

Religion in Japan

Purpose:

This lesson will enable students to clarify understandings of Japan's two main religions.

Target Grade Levels: 6-7

Essential Questions:

1. What are the two main religions practiced in Japan today?
2. How did each of these religions come to be in Japan?
3. What percentage of the population today practices each religion?
4. How do the Japanese practice these religions in everyday life?

Rationale:

More conflicts have been fought in the world over differences in religions than for any other reason. Tolerance is gained through understanding; we can better understand a people if we understand their religious teachings.

Materials:

- Internet Access
- Reference books

Activities:

1. Introduce the lesson by asking the students the following question: "What is the role of religion in a culture?" Have them discuss the role of religion in the United States, or any other culture with which they may be familiar.
2. Lead into the next activity by stating "Let's see what the role of religion is in Japan." Working in pairs or in collaborative groups, have the students use internet access and/or reference books to answer the essential questions. Using two large sheets of paper to mount on the wall or chalkboard, assign a student scribe to record information about each of the religions as each group reports their findings to the whole class.
3. Have the students report their findings to the class.

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4. In order to practice writing extended-response questions as found on the state proficiency tests, during the next class period, assign each student to write individual responses to each of the essential questions

Assessment:

Student feedback to the whole group. Students write extended-response questions for each of the essential questions.

Grade Adaptation:

Target grade for this lesson is 6-7th grades. In order to modify for higher grades, address the following questions:

1. What are the top two primary religions practiced in the United States today, along with the percentage of population professing to practice each religion?
2. What are the major differences in the practice of these two religions in the United States, as compared to the two main religions practiced in Japan?
3. What are the major similarities in each of these religions?
4. What guarantees the right of religious freedom to the people in both the United States and Japan?
5. Why do you think less than 1% of the Japanese population practice Christianity?

Relationship to Social Studies Standards:

Grades 6-8, People in Societies, Benchmark A

Compare cultural practices, products and perspectives of past civilizations in order to understand commonality and diversity of cultures.

This lesson was developed by Marlene Henry, teacher, Northwood Elementary School, Northmont City Schools, Ohio.

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Teacher Information

In ancient times, the Japanese believed that all natural phenomena, animals, and plants possessed kami, or divine power. This belief came to be known as Shinto and was established as an official religion after Buddhism and Confucianism were introduced to Japan from the Asian continent. Buddhism came to Japan from the mainland Asia in the sixth century. Its teachings were embraced by the rulers of the time and then spread to the general public during the Heian period (794-1192) and the Kamakura period (1192-1338). Many Japanese practice both Shinto and Buddhism. Approximately 52% of the Japanese profess to practice Shintoism, 47% practice Buddhism, with a combined membership of both religions as approximately 194,000,000, which is about 54 percent more than the total population of Japan. Christianity is practiced by less than 1% of all Japanese. In the religious feelings of most Japanese, Shinto and Buddhism peacefully coexist rather than conflict. For the average person, however, religious affiliation does not translate into regular worship or attendance. Most people visit shrines and temples as part of annual events and special rituals marking life passages.

On New Year's eve the ringing of Buddhist temple bells fills the air. On New Year's Day, with the first shrine or temple visit of the new year (hatsumode), people throng to both Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples to pray for good fortune in the coming year. During the spring and autumn equinoxes and also Bon festival (in July or August), families perform Buddhist memorial services for their ancestors. Rituals commemorating the stages in an individual's life include the first shrine visit of a newborn baby (miyamairi), the Shichi-go-san Festival shrine visit of three- and five-year old boys and three- and seven-year-old girls, a Shinto wedding ceremony, and a Buddhist funeral. Also through the year, towns and villages hold lively Shinto festivals, where participants carry portable shrines around on their shoulders and tow floats through the city streets.

In Japan freedom of religion is guaranteed to all under the Constitution, Article 20 of which states that "No religious organization shall receive any privileges from the State, nor exercise any political authority. No person shall be compelled to take part in any religious act, celebration, rite or practice. The

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State and its organs shall refrain from religious education or any other religious activity."

References:

1. <http://www.jinjapan.org/kidsweb/japan/d/q9.html>
2. <http://www.jinjapan.org/access/religion/today.html>
3. <http://www.jinjapan.org/today/culture/culture1.html#rac>