

GENESIS: THE BEGINNINGS OF THREE WORLD RELIGIONS

Individual activity

1) Research

- a) Abraham is the Jewish name for the prophet and Ibrahim is the Muslim name. Compare and contrast the two stories.
- b) Abraham was born at a time when people did not believe in one God. They were pagans who worshipped the forces of nature. Can you find examples of any ancient or modern pagan faiths? What beliefs are these faiths based on?
- c) Choose a prophet you like and find out more about his life. What were some of the difficulties he had to face?
- d) The Four Gospels, chronicle the life of Jesus. Compare and contrast the styles of the four different authors. Which stories are contained in all four readings and which ones are missing in some of the Gospels?
- e) Go to www.wikipedia.com and search for entries on Prophet Muhammad. What are some of the things you did not know?

2) Comprehension

- a) Research the following questions using the provided texts and share your responses.
- b) Why did Abraham/Ibrahim believe that the forces of nature are not the Supreme God?
- c) Imagine that you are Abraham/Ibrahim. All the people around you are pagans and you are the only person who believes in one God. How would you feel? Have you ever had to stand alone for your beliefs? Describe the situation and how you felt. What did you do?
- d) In your class, discuss as a group what sort of person a prophet has to be. Review the lives of Jesus, and Muhammad. Discuss what kind of personality they had. Do you think these character traits are good ones to imitate?
- e) Christians call Jesus the human face of God. Is this distinctive truth claim a barrier to dialogue with other people of faith, or an invitation?
- f) The region where Jesus lived was under the governance of the Roman Empire. How did that affect the Jewish inhabitants' lives in terms of their religious worship, ownership of property, civil laws, etc. Research and write a short essay on this topic.
- g) Christian history is as bloody as any other religious history, but can this violence

be traced back to Jesus himself? What was Jesus' true message? Read the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament and use quotations from it in your answer.

- h) Why was Prophet Muhammad raised by his uncle?
- i) What was unconventional about Khadijah's and Muhammad's marriage?
- j) What was Aishah famous for?
- k) Aishah said that prophet Muhammad was "the walking Quran". What do you think she meant by that?

3) **Group Activity**

Jerusalem is an important city for Jews, Christians and Muslims. In groups of threes (each one representing one particular religion), do some research on the religious history of the city. Prepare and give a five-minute oral presentation on Jerusalem for the other two members of your group.

Two websites provide excellent information on multi-faith issues:

www.racismnoway.com and www.humanrights.gov.au.

HOW WE PRAY: THE RHYTHMS AND RITUALS OF MUSLIM, JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN PRAYER

Individual activity

1) **Research**

- a) Prayer is one of the five pillars of Islam. Consulting other background information, find out what the other pillars are.
- b) Contact the clergy of your local mosque, church, and synagogue and find out if you could visit to observe a prayer service. If appropriate, ask them to talk with you beforehand about the rituals associated with the prayer service. What similarities and differences are there in the prayer rituals for Christians, Jews, and Muslims?

2) **Comprehension**

- a) How many times do Muslims pray each day?
- b) At what time do Muslims pray for the first time each day?
- c) At what time do Jews pray for the first time each day?
- d) On what day of the week do Christians attend prayer service?
- e) Name some of the paradoxical characteristics of Jewish prayer.
- f) Why is prayer important to Jews, Christians, and Muslims?
- g) What does the term, *communio* mean?
- h) What are the two meanings of the word *salat*?
- i) What is the English translation for the word *Qibla*?
- j) What do Jewish and Muslim people call the intense concentration during prayer?
- k) What is the Liturgy of the word?
- l) What is the Liturgy of the Hours? What is its Jewish connection?
- m) What is the *Athan*?

3) **Pair Activity**

- a) Jews affirm the unity of God in the prayer known as the *Shema*. Muslims declare their allegiance to God in the *Kalimah*. Christians affirm their belief in one God in “The Lord’s Prayer.” Search the Internet or use reference books to find these three prayers and write them down. *Note the similarities among the three prayers.*
- b) Why do Muslims face Makkah when they pray?
- c) Why do Jews face Jerusalem when they pray?
- d) The Garden of Gethsemane is a sacred site to Christians. Why?

4) **Group Activity**

Discuss why you think prayer is important for many people? What might be the benefits of prayer? Is prayer important to you? How do you practice peacefulness in your life?

**DIETARY LAWS:
COMMONALITIES AND DIFFERENCES**

Individual activity

1) **Research**

a) Visit or invite to your school a halal and a kosher butcher and find out what requirements need to be met for meat to be classified halal or kosher?

Or

a) Visit the following websites to answer the above question:

i) For information on kashrut laws, visit: www.ka.org.au.

ii) For information on Halal laws, visit: www.halalauthority.org

iii) Or www.halalhelpline.org.

iv) For further information on halal products, ring the toll free number for the Halal Helpline: 1300 307 337.

b) Check out the foods you have at home. What ingredients do they contain? Classify these foods as halal or kosher or neither. Hint: Tinned fish and other processed foods will be clearly marked with a Ka or kosher label or a halal label.

c) What is the significance of following dietary laws for many Jews and Muslims?

d) Do you follow any dietary practices? Do Christians have any specific dietary practices, excluding foods or beverages?

2) **Comprehension**

a) Define the words “halal” and “haram”

b) What is the meaning of the word “kashrut?”

c) What is a shochet?

d) Name some of the foods, including animals that are both halal and kosher.

e) Name animals that are forbidden in both religions.

f) List foods that are halal but not kosher and vice versa

g) Follow the development of fasting and asceticism in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. An investigation into the attitudes of the Eastern and Western traditions to a strict adherence to dietary regulations could also yield a useful insight into the differences in spiritualities of each tradition

h) Examine the voluntary nature of fasting of the non-Orthodox, non-Catholic Christian Churches in contrast to Islamic and Jewish dietary practices in a short essay.

i) Research the fasting practices of the three religions.

- j) Ask the students which dietary or fasting practices they follow in their religions. Also, speculate on which dietary regulations of the other faiths they might voluntarily be prepared to undertake.

3) **Group activity**

Cook the following recipes, which are both kosher and halal and enjoy a class feast.

Chicken Soup and Matzah Balls

Chicken soup is often regarded as “Jewish penicillin” because it is often made for sick people. Although its medicinal qualities are still unproven, it is light, nourishing and easily digestible. Matzah balls are light dumplings that are often served during the Jewish holiday feast of Passover. The following recipes were provided by Lorre Zuckerman.

Chicken Soup

1 large pot

9 Chicken legs

4 stalks celery sliced (1 cm)

4 large carrots sliced (1 cm)

Massel chicken stock cubes

Salt, as needed

Put the chicken legs in the pot and cover with water and bring to the boil along with carrots and celery. When boiling, put in prepared matza balls. Simmer for 1 ½ hours. Add salt and Massel chicken stock cubes as needed. Before serving, discard chicken parts and use for another recipe, such as a risotto the next day.

Matzah Balls

2 dessertspoons margarine

2 eggs

Mix together with a fork

5/8 to ¾ cup fine matza meal.

Fold and stir together to make matzah meal. Form balls and put in soup. Makes 12-15 balls

Baklava

Baklava is a delicious pastry that is popular throughout the Middle East. These rich pastries are usually filled with blanched almonds. This recipe was provided by Lynette Ninio.

Pastry

500 grams Filo pastry

180 grams unsalted margarine, melted (butter is more traditional, but cannot be used when meat dishes are also being served)

375 grams ground or finely chopped nuts, pistachios, walnuts or almonds

Syrup

500 grams sugar

300 ml water

2 tablespoons lemon juice

Use a large deep baking dish and brush the base and sides with melted margarine. Take half the filo sheets and layer them one at a time in the dish, brushing each layer with melted butter and overlapping where necessary. Spread the ground nuts evenly over this base. Cover with the remaining sheets of filo, again one at a time and brushing with melted margarine. Cut diagonally with a sharp knife into lozenge shapes.

Prepare the syrup—dissolve the sugar in the water and lemon juice and simmer until it thickens a little (enough to coat the back of a spoon). Allow to cool and chill in the refrigerator.

Bake the baklava in a moderate oven for approximately 45 minutes, increasing the heat for the last 10-15 minutes, if necessary. The baklava will be puffed and light golden in colour.

Remove the baklava from the oven and quickly pour the cold syrup over the hot baklava. When it is cold and ready to serve, re-cut along the original lines and place pieces on a serving plate.

HOLY BOOKS COMMONALITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Individual activity

1) Research

- a) What makes a particular text holy for each faith?
- b) Which particular texts are held in common by Jews, Christians, and Muslims and what is their content?
- c) What status does each faith give to its sacred texts?
- d) How is each text used in community worship?
- e) How is each holy text interpreted for today's situation? Who or what is the authority?
- f) What moral and ethical principles do these texts hold in common?

2) Comprehension

- a) What is the original source document of Judaism? What is the holiest book for Christians? What is the most sacred text for Muslims?
- b) What is the Talmud? What are the Hadiths?
- c) What is the Jewish term for Old Testament.
- d) What are the Apocrypha? Its texts are of significance to which two faiths?
- e) The Quran refers to Jews and Christians as, "_____." Why?
- f) Draw a timeline tracing the development of Jewish, Christian and Muslim texts
- g) What is the Midrash? Give an example of what Midrash does
- h) Why does the Bible tell stories that are not palatable to modern tastes?
- i) Do Christians think the Bible is a divine or a human book?
- j) What does Reverend Henderson believe is the central theme of the Bible?
- k) Check out the website on: The Responsa Project. Write a short response of your own on the permissibility of cosmetic surgery.
- l) The Quran offers guidance in ethical, legal and ritual matters. Name several of them.

3) Group Activity

- a) Have in your group a printed copy of each of the Torah and Talmud, the Holy Bible, and the Holy Quran.
 - i) How are each of these books presented? E.g. layout, artwork, size, print style.

- ii) What language is each one written in?
 - iii) How have they changed in the experience of group members?
 - iv) Have you ever held in your hands a copy of the holy book of the other two faiths?
- b) Discuss in your group:
- i) What in these books brings us together? What in these books divides us?
 - ii) How have you heard these books used to create peace? How have you heard them used to create division?
 - iii) What place do our holy books have in interfaith dialogue and discussion?

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

Individual activity

1. Research

a) **Jewish Holidays**

- i) Draw a chart of the year showing the four seasons in the Northern and Southern hemisphere and chart the Jewish festivals for each season.
- ii) Try some of the foods associated with the various festivals – apples and honey, matza (will need to be purchased), cheese cake (dairy food) etc
- iii) Draw a time-line of Jewish History and mark on it the events that have given rise to particular festivals
- iv) Research the story of Passover and write an essay about it. What are the links between Passover and the Last Supper in Christianity?
- v) Compare and contrast the Jewish New Year observances to the secular New Year celebrations.

b) **Muslim Holidays**

- i) With the help of a personal calendar or the internet, try to find out the name of the current Muslim lunar month.
- ii) Go to www.islamicity.com and work out when the next month of Ramadan starts.

c) **Christian Holidays**

- i) What are the pre-Christian origins of Easter and Pentecost?
- ii) What do the words 'Lent' and 'Epiphany' mean?
- iii) What is involved in the 'Season of Creation' which Australian Christians have been developing?

2) Comprehension

- a) Which are the two greatest Christian festivals, and which is the most important?
- b) Which special festival days can you think of that are marked by churches known to you?
- c) What is important for Christians about Christmas?

- d) Why is Good Friday regarded as 'Good'?
- e) Why is Easter Day at the heart of Christian Faith?
- f) How do Muslims celebrate the end of Ramadan?
- g) Which Prophet's submission to God is celebrated during Eid-ul-Adha?
- h) What happens to the meat of the sheep that is slaughtered?
- i) Why do pilgrims throw stones at the devil during hajj?

3) **Group Activity**

- a) In your class, discuss your attitudes towards fasting. How do you feel about it? Have you ever fasted? If possible, invite a Muslim student to speak about their personal experiences with fasting to you.
- b) Find out more about one or more of the following: special dates associated with Virgin Mary, All Saints Day, Orthodox Church festivals.
- c) Ask a cross-section of Australians what they think Christmas is about, and compare this with what Christians think is important.
- d) Find out more about one or more of the following dates in the Australian Christian Year: Aboriginal and Islander Sunday, Refugee and Migrant Sunday, Social Justice Sunday.
- e) Calculate the date of Easter be in 2010 for the Western and Eastern Orthodox churches. (try using the Astronomical Society of South Australia's website or other resources).
- f) Use the internet or other sources to find the dates of the Jewish festivals for the current year and make a note of those days as they occur throughout the year.
- g) Find out which other religions observe fasts. You can go to www.beliefnet.com to research the practices of other religions. You can also check the entries on fasting in Wikipedia (<http://www.wikipedia.org>). If you feel like it, you can also post an entry on fasting on Wikipedia.

LIFE CYCLE RITUALS

Individual activity

1) Research

- a) In the Quran, Chapter 22, Verse 5 God describes how each human being is created. With the help of a biology book, check if this description corresponds to how modern science explains conception and fetal development.
- b) Rabbi Engel states that the divine soul wants to inhabit a physical body. Research what different religions say about the relationship between soul and body. Which role does the soul play in Western psychology?
- c) Reverend Rod Bower states that Christian groups, some more harshly than others, frown on divorce. Research the process for divorce in Christianity, particularly for Roman Catholics, Islam and Judaism. How these processes compare and contrast with state laws concerning divorce?

2) Comprehension

- a) What is the Muslim term for “welcoming consecration”?
- b) What is the English translation for the term “Nikah”?
- c) Does Christianity have an infant rite of passage like Judaism and Islam?
- d) What does the word “baptism” mean?
- e) Who celebrates Bar Mitzvah and who Bat Mitzvah?
- f) What is a Ketubah?
- g) Why do Muslims recite the call to prayer into the baby’s ears?
- h) Why do Jews sing prayers to the new born baby?
- i) Why do Muslims donate money and food after the birth of a baby?
- j) How do Jewish parents decide on a name?
- k) Do all Christian traditions have an adolescent rite of passage? What do Catholics call this ritual and at what age does it occur? Visit the internet to find the answer.
- l) Why do some reformed churches not have confirmation?
- m) Describe some of the changes that happen at puberty from the Islamic perspective.
- n) What changes for Jewish children when they reach the age of maturity?
- o) Is Christian marriage symbolic of anything else?
- p) According to Islam, what constitutes an ideal marriage?
- q) According to Judaism, what constitutes an ideal marriage?

r) How is intimacy in marriage described in the New Testament?

3) Individual Activity

Choose one of the life cycle events: birth, name giving, circumcision, coming of age, or marriage. Write about it from a Christian, a Jewish and a Muslim perspective, noting the similarities and differences.

4) Group Activity

a) In your class, discuss which rituals appeal to you, which ones don't. Give reasons for your opinions. Do you have similar customs or do you know of other cultures which practice interesting rites of passage? How do you feel about the similar perspective the speakers share in terms of the importance of God in all aspects of life? Which parts of their talks will leave a lasting impression on you?

b) Personal growth activity

Imam Yousuf noted in his article that each baby is born with a special gift. To help us remember our unique attributes, we suggest the following activity:

- i) Each student has to bring a hat or cap to school, big enough to hold many pieces of paper.
- ii) Now each student writes on a piece of paper something positive about each other student. You might write down things like: "Sarah, you are very kind. I also like your strength of character." or: "Joseph, you are always helpful and have integrity."
- iii) Write down attributes, character traits, and things you appreciate about each person. For instance, if you have 25 students in your class, you need to write 25 statements.
- iv) Only mention the most positive things. Even someone whom you do not like very much has certain positive characteristics worth mentioning. Do not write anything negative!
- v) Without signing your piece of paper, put it in the other students' hats.
- vi) Now each student has time to read what the others have written down as her or his personal gifts. Students might like to share openly or in writing how this exercise affected them.

DEATH AND THE AFTERLIFE

Individual activity

Comprehension

- a) What is the 'Confession of Faith' in Islam?
- b) Outline the four stages of life the human beings go through according to Islam.
- c) In trying to understand death whose story do Christians look to?
- d) What is the Jewish funeral home called?
- e) What do Muslim's believe regarding death? What do Christians believe? What do Jews believe?
- f) Islam speaks of one unforgivable sin. Explain?
- g) Describe the stages of mourning in Christianity, Judaism and Islam.
- h) How does New Testament teaching see the human person, as a separate spirit and body or differently?
- i) What is the Jewish memorial prayer called?
- j) How will people be grouped on Judgment Day in Islam? What is the Christian belief in a final Judgment Day? Do Jews have similar beliefs?
- k) According to Christian doctrine, is resurrection just about people or does it involve the whole creation?
- l) Describe the *Siraat* and the trip over it.
- m) What qualities and values in Christian teaching about the way we live now are important for Christian thinking about the afterlife?
- n) In Judaism, what are the Hebrew names for Heaven and Hell?
- o) Why don't Muslims have tombstones at their graves?
- p) How are Jews buried?
- q) What are the three common elements of the Christian funeral service?

2) Writing

According to the three Abrahamic faiths, life is infinitely precious. Knowing that we will die one day helps us remember that our time on earth is limited. Write an essay about your aims in life. When your time comes to die, how would you like to be as a person? What would you like to have achieved? What do you think will happen to you after your death? In how far will your life on earth have an influence on your life after death?

3) Group Activity

- a) Discuss your own attitudes towards aging, death and life after death. Have you experienced death in your family? How do you feel about growing old? How have the talks changed your opinions about these matters?
- b) Some religions believe in reincarnation. Research one of these religions and write about their beliefs. How do you feel about the idea of reincarnation? Would you like to come back again? Is so, why?
- c) Work in a group to write about the deceased for a Muslim, a Jewish and a Christian funeral service. Decide who will read the three speeches. Afterwards, re-read the talks and fill-in the table below with answers in keywords.

Beliefs and attitudes	Judaism	Islam	Christianity
Respect towards elderly people			
Life after death			
Immortality of the soul			