

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 322 075

SO 030 122

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 TITLE Hinduism: A Unit for Junior High and Middle School Social Studies Classes.  
 SPONS AGENCY Center for International Education (ED), Washington, DC.; United States Educational Foundation in India.  
 PUB DATE 89  
 NOTE 12p.  
 PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)  
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
 DESCRIPTORS Area Studies; \*Asian History; Class Activities; Curriculum Design; Epics; Foreign Countries; Foreign Culture; Global Approach; \*History Instruction; Instructional Materials; Junior High Schools; \*Non Western Civilization; Social Studies; Visual Aids  
 IDENTIFIERS \*Hinduism; \*India

ABSTRACT

As an introduction and explanation of the historical development, major concepts, beliefs, practices, and traditions of Hinduism, this teaching unit provides a course outline for class discussion and activities for reading the classic epic, "The Ramayana." The unit requires 10 class sessions and utilizes slides, historical readings, class discussions, and filmstrips. Worksheets accompany the reading of this epic which serves as an introduction to Hinduism and some of its major concepts including: (1) karma; (2) dharma; and (3) reincarnation. (NL)

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Hinduism: A Unit For Junior High  
and Middle School Social Studies Classes

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as member of

Summer Fulbright Seminar To India, 1988

sponsored by

The United States Department of Education

and

The United States Educational Foundation in India

March, 1989

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Goals:

To present the historical development, the major concepts, beliefs, practices, and traditions of Hinduism.

To present the epic story, The Ramayana.

Objectives:

At the end of the unit, students will be able to recall and identify the following:

- \* When and where Hinduism developed and found today.
- \* The Vedas and The Upanishads as the two most important Hindu sacred writings.
- \* The significance of The Ramayana and The Mahabrahma as guides to proper and ideal ways of behaving.
- \* The significance of the gods, Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu in relationship to Brahman (The Absolute God).
- \* The Hindu concept of Afterlife, including Karma, Dharma, Reincarnation, Moksha and Caste.
- \* The three main sects of Hinduism.
- \* The significance of the sacred word, "Aum" and the image of The Dancing Shiva as symbols of Hinduism.
- \* The significance of Puja and the Sacred Thread ceremonies.
- \* The significance of Dussehra, Divali, and Holi as important Hindu holidays.

Skills to be used:

Location of Indus Valley and India on world and Asian maps.

Concept of Time in terms of B.C. and A.D.

Concept of one God taking many forms.

Note taking in outline form.

Relating in-class readings to previously presented information.

Methods of instruction:

Slides of Hindu worship and practices

Lecture, note taking

Filmstrip on Hinduism

Class readings of The Ramayana

Textbook reading

Discussion

Delivery of instruction:

- \* Introduction and explanation of the unit.
- \* Slide presentation of Hindu worship, images and practices. Students write and discuss their impressions and assumptions of Hinduism as based on viewed slides and past knowledge.
- \* Lecture on the major concepts, beliefs, practices, and traditions. Students take outline notes.
- \* Class reading of The Ramayana. Discussion and worksheet to accompany.

Evaluation of instruction:

- \* Visual or literary art project in which students must incorporate several (4-6) of the concepts and or bits of information presented in class. These would take the forms of drawings, paintings, puppets, diaramas, poems, stories, etc.
- \* Objective pencil/paper exam over information presented in class.

Length of unit: Approximately 10 days.

Outline of Major Concepts, Beliefs,  
Practices, and Traditions To Be Presented During Unit

I. Historical beginnings

- A. Where - Indus Valley area of present day Pakistan
- B. When - 2,000 - 3,000 B.C.
- C. Founder
  - 1. No one person or group of people
  - 2. Evolved over time and out of local belief systems

II. Sacred writings

- A. No single book or transcript
- B. Two main religious writings
  - 1. Vedas - set of hymns revealed to sages
  - 2. Upanishads - explanation of Brahman (World Soul)
- C. Two epic poems
  - 1. Ramayana - story of Rama, Sita, and Lakshman
  - 2. Mahabharata - story of warring families
  - 3. Both guide and teach of proper behavior for ordinary, non scholarly, people

III. Concept of God

- A. One Supreme, Absolute God
  - 1. No form, defineless
  - 2. Called Brahman
- B. Three main aspects of Brahman, personified as gods for understanding
  - 1. Brahma - The Creator aspect
  - 2. Vishnu - The Preserver aspect
  - 3. Shiva - The Destroyer aspect

- C. All three gods have female aspects (goddesses)
  - 1. Saraswati - consort of Brahma
  - 2. Lakshmi - consort of Vishnu
  - 3. Parvati - consort of Shiva
- D. Brahman (Supreme God) has thousands of other aspects
  - 1. Personified as other gods and goddesses
  - 2. As incarnations of the three main aspects

#### IV. Concept of Afterlife

##### A. Reincarnation (Samsara, Transmutation)

- 1. Soul born again and again
- 2. Eventual reunion with Brahman (Moksha)

##### B. Karma

- 1. Quality of deeds in life brings corresponding consequences both in this life and next
- 2. Quality of next life greatly effected by deeds in this life
- 3. Three aspects or stages of Karma
  - a. Physical - body and environment born into; unalterable; accumulation of all past deeds.
  - b. Personality characteristics - changeable
  - c. Present and future life - Totally in our control, of our free will, result of deeds in this life

##### C. Dharma

- 1. Duties to be followed in this life
- 2. In respect to self, stage in life, caste and/or job
- 3. Following Dharma helps break cycle of rebirths

D. Yogas - also ways to break cycle and reunite with God

1. Bahkti Yoga - Love and devotion
2. Karma Yoga - Right action
3. Jnana Yoga - Wisdom

E. Caste

1. Social division or class one is born into
2. Four major castes
  - a. Brahmins - priests
  - b. Kshatriays - rulers and warriors
  - c. Vaishyas - traders and craftsmen
  - d. Shudras - servants and laborers
3. Jati
  - a. smaller caste group
  - b. determines job and influence

V. Symbols of Hinduism

A. "Aum" or "Om"

1. Word that represents the totality of the universe
2. Written in Sanskrit

B. Dancing Shiva

1. Depicts cosmic energy of the Universe
2. Each symbol represents a universal aspect

VI. Ceremonies

A. Puja

1. Daily offering of prayers to a deity
2. Includes offering of flowers, food, etc. to deity



**B. Sacred Thread Ceremony**

1. Initiation ceremony for boys into manhood
2. Only for boys of top three castes
3. Long loop of thread placed over left shoulder, under right arm. Never to be removed.

**VII. Special Holidays****A. Dussehra**

1. Celebration of Good over Evil
2. Lasts ten days
3. Celebration varies from area to area

**B. Divali**

1. Celebrates Rama's return to his kingdom
2. Festival of Lights, as candles are kept lit

**VIII. Main Sects**

- A: Vishnu worship emphasized - Vaishana
- B. Shiva worship emphasized - Shaiva
- C. Devi/Shakti worship emphasized - Shakta

Worksheet To Accompany Reading of The Ramayana

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_

As we read The Ramayana in class, identify these characters:

Dasharatha -

Kaikeya -

Rama -

Lakshmana -

Sita -

Ravana -

Hanuman -

The Ramayana teaches Indians the ideal behavior for family members and others in society. As we read, notice and record examples the following:

Ideal behavior for rulers.

Ideal behavior for fathers.

Ideal behavior for sons

Ideal behavior for brothers.

Ideal behavior for wives.

Dharma is a major concept of Hinduism. Give three examples from the story where a character did something because of his or her belief in Dharama.

Give character name, what they did, and why that was part of their Dharama.

1.

2.

3.

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What was Rama's response towards Sita once he had rescued her from Ravana?

Why do you think he responded and acted in that way?

What was Sita's response to Rama's response?

Why do you think she responded that way?

If there was one, overriding message to be found in The Ramayana, what would you say it was?

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