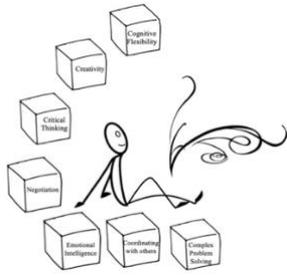


Scaffolding International Religion Day (Higher Education)



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theory behind scaffold...

International Religion Day is celebrated every year on the 3rd Sunday of January. The aim is to reconsider the origins and utility of religion in the world today. International World Religion Day began in 1947 in Portland, Maine by Firuz Kazamzadeh, whose desire it was to spread awareness and knowledge of the thousands of religions practiced all over the world, and so create tolerance and understanding between people of all faiths.

This scaffold helps educators to address the focus of the day. It encourages students to separate the dogma of religions from the intention, to recognise traditional practices common in many religion (in other words, see the similarities), and to negotiate with their classmates the relevance (or irrelevance) of religions in the present.

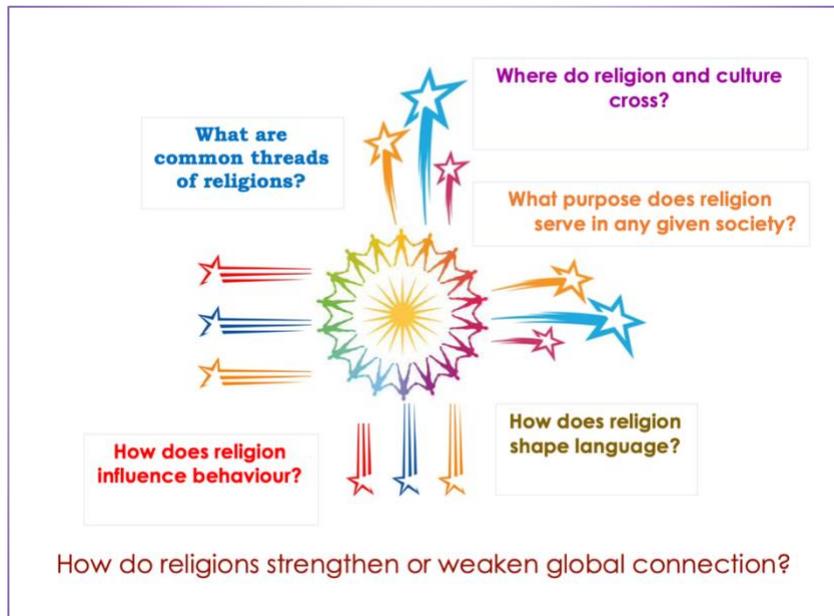
For teachers working in religiously volatile areas, this can be a delicate dance, and so will need to evaluate the high- or low-impact it may have on the community in question. However, religion is only one of many sensitive subject areas: war, animal rights, euthanasia, stem cell research being among the many others. If we don't give our students the opportunity to consider these topics through structured critical thinking strategies, they may not acquire a sufficiently incisive understanding of different perspectives of religion and beliefs. This might end up meaning that their understanding of the impact of these issues on people's decision-making is often distorted ([Ofsted, 2010, 31](#)).

For those of you willing, here are the steps to introduce the subject conscientiously and respectfully to your students.

step by step...

1. Students use the [template](#) to consider, negotiate and answer the following questions:

What are common threads of religions?
What purpose does religion serve in any given society?
Where does religion and culture cross?
How much does religion shape language?
How much does religion influence behaviour?
How do religions strengthen or weaken global connection?
If you could choose one word to represent your religion, what would it be?



2. In groups, students choose 5 religions from the list at the site: and its sister page: [Big Religion Chart](#). Using a Venn Diagram or any other type of graphic organiser to show the similarities and differences between them.

BIGRELIGIONCHART						
RELIGIONFACTS Just the facts on religion.				www.religionfacts.com		
Belief & Followers	Origins & History	God(s) & Universe	Human Situation & Life Purpose	Afterlife	Practices	Texts
Aladura Followers: 1 million	Various prophet-healing churches founded since c.1918, West Nigeria.	Generally monotheistic; a mix of Anglican, Pentecostal and traditional African beliefs.	Strong emphasis on healing and salvation in this life through prayer, fasting and other rituals.	Not stressed; views vary.	Spiritual healing is central. Mix of Anglican and African rituals; a prophet plays key role.	None
Asatru Followers: unknown	Revival of Norse and Germanic paganism, from 1970s Scandinavia and USA.	Polytheistic, Norse gods and goddesses, Norse creation myths.	Salvation or redemption not emphasized. Fatalistic view of universe.	Valhalla (heaven) for death in battle; Hel (peaceful place) for most; Hlhel (hell) for the very evil.	Sacrifice of food or drink, toast to the gods, shamanism (atypical), celebration of solstice holidays. None Noble Virtues is moral code.	Eddas (Norse epics); the Hávamal (proverbs attributed to Odin)
Atheism Followers: 1.1 billion (the figure includes agnostic and non-religious, which tend to be grouped in surveys)	Appears throughout history (including ancient Greek philosophy), but especially after the Enlightenment (19th cent).	There is no God or divine being. Beliefs about the universe usually based on latest scientific findings.	Since there is no afterlife, this life is of great importance. Only humans can help themselves and each other solve the world's problems.	none	none	Key works include those by Marx, Freud, Feuerbach and Voltaire. Notable modern authors include Richard Dawkins and Carl Sagan.

The "Big Religion Chart" is the intellectual property of www.religionfacts.com. It may not be sold or reproduced outside the parameters set forth in the purchasing agreement.

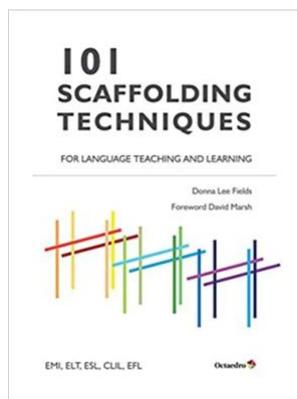
3. Students read about the role of women in religion at [Open Learn](#) and consider dictates about women and virginity that are virtually universal in religions, the origins of these practices, and whether they have or ever had validity.

4. *Formative Assessment:* Groups share the similarities between the religions they have studied, their conclusions and answer the question:

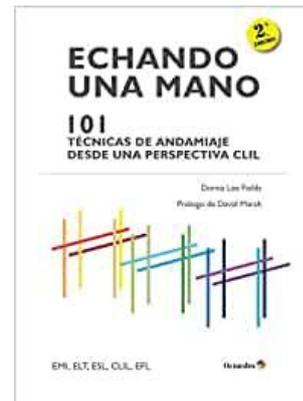
How might the world be different - economically, socially and politically - if world leaders were more authentically tolerant of all religions, and egalitarian regarding gender.

5. Students need to give a theoretical example of how at least one country would be changed if led by this axiom.
6. *Reflection:* Students view the graphic organiser created by their classmates and write 100-150 words on the similarities and differences that they recognise from their own.

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