

Religions Poster Assignment

Religion: (noun) The belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, esp. a personal God or gods. A unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden--beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community.

Task: Learn about a specific religion, organize the information on a poster, present to the class.

Step 1: Gather information about your assigned religion and take notes

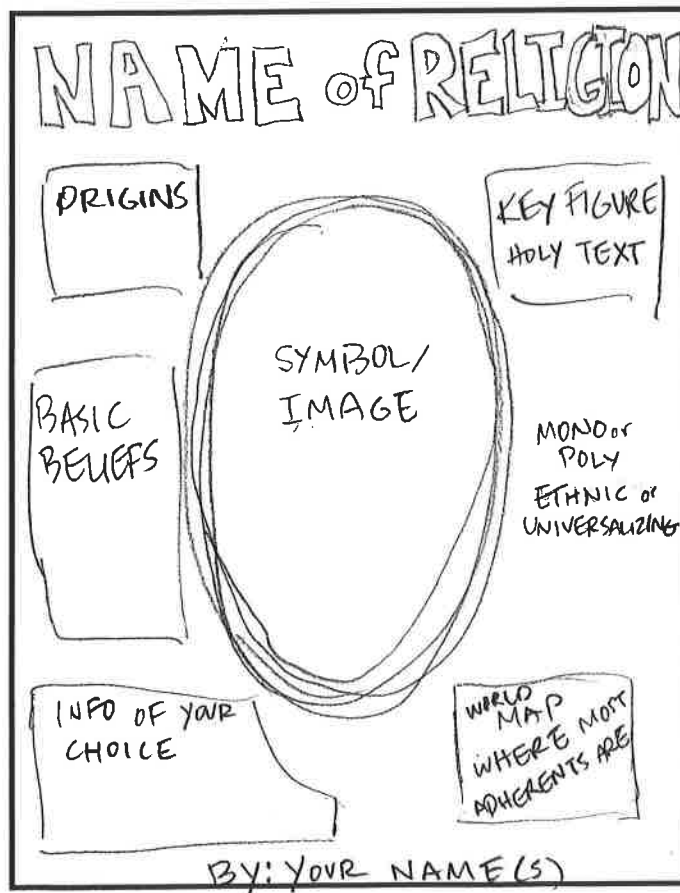
Step 2: Assemble the information onto a poster. (20 points)

Step 3: Present poster and information to class (10 points)

Required information includes:

- Origins and/or founder of religion
- Basic tenets/beliefs
- key figure and/or holy text of religion
- symbols, colors associated with the religion
- Where most of the followers of the religion live

Please make the poster visually pleasing and include at least 1 image substantial in size.



BAHA'I

Baha'i is a monotheistic religion (one that believes in a single god) founded by Siyyid Ali-Muhammad in 1844 and carried on by his followers. Although influenced by Islam, Baha'i is considered a separate faith.

Baha'is view such diverse figures as Abraham (of Judaism), Buddha (of Buddhism), Jesus (of Christianity) and Mohammad (of Islam) to be divine messengers sent to guide the world's spiritual development. Baha'is emphasize unity among all of mankind and promote racial and gender equality, religious tolerance, environmental responsibility and improved economic status among those in need.

Some religious observances:

Naw-Ruz (Baha'i New Year)

Time of Year: March. Naw-Ruz marks the end of a 19-day fast (when people avoid eating during certain hours) and is a celebration of the coming spring, as well as a time of spiritual renewal. It is a popular time for sending out greeting cards, visiting others' homes and enjoying communal meals.

Baha'is in Iran often prepare *haft-sins* (*Haft Seens*), displays of seven traditional items that start with the letter "s" (e.g., *sib* [apples]) and that symbolize health, wealth and other positive outcomes. Followers of the Zoroastrian faith (most often living in Iran or India) also celebrate Naw-Ruz, although they have their own unique practices.

Rivdan

Time of Year: April through May. This 12-day festival celebrates the 1863 revelation of Baha'u'llah (a key Baha'i religious leader) that he was the next Manifestation of God. Rivdan also marks the beginning of Baha'u'llah's exile from Baghdad, which he compared with the exile of Islam's Mohammad from Mecca. Baha'is typically observe by suspending work and holding community prayer gatherings on the first, ninth and twelfth days of the festival.



Nine-pointed Star



The Ringstone Symbol



The Greatest Name

SHINTOISM

Shinto, which means "the way of the gods," is the traditional religion of Japan. It emphasizes the relationship between humans and a variety of supernatural entities called *kami* which are associated with different aspects of life, including ancestors and forces of nature.

Shinto practices center on tradition and family, love of nature, physical cleanliness and festivals and ceremonies that honor the *kami*. Shinto does not have a schedule of regular religious services — followers decide when they wish to attend a shrine. Japan has over 80,000 Shinto shrines, ranging greatly in size from tiny to elaborate and large.

Valued texts in Shintoism (such as the *Kojiki* and the *Rokkokushi*) contain folklore and history, rather than being considered holy scripture. Many people who follow Shinto also follow aspects of Buddhism.

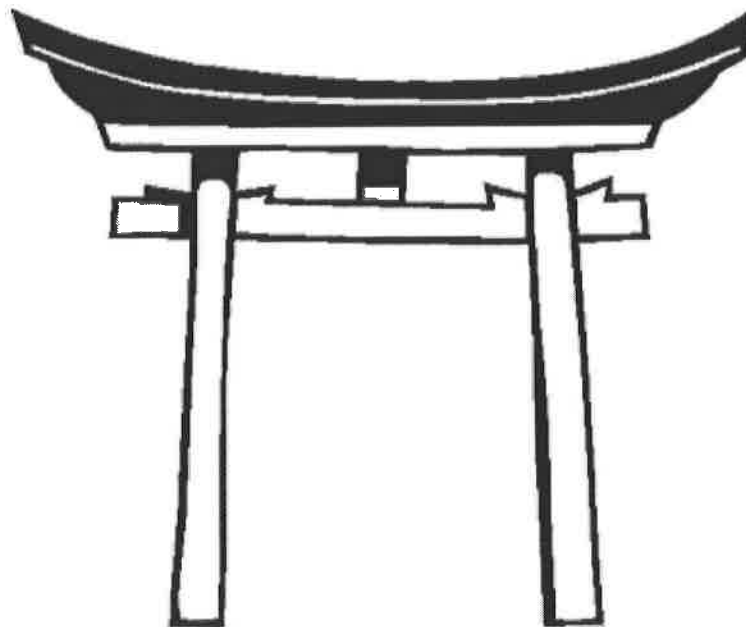
Some religious observances:

Oshogatsu (New Year)

Time of Year: January 1. On New Year's Day, attendance at shrines is huge, as this is traditionally a time when the Japanese make a special visit. People go to thank the *kami*, make resolutions and ask the *kami* to bring them good fortune in the coming year.

Rissun (or Setsubun)

Time of Year: February 3. Rissun, known as the bean-throwing festival, marks the beginning of spring. When celebrated at home, a male family member will scatter roasted beans, saying "demons out, good luck in." At shrines, beans are thrown into the congregation, and people will try to catch them.



SIKHISM

The Sikh faith originated in Pakistan and North India about 500 years ago. Sikhism is sometimes confused with Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism because of geographical and cultural similarities. Sikhism is the fifth largest religion in the world, with about 26 million followers worldwide. Most Sikhs live in the Panjab in northern India, but they are also found around the world.

Sikhs worship one god called Waheguru, whose name means “wonderful enlightener.” Sikhs live by three primary principals: (1) Be always absorbed in meditation and prayer; (2) Make an honest income by honorable methods; and (3) Share earnings and selflessly serve others. They believe that everyone should be treated equally, and they work to preserve religious freedom.

Sikhs keep special “articles of faith” with them at all times, including a small sword that symbolizes battling of the senses, along with the Sikh ideal of protecting the innocent.

Some religious observances:

Vaisahki Day

Time of Year: Early April. This holiday commemorates the first Sikh initiation (baptism) ceremony. The day usually begins with a baptism ceremony where initiates (those newly committing themselves to the faith) drink Amrit (a ceremonial drink said to be the ambrosial nectar of gods that makes immortal those who drink it). Other practices may include the retelling of the event, narration of battles fought by Guru Gobind Singh (the tenth guru, or religious leader, of the Sikhs), devotional singing and parades.

Hola Mahala

Time of year: Mid-March. In this martial arts festival and parade, a special group of performers demonstrates Sikh sword dancing (*Gatka*). The *Guru Granth Sahib*, Sikhism's Holy Scripture, is also paraded through town. Five Sikh leaders known as the *Panj Pyara* walk at the head of *Guru Granth Sahib*, while other floats follow behind. The Sikh congregation sings hymns, known as *Kirtan*, during the procession.



ISLAM

Islam is a major world religion, with over a billion followers worldwide. It is considered a monotheistic faith (one that believes in a single god), along with Judaism and Christianity.

The word "Islam" comes from an Arabic word meaning "peace" and "submission." Islam teaches that one can find peace in life by submitting to Almighty God (Allah) in heart, soul and deed. A person who follows Islam is called a Muslim.

The Prophet Muhammad is a central figure in Islam. He revealed the words of the Qur'an (holy book) and serves as an example for Muslims to follow. Although usually associated with the Arabs of the Middle East, less than 10% of Muslims are in fact Arab. Muslims are found all over the world.

Some religious observances:

Ramadan

Time of Year: Different every year, but typically begins in June, July or August. Muslims who are physically able fast (do not eat) each day of the entire month of Ramadan, from sunrise to sunset. The evenings are spent enjoying family and community meals, engaging in prayer and spiritual reflection, and reading from the Qur'an (holy book). **Eid al-Fitr** (Breaking of the Fast) is celebrated at the end of the month of Ramadan.

Hajj

Time of Year: Usually late November. Every year, millions of Muslims from around the world make the journey to Makkah (Mecca), Saudi Arabia, for the annual pilgrimage (or Hajj). Pilgrims gather to perform rituals dating back to ancient times. Muslims are required to make the pilgrimage once in a lifetime, if they are physically and financially able.

When the pilgrims return to their home countries, they do so spiritually refreshed and forgiven of their sins (wrongdoings in God's eyes). After the completion of Hajj, Muslims around the world observe a special holiday called **Eid al-Adha** (the Festival of Sacrifice).



CHRISTIANITY

Christianity is the world's largest religion, with about 2.1 billion followers throughout the globe. Christianity is also the United States' biggest religion. Under the umbrella of Christianity, there are hundreds of denominations; about a quarter of all people in the U.S. identify with the Roman Catholic Christian denomination, while about half identify with one of the Protestant Christian denominations such as Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran or one of many others. Each denomination may have somewhat different practices, even though it shares beliefs common to most Christians.

Christians believe that there is only one god, but that there are three elements of God, including the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They also believe that 2,000 years ago in what is now Israel, God sent his son, Jesus Christ, to earth to save humans from the consequences of their sins (wrongdoings in the eyes of God). Christians believe that Jesus gave his life by being crucified (nailed to a wood cross) and on the third day rose from the dead (was resurrected). The Christian holy book is called the Bible.

Some religious observances:

Christmas

Time of Year: December 25. For Christians, Christmas is a holy day that marks the birth of Jesus, believed to be the son of God. Many non-Christians also observe with secular (non-religious) festivities. Although they differ around the world, some common ways of observing the holiday include attending worship services, hosting gatherings with family and friends, feasting and exchanging gifts.

Many decorate for the holiday using lights, Christmas (fir) trees, Nativity Scenes (displays depicting the birth of Jesus), and (commonly in the United States) images of Santa Claus, a character of legend who is believed to bring gifts to children.

Easter

Time of Year: Usually April. Easter commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ following Good Friday, the day of his crucifixion. Churches (Christian houses of worship) are filled with flowers, and people sing special hymns (religious songs).

Non-religious customs associated with the holiday include giving baskets of candy to children, with reference (commonly in the United States) to a character called the Easter Bunny. The holiday is often associated with celebrating the arrival of spring.



BUDDHISM

Most religions are defined by their beliefs. But in Buddhism, followers are discouraged from believing in doctrines (religious laws or rules) just because they read or are taught them. Instead, the historical Buddha (the religion's founder Siddhartha Gautama, who lived about 25 centuries ago in what is now Nepal and northeastern India) taught others how to realize truth for themselves.

Buddhism is a non-theistic religion, meaning that followers do not concern themselves with a personal-creator god present in faiths such as Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Buddhist practices are described in spiritual guides such as the Eightfold Path, which addresses wisdom, ethical behavior and mental discipline. Examples of practices include meditation, chanting and a belief in *karma* (a law of cause and effect set in motion by human actions and thoughts). Practices and beliefs can vary widely among Buddhists, however.

There are about 350 million practicing Buddhists, making Buddhism the fourth largest of the world's religions. Buddhism is most often practiced in Asian countries.

Some religious observances:

Vesak (Buddha Day)

Time of Year: Usually May, although celebration days differ depending upon the country. On this day, Buddhists rededicate themselves to the Eightfold Path (guide to spiritual practices). Monks and nuns (men and women dedicated to a religious life) meditate and chant ancient rules. Others bring flowers and offerings to the temples, where they may also meditate and listen to talks. In the evenings, often there will be candlelight processions.

In some places, Buddhists celebrate with parties, parades and festivals. Temples and streets may be decorated with lanterns. Some Buddhists also "wash the baby Buddha." A small standing figure of the baby Buddha is put inside a basin on an altar. People fill a ladle with water or tea and pour it over the figure to "wash" the baby.

Chunga Choepa (Butter Lamp Festival, Tibet)

Time of Year: Usually March. This festival celebrates miracles performed by the historical Buddha. People display colorful butter sculptures and sing and dance into the night. Sculpting yak butter is an ancient Tibetan Buddhist art practiced by monks.



JUDAISM

Judaism is a monotheistic faith, meaning that Jews believe there is only one god. They believe that while often this god is beyond our ability to comprehend, God is nevertheless present in people's everyday lives. Jews believe that every person is equally important and has an infinite potential to do good in the world. They also feel that people have the free will to make choices in their lives and that each of us is responsible for the consequences of those choices. All Jews, wherever they live in the world, are considered part of a global Jewish community.

The *Torah* is Judaism's most important text. It contains stories and commandments that teach about life and death. Some Jews also observe special dietary laws of *kashrut* (keeping kosher).

Some religious observances:

Rosh HaShanah

Time of Year: September. Rosh HaShanah is the Jewish New Year. During this two-day observance, Jews examine their lives, repent for wrongs committed during the previous year, and make amends. To remind people of the importance of reflection, the *shofar* (an instrument often made of a ram's horn) is blown one hundred times on each of the two days. Some also participate in a *tashlich* ceremony, where people symbolically cast off the sins of the previous year by tossing pieces of bread or another food into a body of flowing water.

Yom Kippur

Time of Year: September or October. Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, falls 10 days after Rosh HaShanah. The day's purpose is bringing about reconciliation between individuals and God. The day is marked by fasting and attending worship services at synagogues. In the 10 days leading up to the holiday, Jews engage in a process of repentance (*teshuvah*), where they ask forgiveness from—and reconcile with—anyone whom they may have offended.



HINDUISM

Hinduism is considered the world's oldest religion (traced back to as early as 10,000 B.C.), and with a billion followers, is the world's third largest religion. Hinduism includes religious, philosophical and cultural ideas and practices that began in India.

Hindus believe that there is only one supreme being called "Brahman," and that thousands of Hindu gods and goddesses represent the many aspects of Brahman. Hindus also believe in reincarnation (rebirth), the law of cause and effect, and the importance of staying on the path of righteousness. The most popular sacred Hindu texts include the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Upanishads* and the epics of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.

Some religious observances:

Diwali

Time of Year: October or November, depending on the cycle of the moon. This five-day festival celebrates the start of the Hindu New Year. Known as the "Festival of Lights," the festivities feature fireworks, small clay lamps and candles. These lights represent the victory of good over evil, and brightness over darkness.

Diwali is actually celebrated in honor of Lord Rama and his wife Sita, who returned to their kingdom of Ayodhya following Rama's and the monkey god Hanuman's defeat of the demon King Ravana and rescue of Sita from his evil clutches. Special blessings are given to Laxshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, and Ganesha, the remover of obstacles.

Ganesh Chaturthi

Time of Year: Late August or early September, depending on the cycle of the moon. The Ganesh Chaturthi festival lasts 11 days and honors the birth of the Hindu elephant-headed god, Lord Ganesha. Huge statues of Ganesha are installed in homes and on podiums. At the end of the festival, the statues are paraded through the streets and then submerged in the ocean.



TAOISM

Taoism (also spelled Daoism) is an organized religious tradition that has been developing in China, and elsewhere, for over 2,000 years. Its roots in China are believed to lie in the ancient traditions of shamans (people who were believed to have access to the spirit world). Today, Taoism has followers from a range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Taoism followers aim to align with the patterns of the natural world by increasing their sensitivity to *qi* (*chi*), which they believe to be the life-force energy within all living things. Those who achieve this alignment are thought to be on a path to immortality and have the ability to gain health and happiness for themselves and others. Taoist practices include special physical movements and using breath, attention, sound and/or visualization to activate flowing energy (*qi/chi*).

Daode Jing (*Tao Te Ching*) is Taoism's most famous scripture. Taoist beliefs are associated with the practices of meditation, yoga, Tai Chi and Kung Fu.

Some religious observances:

Tomb Sweeping Day

Time of Year: March or April. This festival's purpose is: (1) celebrating the arrival of spring, and (2) honoring deceased ancestors. Families may go on outings, sing, dance or fly kites. Another popular ritual is coloring eggs, and then breaking them open to symbolize the opening of new life. Graves of ancestors are swept clean, and the plants growing around them are trimmed. Offerings such as food, tea, chopsticks and wine are presented. Many also burn symbolic joss paper—also called “spirit money,” as a way of asking for the relatives' continued guidance.

Dragon Boat Festival (Duanwu Jie)

Time of Year: May. This festival, also called “Poet's Day,” honors Qu Yuan, a poet and minister to the Zhou emperor who died in despair, having failed to prevent war between feudal states in ancient China. People mark the anniversary of his death with activities that include dragon boat races and the eating of *zong zi* (rice balls filled with egg, beans, fruits, walnuts, sweet potato, mushrooms and/or meat).

Dragon boats are long canoes made to look like dragons and which can be powered by up to 80 rowers. A popular festival activity—along with others believed to bring health and good luck—is creating pouches filled with herbs or spices believed to ward off disease.

