?

Answer: He was the earthly devotee of Quetzalcoatl, and he ruled as priest-king. He provided the Aztecs with the perfect role model for their authority figures.

Question 34: What did the Aztecs call their present age? What did they anticipate its fate to be?

Answer: They called their present age the Age of the Fifth Sun. They believed that four previous suns and their ages had already been destroyed, and a similar fate was anticipated for this one.

Question 35: How did the Aztecs understand the spatial world?

Answer: They understood the world as having four quadrants extending outward from the center of the universe (the axis mundi), which connected the earthly realm to the many-layered heavenly realm above and the many-layered underworld below.

Question 36: Why did the Aztecs regard each human being as a sort of *axis mundi*?

Answer: Two divine forces, one concentrated in the head, the other in the heart, were believed to nurture the human being with basic needs. The potency of these forces connected the earthly realm to the divine.

Question 37: What were the special religious capabilities of the Aztec knowers of things?

Answer: *The knowers of things could communicate with the gods and make offerings through language, thus providing an alternative to sacrifice.*

Question 38: What historical coincidence contributed to the fall of Tenochtitlan to the Spaniards?

Answer: *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, who had disappeared from earth long ago, was expected to return, possibly in 1519. By an amazing coincidence, Cortés—wearing a feathered helmet—arrived in Mesoamerica that year. The Aztec King Moctezuma thought Cortés was the returning Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl and welcomed him with gifts.*

Question 39: How does the popular Day of the Dead show the survival of Aztec religious culture?

Answer: *The celebration, held at the end of October and beginning of November, joins the living and the dead through rituals that are both festive and spiritually meaningful. The Aztecs also set aside a certain time each year to perform similar rituals devoted to the same basic purpose.*

Student Book Activities

Activity 8 (student book, p. 36)

The Aztecs looked back to the Toltec tradition as a kind of golden age, providing them with a mythic pattern for the ideal civilization. In what ways do you and your society look to past traditions for cultural ideals?

Activity 9 (student book, p. 36)

The Aztec cosmology is marked by a deep pessimism regarding the future. How does your society view the future? What can human beings offer to “nourish” the present so as to ensure a sound future?

Activity 10 (student book, p. 38)

Considering the Aztec ritual of human sacrifice offers a challenging opportunity to see things from another’s perspective. Explain how human sacrifice is part of the Aztecs’ ordered and sophisticated religious worldview, given their cosmology and understanding of the human condition.

Activity 11 (student book, p. 38)

In your experience, how has the mastery of language helped to convey religious power? How does the significance of speech in the Aztec tradition compare with the significance of speech in another religious tradition you are familiar with?

Additional Activities

A New Aztec Ritual for the Head and Heart

In this exercise, the students design a modern ritual (without human sacrifice) in which they symbolically offer their heads and their hearts for the betterment of the world.

1. Make the following points in your own words:
 - ▶ The ancient Aztec ritual of human sacrifice demonstrated a belief in a powerful, inextricable connection between people and the universe. In the act of sacrificing their lives to nourish the sun, the Aztecs believed they were helping sustain the sun, ensuring that the current age would progress and life would continue to flourish.
 - ▶ Today we are increasingly aware of the interdependence between human beings and nature. Unfortunately our modern world often harms nature through pollution, overconsumption of resources, and ever-increasing human population. And despite a growing awareness of the relationship between human beings and nature, individuals, communities, and nations still engage in practices that are harmful, wasteful, or even life destroying. It sometimes seems that modern society would rather sacrifice nature to feed its own desires, than sacrifice its desires for the good of the natural world.

2. Break the class into groups of two or three and tell the groups each to appoint a recorder. Instruct the recorders each to make two columns on a sheet of paper, one titled “Head” and the other titled “Heart.” Direct the groups to brainstorm a list of ideas for the head, and attitudes for the heart, that are necessary for humans to enjoy a beneficial and interdependent relationship with the natural world. For example, under the title “Head,” they might list, “Developing alternative fuels that preserve resources and reduce pollution”; under the title “Heart,” they might write, “Looking at my own transportation needs as an opportunity to respect the environment (by carpooling, walking, biking, and so on).”

After a sufficient amount of time, tell the groups to now think of symbols that may evoke those ideas and attitudes, and to write them down.

3. When the groups have had enough time to think of symbols, give them the following directions:
 - ▶ Using the ideas, attitudes, and symbols you just discussed, design a modern ritual that symbolically offers your heads and your hearts for the betterment of the world. The ritual does not have to be long, but it does have to include the following elements:
 - Appropriate objects and symbols (for example, photographs, illustrations, a globe, objects from nature, incense, candles, and music)
 - Appropriate readings and symbolic movements or gestures (for instance, poems, prayers, and vows to avoid certain actions or to embrace a certain lifestyle)
 - Participation of the assembly (for example, through responses to readings, singing, movement, sharing of thoughts, and bringing in of a symbol)

You may wish to collect the rituals in written form, or schedule class time for each group to enact its ritual and explain the ceremony's meaning.

Día de los Muertos

This activity involves a guest speaker and a project in which the students create their own altars. The goal is to expand the students' understanding of Aztec rituals as they have influenced present-day religion in Mexico.

1. Invite someone from your school's foreign language department or a guest speaker to come to class and discuss the celebration of Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead).
2. To extend the activity, encourage the students to create altars honoring the dead in their families, following the Mexican custom. For links to resources about Día de los Muertos, visit www.smp.org/resourcecenter/books, click on the *World Religions* book cover, and then click on "Chapter 2."