

Religious Identity Descriptions

Make enough copies of this handout so that everyone in class can have a copy of one of the following five religious identities. Cut apart and distribute these identities to the students.



Jewish

As a member of the Jewish faith, you believe in one God. Your religion is thousands of years old and began when God called a man named Abraham to follow him. The Israelites eventually became known as the Jews. You have a sacred book, called the Tanak, which records how God revealed himself to your ancestors. Christians call the Tanak the “Old Testament,” but it is not old to Jews. God revealed himself through many great prophets whose teachings are recorded in the Tanak. Some Jews consider Jesus Christ a prophet, but you do not believe he was the Divine Son of God or the Messiah. You do believe that God’s Spirit is at work in the world, but you do not believe in the Christian Holy Trinity.

God’s Law, also called Torah, teaches you how to worship God properly and how to live in right relationship with your neighbors. It teaches you to love your neighbor as yourself. Most Jews today believe that if you carefully follow God’s Law, you will be resurrected after you die and be united with him after death. You don’t really believe in a hell. Most Jews believe that after death the souls of evil people either cease to exist or are reincarnated and have a chance to try again. You worship God in the synagogue on the Sabbath and have many religious holy days but nothing like the Christian sacraments.



Muslim

As a Muslim, a member of the Islamic faith, you believe in one God, called Allah. Your religion began with a human prophet called Muhammad, who was born in AD 570. God revealed his teachings to Mohammad, who wrote them down directly as God dictated them. This holy book is called the Qur’an and is the holiest book in the world, as it contains the direct words of God. It can only be fully understood when it is read in the Arabic language in which it was written.

Muslims share many beliefs with Christians and Jews. You believe you are also descended from Abraham, whose son Ishmael was the father of the Arab race. You believe that Moses and Jesus were great prophets of God, but you do not believe that Jesus was the Divine Son of God. You believe in the Golden Rule taught by Jesus: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” You believe that righteous people will be rewarded after death in Paradise, and evil and unbelieving people will be punished in Hell.

Many Muslims believe that the Islamic faith is the only true faith and that other religions have misunderstood or confused the true teachings of God. You believe that embracing the Muslim faith and all it teaches is the only true path to salvation.



Evangelical Protestant

As an evangelical Protestant, you share many beliefs with Catholic Christians. You believe in the Holy Trinity, three Divine Persons in One God. Like Jews and Muslims, you believe your religious faith has its roots in God's call of Abraham. You believe that God reveals himself in the Holy Scripture, the Bible. But God's ultimate Revelation was through Jesus Christ, the Divine Son of God, and the promised Messiah. Jesus taught us everything we need to know about God and our salvation.

You believe that faith in Jesus Christ is the only sure path to salvation. Those who put their faith in Jesus Christ will be joined with God after death in Heaven. Those who do not will suffer in Hell. You believe in the Ten Commandments and the two Great Commandments taught by Jesus: "Love God with all you heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength" and "Love your neighbor as yourself." But you do not believe in other Catholic teachings, such as the importance of Sacred Tradition, the authority of the Pope, or the necessity of the Seven Sacraments.



Hindu

As a Hindu, you are a member of one of the oldest religions in the world. The start of your religion is about four thousand years ago, a little before the time of Abraham. Your beliefs are so complex and there are so many ways to practice your religion that it is practically impossible to give a simple description. Most Hindus believe there is only one God but that he has many aspects and names. So Hindus worship God in the form of many different gods and goddesses. You revere many holy people, including Jesus and Ghandi, but you do not believe that any of them were divine when they walked the earth. You have many holy texts, and some Hindus even look to the teachings of Jesus in the Bible for inspiration.

Your belief in life after death is also pretty complicated. You believe that all time and creation moves in cycles and repeats itself. This includes an individual person's life. After you die you will be reincarnated, or born again into a different life. This cycle of death and rebirth will continue until you have reached a type of spiritual perfection, and then you will be united with the source of all life, or God, at least for a time. This is related to your belief in "karma," which is the belief that whatever we do in life comes back to us. If we do good, we shall experience good things, and if we do bad, bad things will return to us. So Hindus believe in a kind of heaven, but the only hell you believe in is the one people create for themselves.



Buddhism

As a Buddhist, you aren't even sure if you should call your belief a religion. Your beliefs are based on the life and teachings of the Buddha, a man named Siddhartha Gautama, who was born about 560 years before Jesus Christ. Gautama was only a man, not a god, but through a series of experiences in his life he awakened to fully understand the human condition. (*Buddha* means the "awakened one".) What's more, he learned how to move beyond the pain and suffering in life and reach spiritual perfection. A person who has reached this stage can pass into a state of eternal bliss called nirvana after he or she dies (kind of like the Christian Heaven). A person who has not reached nirvana will be reborn into a new life after he or she dies. For Buddhists, salvation is achieved by the effort of the self, not by a reliance on something outside of you like a Church or sacraments.

So Buddhism isn't so much a belief in God as it is a way of life. In fact, you can be a member of another religion and also practice Buddhism. Buddhists live a life guided by the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. This includes a moral life guided by the Five Precepts, which are similar to the Ten Commandments and can also be summarized by the Golden Rule of "Love others as you love yourself." Buddhists live a disciplined life of meditation and avoid excessive attachment to all things. You are guided in this by sacred texts called the Sutras, which contain the words and teachings of the Buddha.

✂-----

