

Freedom of Religion: An American Attribute

By

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Narrative

Each morning at 8:55 a.m., I remind (and sometimes prod) my eighth grade students to stand for the pledge. All comply. The loudest hush down their conversation. The latecomers stand still at the doorway. A few even hook their thumbs over a shirt button. But most flop back down into their seats just as the phrase "with liberty and justice for all" comes crackling over the loudspeaker. I always stand alertly facing the flag, and recite the pledge with my hand over my heart along with our morning reader. The students think that I am corny, and some think no doubt that I am crazy, to insist that they too recite the pledge. I speculate for their reasons: Rote recitation since their kinder years has rendered the pledge a meaningless statement. Their savvy adolescence has perceived the pledge as a means toward social conformity against which their hormonal throes and burgeoning identities rage. They are collectively lazy. I've suggested my musings to them and the complex response I received actually credits their public education to date. "It's got the word "GOD" in it, Mr. Chmiel. And in case you haven't noticed this is a public school. You know, it's like the separation of church and state. You can't talk about God here."

As a public educator, I know what they mean. I've purged from my own speaking that which would cue my own deeply held religious beliefs. I'm certain to wish the students a "Happy New Year", or if I'm feeling daring, I urge students to "have a Holy Holiday," as they depart for winter break. I perceive it as my role to model behavior that promotes no one religion and conveys respect and inclusion for all of the religious beliefs and practices that are represented in an American Public High School. To accomplish this task I've done what most educators have done: I've opted to avoid the issue. And the students---not for laziness, or growing pains, or boredom-- have seemingly done the same thing. What a good job we've done!

But as a social studies teacher I can't avoid the issue. I can't omit a discussion of the culturally relevant and historically significant role that religion and religious practice has had on our world. Religion, like language, like economics, like politics, like environment, is part of the human complex of experiences that defines and shapes our social responses to each other. Its impact cannot be understated, but it is often simply omitted from a public school curriculum for fear of crossing THAT line. Teachers fear that discussing with knowledge the impact of a religious belief or practice with students is tantamount to promoting that religion to students. Worse, teachers fear that any conclusions--positive or negative-- that are drawn from that discussion are certain to be found offensive to someone somewhere with a lawyer.

This clearly leaves a void in a student's education and the impression that religious belief never existed; that religious belief did not and does not motivate mankind to structure families and societies, to move across continents and oceans, to raise architecture, to raise war or to raise government. It leaves a void in place of explaining that religious belief itself prompted the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment to state "Congress shall make no law to promote or establish religion." Without developing a way to deal sensibly with a teachers' fear of offending a religious practice, we are left with a void in place of explaining that our system of Government so values the freedom of religion in order to highlight that religion itself (even in its absence) is an integral and arguably necessary part of our social life as Americans.

So, thus motivated to take my students beyond statements of "You know, it's like the separation of church and state." I offer the following unit that makes it possible it to talk about God here. The approach I take is divided into two major sections. Part One, called *Religion Before the Revolution*, looks at the various religious beliefs

and practices as it influenced colonial America to rebel against the English Crown. Part Two, *The Religions of the World Arrive*, looks at how the constitutional concept of the freedom of religion expands to include non-Protestant forms of Christianity.

In Lesson One, *I Pledge Allegiance*, start out picking apart the Pledge of Allegiance to introduce the concept of religion as a social and cultural influence upon the development of the United States and to establish some sensible ground rules for discussing various religious beliefs and practices within a school setting. I recommend that a teacher interested in adapting this curriculum for their own use read Brief Overview of Religion in School by Nicholar Piediscalze, for the suggestions he makes regarding this healthy classroom environment.

Lesson Two, called *Religious Revolutionaries*, introduces vocabulary and concepts related to the religious beliefs of the white colonials, and hopes to categorize the two major Protestant sects that held the most influence. Basically, a student should understand that the Anglican tradition stressed liturgy and hierarchy to impose a sense of awe and thus servility to God and King. The Reformist stressed a rapturous conversion experience in which there stood no mediator between the individual and God. This information sets up the possibility for later analysis.

Lesson Three, *The First Great Awakening*, traces the upsurge in religious piety of the 1730-1770's and the impact that it had upon both religious practice and civil colonial government. Most notable here is the establishment of the Methodist Church which attempted to reform the traditional Anglican approach by incorporating not only Calvinistic theology, but also the dramatic, theatrical style of sermonizing common among the evangelical sects. Though the Methodists seemingly offered a compromise, *The First Great Awakening* nonetheless sharply polarized the American Colonies as civil government was called upon to support one sect or another as the "true Christianity."

Lesson Four, *Time Makes More Converts than Reason*, continues to trace the influence of the *First Great Awakening* on the political realities of the American Colonies. This time we look at selections from Thomas Paine's Common Sense to note that it functions as a secular sermon. The most popular and successful piece of propaganda literature of its day, Paine uses the same rhetorical tactics of an evangelical preacher to stir a fervor of rebellion.

Lesson Five, *A holy, Happy People*, looks at how the Congress of the Confederation handled the issue of religion. Fresh from a military victory cast a la Paine with biblical overtones, Americans thought of themselves as a new chosen people in a new promised land. A covenant theology guided this congress to appoint chaplains, publish the Bible and grant public land to promote Christianity among the Indian tribes. Though the official stance of the Congress was nondenominational and non polemic, this middle road nevertheless took the stand that public prosperity depended on the vitality of its religion.

Lesson Six , *We, the People, in order to form a more perfect union*, begins PART TWO of the unit. Here the basic constitutional right of the first amendment is presented and analyzed. This information curiously contrasts with how the concept of religious freedom was actually practiced in the early 1800's. Thomas Jefferson's own recommendation about public schools shows well the brewing conflicts to come. He believed that public schools should combine aspects of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the best elements of other world religions. For him this served a simple function: to inculcate youth in a national democratic faith and morality to foster national unity and well being.

Lesson Seven, *The church--our refuge, our strength, our only dry place*, begins to look at the effect of large groups of people entering the United States mainstream from ethnic and religious backgrounds radically different from the Pan Protestant majority. In the 1840's, Irish Catholic immigrants arrived en masse with fiercely held religious beliefs -- beliefs they held in the face of English Oppression for hundreds of years. Upon

arrival, however, this group perceived the public schools as a threat to their own belief system and eventually established their own parochial schools as means of protecting and preserving their identity.

Lesson Eight, *If I were a rich man*, examines the experience of European Jews who fled religious and social persecution to the United States on the promise of the First Amendment.

Lesson Nine, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot, Coming Forth to Carry Me Home*, determines the effect and use of religious spirituals among enslaved African Americans in the early 1800's by examining the overt and covert messages conveyed in these songs. Students here are exposed to both the songs themselves as well as the perceptive commentary of Frederick Douglass.

Lesson Ten, *A divine revelation and tenet of the church*, wraps up the unit by examining the early experiences of the Church of the Latter Day Saints, more commonly know as the Mormons, to judge if the United States, while not having the power to establish religion, has the constitutional power to prohibit religious practice. Early Mormons, of course, practiced polygamy as allowed by their church, but outlawed by U.S. federal law under the Edmund-Tucker Act of 1887. The Mormons challenged the constitutionality of the law. The students act as members of the Supreme Court, and as lawyers who must make their persuasive arguments for each side.

For a grand finale, students must relate the experiences of three of the groups they have studied. They must choose these groups to best argue for or against continuing the founding father's concept of freedom of religion.

For this original concept of the freedom of religion has certainly evolved in our country's history. At first a prudent political move to keep squabbling states united, religious freedom also promoted a desired national moral character. But as differing groups came to the United States to practice their religion freely, the first amendment became a means to codify respect among a glowingly diverse citizenry. Even now, as students will tell us, the concept of the freedom of religion has famously transformed into the freedom from religion--the logical conclusion for a modern pluralistic society. The Freedom of Religion is clearly an American attribute. And your students success can be measured beyond the pencil and paper tests as they bring their own varied religious beliefs confidently into full public discussion and resist the antidisestablishmentarianism would limit all peoples concept of God. This is their right as an American, and our responsibility as social studies teachers.

8th Grade Citizenship Standards

The following 8th Grade Citizenship Standards have been integrated into this curriculum:

1. All students will demonstrate an understanding of major events, cultures, groups, and individuals in the historical development of the United States and describe the patterns of historical development.
2. All students demonstrate understanding of the themes and patterns of geography, know the location of major bodies of water and landmasses and describe the relationships between geography and historical, economic and cultural development of the United States.
3. All students describe the development and operations of economic, political, legal and governmental systems in the United States and assess their own relationship to those systems.
4. All students examine and evaluate problems facing citizens of the United States by incorporating concepts and methods of inquiry of the various social sciences.

5. All students develop and defend a position on current issues confronting the United States conducting research, analyzing alternatives, organizing evidence and arguments, and making oral presentations.
6. All students explain basic economic concepts and development and operation of the economic system in the United States and make informed decisions about economic issues.
7. All students demonstrate their skills in communicating, negotiating, and cooperating with others.
8. All students demonstrate they can work effectively with others.
9. All students demonstrate an understanding of the history and nature of prejudice and relate their knowledge to current issues facing the United States.
10. All students demonstrate the ability to resolve conflicts in peaceful ways, including, but not limited to, peer mediation, anger management, interpersonal skills, and problem solving.

BACKGROUND

The National Council for the Social Studies provides the following information and text found in this background section. The entire text can be found on-line at

Knowledge about religions is not only a characteristic of an educated person, but it is also absolutely necessary for understanding and living in a world of diversity. Knowledge of religious differences and the role of religion in the contemporary world can help promote understanding and alleviate prejudice. Since the purpose of the social studies is to provide students with a knowledge of the world that has been, the world that is, and the world of the future, studying about religions should be an essential part of the social studies curriculum. Omitting study about religion give students the impression that religions may be dealt with in special courses and units of wherever and whenever knowledge of the religious dimension of human history and culture is needed for a balanced and comprehensive understanding.

--From the Position Statement and Guidelines of the National Council for the Social Studies

---excerpts of a [Brief Overview Of Religion In Schools](#) by Nicholas Piediscalzi, Project Director for the California Three Rs Project (Rights Responsibilities

and Respect)

UNIT OBJECTIVES

Study the influence of various religious beliefs and practices upon both the formation and development of the United States and its Constitutional guarantees.

Determine an appropriate role for diverse religious beliefs in a unified, though necessarily pluralistic, modern society.

PART ONE: Religion Before the Revolution

Lesson One: "I pledge allegiance..."

(Opening Unit Set)

Objectives:

-Acknowledge the possibility and the permissibility to discuss religion as a social and cultural influence upon the United States within a modern day public school;

-Establish class guidelines that convey the respect, the responsibility, and the right for varied religious beliefs and practice to flourish.

Materials:

"The Pledge of Allegiance" translated into several languages and printed on a handout.

Methods:

Read aloud the pledge.

Determine prior knowledge and attitudes about the pledge. Turn the discussion to "The Pledge" written in other languages than English. Determine that the differing languages acknowledge our pluralistic society.

Re-read the pledge this time stopping at each word to define and expand the possible definitions and meanings. For example, the first word "I" refers of course to the speaker, but who *can* this speaker be who makes this pledge? Students will begin with themselves but can be quickly led to broaden this "I" to includes classmates, fellow Pittsburghers, the old and young, others from the region, and then, others not from this region, or even this country. Skillfully led, students must acknowledge the open and diverse society of cultures, languages, customs, and thoughts that is welcomed to be "I" in such a pledge. Continue with each word similarly pausing upon those words that best reinforce this concept of American society.

The **KEY POINT** is the word "God." Without attempting to define God, although it is fun to moderate a lively attempt among the students, direct the discussion to acknowledge that a group committing itself to a secular symbol such as a flag reinforces that commitment by calling upon an individual's own sense of the sacred to sanctify the promise now made to each other.

Use this discussion to introduce the unit objectives.

Formalize class guidelines for discussing religion in school that you modeled in the opening set.

Evaluation:

Allow students to re-write the pledge of allegiance in their own words; OR in the words (even the language) of an adopted character such as a founding father, former indentured servant or slave, an immigrant escaping political or religious persecution or even an angry street kid.

Lesson Two "Religious Revolutionaries"

Objectives:

Master vocabulary and concepts related to the religious beliefs of the white colonials

Categorize the differing beliefs and practices of the two Protestant sects that held the most influence in Revolutionary Times

KEYWORDS

The Anglicans The Church of England Henry VIII

liturgical tradition hierarchy

The Reformed Tradition Puritans

Predestination conversion sermons

Materials:

Pictures of key figures, church buildings, and recorded chorale music related to the Anglican religious tradition.

Prepared overheads that define Keywords.

Text of Jonathan Edward's sermon "Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God" as an example of the Reformist tradition

Methods:

Through lecture, presentation, and class discussion, have the students create a large chart on the front board that contrasts the Anglican and Reformist traditions.

KEY POINTS

The Anglican tradition, with its stress upon the liturgical tradition and hierarchy, sought to impose a sense of awe and piety upon its laity that reinforced a "servile" attitude from God to king. One could **reason** that the certainty of salvation by completing the acts of worship within the structure of the church.

The Reformist tradition imposed no mediator between the individual and God. One could **feel** the certainty of salvation through a rapturous conversion experience brought about by individual study or stirring sermon.

Evaluation:

Students should copy a finalized version of this chart for themselves.

Lesson Three: The First Great Awakening

Objectives:

Determine the influence of the First Great Awakening upon the religious life and practice of the early white colonials.

Trace this influence into the political realities of the American Colonies.

KEYWORDS

The First Great Awakening 1730-1770's Romanticism

John and Charles Wesley Methodism

disestablishment

Materials:

A stirring recording of some Romantic symphonic Music e.g. Wagner

Methods:

Through lecture, present information on the First Great Awakening.

KEY POINTS:

The First Great Awakening was a revitalization of religious piety that was part of the greater Romantic Movement; it reaffirmed the view that being truly religious meant

- * trusting the heart rather than the head,
- * valuing and prizing feeling more than thinking, and
- * relying on biblical revelation rather than human reason.

The Reverent William Tennent, a Scots-Irish immigrant, began a series of religious revivals in the colonies during the 1730's. He also established "the Log College", later known as Princeton University, in order to train clergymen whose fervid, heartfelt preaching would bring sinners to experience evangelical conversion.

The Anglican minister George Whitefield allied himself with others like John and Charles Wesley, who shared his evangelical bent. Together they led a reform of the Church of England, incorporating not only Calvinistic theology, but a dramatic, theatrical sermon style. These reforms led to the establishment of the Methodist Church.

Conservative response to Methodism objected to the emotionalism and the inevitable disorder of the revivals. The Methodists were, also, criticized for allowing white women and African Americans to shed their subordinate social status to exhort their religious feelings.

The First Great Awakening sharply polarized the colonies. Inevitably, civil governments were drawn into the fray. States that supported one denomination were lobbied by opposing groups for disestablishment. At heart of all of these actions lay the claim of one group or another of upholding "True Christianity."

Evaluation: Short essay:

What would account for the tremendous appeal of evangelical Christianity in Pre-Revolutionary times?

This era saw extraordinary upheaval and crises for ordinary people. Many had recently left war-wracked and famine ridden Europe to eke out a subsistent living in the American frontier. Danger of starvation and attack from Indians overturned traditional family structure. Women frequently became the heads of households. The industrial revolution created potential converts from the miserable ranks of miners and factory workers. The evangelicals offered a new opportunity for fellowship, solace and emotional release. These churches, also, represented a haven from the "failed faith" of the Anglicans.

Lesson Four: "Time Makes More Converts than Reason"

Objectives

Trace the influence of the First Great Awakening to the political realities of the American Colonies.

Materials:

Selections from Thomas Paine's "Common Sense"

Methods:

1) Pose this opening question and lead the following discussion: "What are the possible connections between the First Great Awakening and the American Revolution?"

KEY POINTS

In the decades before the revolution many had faced important choices about their religious beliefs and loyalties. The conversion experience prompted many to criticize and reject their former ministers and churches and prepared them to make equally important decisions and actions about their political beliefs and loyalties.

This was a generation of people who had been schooled from the pulpit in the importance of self-determination and even rebellion against the existing hierarchies of deference and privilege.

2) Read selections from Paine's political treatise "Common Sense"

KEY POINTS

Published in January 1776, this famous exhortation to rebellion was the runaway best seller of its day. It was carefully studied in private homes and read aloud in taverns. It solidified public opinion to embolden the Continental Congress to sign the Declaration of Independence. It read like a **SECULAR SERMON** mixing politics and religion. Paine:

* cast decision to rebel as a matter of feeling rather than thought;

* proposes that kings are usurpers who claim a sovereign authority over other human beings that rightfully only belongs to God;

* compares the Jews of the Old Testament , who rejected monarchical government, to the new "chosen people" in America who should follow the example.

* argues that the colonies are an asylum of religious liberty, and must pass from argument to arms to protect freedom of conscience or religious dissenters; and finally

* echoes the cadence of language and craft of the Bible.

Evaluation - Pencil and paper TEST

Select passages from "Common Sense" that best illustrate each of the Key Points listed above. Match the passage with the key point.

Lesson Five: "a holy, happy people."

Objective:

Determine the position that the first Government of the U.S. took on the freedom of religion.

KEYWORDS

Congress of the Confederation 1774-89 Covenant Theology

Nondenominational nonpolemic

Materials

Selections of original source material "Religion and the Founding of the American Republic" found on the web.

Methods

Assign and then read aloud resource material..

KEY POINTS

The public considered it appropriate it for the national Government to promote a nondenominational, nonpolemic Christianity. The Congress of the Confederation:

* appointed chaplains for the Armed forces

* sponsored the publication of the Bible

* granted public land to promote Christianity among the Indians

Covenant theology guided Congress. Covenant Theology is a Reformationist doctrine that God bound himself with a nation and its people. The first Government of the United States was convinced that the Public

prosperity of a society depended on the vitality of its religion. "Nothing less than a Spirit of universal reformation among all the ranks and degrees of our citizens...would make us a holy, that so we may be a happy, people."

Evaluation

Identify and evaluate the influence of Anglican, Reformationist or non-denominational Christianity upon these examples from the early Congress

PART ONE EVALUATION: MID-UNIT EXAM

Short Essay: Agree or disagree with the following statement. Defend your position with specific facts from the previous lessons.

Though the Congress of the Confederation falls far short of the later Constitutional guarantee where Congress shall make no law to promote religion, this first congress has made a successful beginning to secure our later freedom of religion.

PART TWO: The Religions of the World Arrive

Lesson Six: "We The People, in order to form a more perfect Union..."

Objectives:

Determine the meaning and implications of the first amendment of the US Constitution.

Determine how the concept of religious freedom was practiced in the early 1800's.

Materials

Various overheads as needed below.

KEYWORDS

Constitution The Bill of Rights

The First Amendment "the separation of church and state"

Thomas Jefferson "all men are created equal" "freedom of religion"

Horace Mann "free and public education"

Methods

As an opening set, project and read aloud the Preamble to the Constitution.

Discuss the purpose and importance of a constitution. Discuss how it can be amended.

Discuss the Bill of Rights.

Project and read aloud the First Amendment.

Engage the students to discuss their opinions.

Address the issue of the separation of church and state.

KEY POINTS

1) Horace Mann, the founder of the U.S. Public School System, advocated for a nonsectarian education and was opposed by church officials.

2) The public schools in the United States have developed in large part according to the model conceived in the 18th Century by Thomas Jefferson. Because churches were in conflict over the essentials of basic theology-- especially concerning the beliefs necessary for salvation-- and because of his own philosophical suppositions and concerns for national political unity, Jefferson called upon public schools to combine aspects from both the Judeo-Christian traditions and the elements from other world view, that our founding fathers regarded and being common to all religions, the best in all religions and the only aspect of any religion necessary to civic order and well being. The purpose was to inculcate youth in a national democratic faith and morality to foster national unity and well being.

Evaluation

Complete the following sentence in five different and creative ways.

Although the first amendment to the Constitution states that Congress shall make no law to establish a religion,.....

Lesson Seven: "The church-- our refuge, our strength, our only dry place--"

Objectives:

Identify the Irish as proud, poor, but literate people who fiercely cherish their religious identity in the face of oppression.

Determine the effect of the Irish Catholic immigrant population arriving en masse in the United States in the 1840's.

Materials:

Excerpts of Angela's Ashes, by Frank McCourt pages 11-12

KEYWORDS

The Great Potato Famine of the 1840's English Oppression of the Irish

Roman Catholics

Background

While Congress made no laws to promote the establishment of religion, states were free to have established religions. At first the problems were just between the different Protestant sects. But when a large number of non-Protestant immigrants entered the US, the conflicts were exacerbated. Jewish and Roman Catholic immigrants did not want their children indoctrinated with the Pan Protestant theology and morality taught in the Public Schools. Immigrant groups founded parochial schools during the period early nineteenth century as a means of preserving their ethnic and religious identity.

Methods

Day One

As an opening set read the following passage from Angela's Ashes.

My mother and my father should have stayed in New York where they met and married and where I was born. Instead they returned to Ireland when I was four, my brother Malachy, three, the twins, Oliver and Eugene, barely one, and my sister Margaret, dead and gone.

When I look back on my childhood I wonder how I survived at all. It was of course a miserable childhood: the happy childhood is hardly worth your while. Worse than the ordinary miserable childhood is the miserable Irish childhood, and worse yet is the miserable **Irish Catholic** childhood.

People everywhere brag and whimper about the woes of their early years, but nothing can compare with the Irish version; **the poverty; the shiftless loquacious alcoholic father; the pious defeated mother moaning by the fire; pompous priests; bullying schoolmasters; the English and the terrible things they did to us for eight hundred long years.**

Above all, we were wet.

Out in the Atlantic Ocean great sheets of rain gathers to drift slowly up the River Shannon and settle forever in Limerick. The rain dampened the city from the Feast of the Circumcision to New Year's Eve. It created a cacophony of hacking coughs, bronchial rattles, asthmatic wheezes, consumptive croaks. It turned noses into fountains, lungs into bacterial sponges. It provoked cures galore; to ease the catarrh you boiled onions in milk blackened with pepper; for the congested passages you made a paste of boiled flour and nettles, wrapped it in a rag, and slapped it, sizzling, on the chest.

From October to April the walls of Limerick glistened with the damp. Clothes never dried; tweed and woolen coats housed living things, sometimes sprouted mysterious vegetation's. In pubs, steams rose from damp bodies and garments to be inhaled with cigarette and pipe smoke laced with the stale fumes of spilled stout and whiskey and tinged with the odor of piss wafting in from the outdoor jakes where many a man puked up his week's wages.

The rain drove us into **the church--our refuge, our strength, our only dry place.** At Mass, Benediction, novenas, we huddles in great damp clumps, dozing through priest drone, while steam rose again from our clothes to mingle with the sweetness of incense, flowers and candles.

Limerick gained a reputation for piety, but we knew it was only the rain.

Using the emboldened words in the above passage as a starting point, create a massive word web that defines the Irish character. Prompt, then take suggestions from the class; however, subtly shift the focus to meet the first objective--proud, poor, but literate who cherish their religious identity in the face of oppression.

As an intermediate evaluation make sure the student's have a version of this web in their notes, or provide a sheet that can structure these notes, depending on the group.

DAY TWO

Propose the following prompt:

What would happen if a large group of people who already have a fiercely defined national character uproot themselves to a new land?

Take suggestion and predictions on the board.

Narrate the story of Irish immigration to The United States in the 1840's.

Evaluation – Part I: Create a chart

Chart the differences and similarities between the Irish Roman Catholic and (American) Pan Protestant beliefs and practices.

Irish Roman Catholic (American) Pan Protestant

Concept of GOD

Key BELIEFS

Structure of CHURCH

Forms of WORSHIP

Structure of INDOCTRINATION

Key MYTHS

(stories and legends that explain why things are the way they are to promote a national or religious character)

Relevant SOCIAL

and/ or MORAL EDICTS

Evaluation Part II: Short Essay

Do you believe that those like the Irish, who come to the U.S. but cling to their ethnic and religious heritage, contribute to the sense of a national unity?

Support your argument.

Lesson Eight: "If I were a rich man."

Objectives:

Identify the plight of European Jews who fled European religious and social persecution.

Materials

Video production of [A Fiddler on the Roof](#)

KEYWORDS

Heritage cultural identity assimilation

Jewish Sabbath Abraham

Moses Commandments Torah

Covenant Chosen People Orthodox

Reformed Zionistic Anti-Semitism

Ghettos pogroms the Inquisition

Methods

As an introductory set, show the opening song "Tradition" from the video.

Identify the main point of the video ("Traditions tell us who we are.")

Replay the video asking students to write down all of the "traditions" that help the characters create their sense of heritage and identity.

List these on the board; and then expand this list to include as many examples of cultural forms that create a norm.

Address the issue: How did a family of Jews wind up in a village in Russia (or worse, stomping around cartoonishly in a musical!)?

Narrate significant aspects of the history of the Jews.

KEY POINTS

From the earliest times the Hebrew people took their COVENANT relationship with God quite seriously. By keeping to a series of strict beliefs, practices, rituals, laws, and customs, God will deliver his CHOSEN PEOPLE to a promised land of salvation. Jews celebrate and remember specific instances where God acts in history to test, strengthen, and reward their resolve. This "promised land" has been interpreted historically by various Jews as both a literal place and as a metaphoric state of being in a special relationship with God.

The demand of the Hebrew God upon his chosen people to hold no other god before him has preoccupied and prompted much of Jewish history with the rest of the world. Located at the far end of the Mediterranean Sea, the Jews lived at the cross roads of the ancient world. To simplify things dramatically, as they were constantly displaced by famine, fighting or following the herd, the ancient Jews learned to "carry their religion" with them into hostile environments that often demanded that they pay respect to the local gods. According to the broadest strokes of their mythology, the Jews suffered or thrived based on how well they kept their covenant. Even when the Israelites were most firmly established in Jerusalem, when they had codified a priestly class to worship at the only Temple allowed in Jewish law, the Jews suffered miserable persecution at the hands of the Roman Empire when they refused to worship the divine Caesar and the pantheon of Roman gods concurrently with their own. In 80 AD, The Romans destroyed the temple and effectively dispersed the Jews throughout the ancient world. Jewish law, custom, and tradition thrived only through rabbinical study, careful preservation of the ancient language, and prohibitions against intermarriage to maintain racial their characteristics.

Over the next 1500 years, Jews emigrated to all parts of the European continent. Refusing to assimilate the cultural and religious norms of the host country, Jews suffered as social outcasts. They were typically denied citizenship, and prohibited from owning land. In the best case scenarios, Jews profited by taking work as bankers, merchants, and craftsman; and as such, developed a middle-class respectability were there was even no middle class before. In other instances, Jews simply wandered into the countryside to survive on their wits.

In a worst case scenario, Jews were rounded up into ghettos, subject to pogroms, even tortured to accept conversion. By the beginning of the 19th century, Jews greatly threatened the growing sense of nationalism sweeping Europe, and they were often blamed for an individual country's numerous failings and stalled successes.

European Anti-Semitism forced many to look to the United States as a place where they could live unmolested as Jews. Though America was rooted in the same religious traditions as those that oppressed the Jews, its national constitution promised religious freedom.

Evaluation

Like the Irish, the Jews arrived on American shores with a firm sense of their own religious and ethnic identities. Did America turn out to be the promised land of religious freedom. Do you believe that America has fulfilled its promise?

Defend your opinion with specific details.

Lesson Nine: "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot, Coming For'd To Carry Me Home"

Objectives:

Determine the effect and use of religious spirituals among enslaved African Americans in the early 1800's.

Determine attitudes of southern plantation owners concerning their slaves religious freedom.

KEYWORDS

Spirituals

Frederick Douglass

Materials:

The Norton Anthology of African American Literature: Audio Companion and selected printed text from pages 5-15

Selection from Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, Chapter III

Methods:

DAY ONE

Play "Didn't my Lord Deliver Daniel" and solicit student responses about its meaning and intent. Chart these responses on the board.

Inform the students that this song is a spiritual, and define the term for the students. (see NORTONS for additional background info page 5). Play the spiritual again, this time listening for the "special" meaning and intent of the song. Chart these responses on the board as well.

Play "Soon I Will Be Done", "Steal Away to Jesus", "Go Down Moses", "Been in the Storm So Long". Identify the OVERT AND COVERT MESSAGE of each spiritual.

(See below)

Read aloud from Frederick Douglass Chapter III

The slaves selected to go to the Great House Farm, for the monthly allowance for and their fellow-slaves, were peculiarly enthusiastic. While on their way, they would make the dense old woods, for miles around, reverberate with their wild songs, revealing at once the highest and the deepest sadness. They would compose and sing as they went along, consulting neither time nor tune. The that came up, came out, if not in the word, in the sound; and as frequently in the one as in the other. They would sometimes sing the most pathetic sentiment in the most rapturous tone, and the most rapturous sentiment in the most pathetic tone. Into all of their songs they would manage to weave something of the Great House Farm. Especially would they do this, when leaving home. They would then sing most exultingly the following words:--

" going away to the Great House Farm!

O, yea! O, yea! O!"

This they would sing, as a chorus, to words which to many would seem unmeaning jargon, but which,

nevertheless, were full of meaning to. I
have sometimes that the mere of
those songs would do more to impress some
with the horrible of slavery, than the reading
of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject
could do. I did not, when a slave, the deep
meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent
songs. I was within the circle; so that I neither
nor as those without might and
They told a tale of woe which was then altogether
beyond my feeble comprehension; they
were tones loud, long, and deep; they breathed the
prayer and complaint of boiling over with the
anguish. Every tone was a testimony against
slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from
chains. The of those wild notes always de-
pressed my, and filled me with ineffable sad-
ness. I have frequently found in tears while
them. The mere recurrence to those songs,
even now, afflicts me; and while writing these
lines, an expression of has already found its
way down my cheek. To those songs I trace my first
glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character
of slavery. I can never get rid of that conception.

Those songs still follow me, to deepen my
of slavery, and quicken my sympathies for
my brethren in bonds. If any one wishes to be impressed
with the soul-killing of slavery, let
him go to Colonel Lloyd's plantation, and, on allowance-day,
place in the deep pine woods, and
there let him, in silence, analyze the sounds that
shall pass through the chambers of his ,--and if
he is not thus impressed, it will only be because
"there is no flesh in his obdurate heart."

I have often been utterly astonished, since I came to the north, to find persons who could speak of the singing, among slaves, as evidence of their contentment

and. It is impossible to conceive of a greater mistake. Slaves sing most when they are most. The songs of the slave represent the of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears. At least, such is my. I have often sung to drown my, but seldom to express my. Crying for, and singing for, were alike uncommon to

me while in the jaws of slavery. The singing of a man cast away upon a desolate island might be as appropriately considered as evidence of contentment and, as the singing of a slave; the songs of the one and of the other are prompted by the same.

Determine Douglass' meaning and compare it to the overt and covert messages that the class created from the earlier discussion.

Evaluation Worksheet

Religion and the Enslaved African American

PART I

Listen and read each of the following spirituals. Identify the overt and covert meaning and intent of each song.

_____ OVERT _____ COVERT _____

Didn't my lord deliver

Daniel

Soon I will be Done

Steal Away to Jesus

Go Down Moses

Been in the Storm So Long

PART II

Does your analysis of the spirituals agree or disagree with Douglass. State the similarities and the differences.

Lesson Ten "a divine revelation and tenet of the church"

Objectives

Judge if the U.S. Congress, while not having power to establish religion, has the constitutional power to prohibit religious practice.

Materials:

Photocopied handouts from Harper's Encyclopedia of United States History Vol. 6. Pg. 272-273, copyright 1901

Methods

As an opening set read the following passage from Harpers

They chose the great **Salt Lake Valley**, enclosed within lofty and rugged mountains, fertile, isolates and healthful: and thitherward, in the early summer of 1847, **a chosen band of 143 men, accompanied by their wives and children and the members of the high council**, with seventy wagons drawn by horses, proceeded as pioneers to take possession of the country. They passed up the north fork of the Platte River to Fort Laramie, crossed that stream. Followed its course along the banks of the black Hills to South Pass, which they penetrated. Along the rivers through deep canyons, over the lofty Utah Mountains, they toiled on until, on the evening of July 20, they saw from the summits of Wasatch Mountains, the placid Salt Lake glittering in the beams of the setting sun. It was like the vision of the **Hebrew lawgiver on Mount Pisgah**. It was a scene of wondrous interest. Stretched out before them was the **Land of Promise** where they hoped **never to be molested by "Gentiles"** or the arm of the Gentile Government. The pilgrims entered on the valley. The pilgrims entered the valley on the 21st and on the 24th the president and high council arrived. They chose a site for a city on a gentle slope, on the bank of a stream they called **Jordan**, connecting with the Great Salt Lake. They built a fort, planted seed, and with solemn ceremonies the land was consecrated to **the Lord**.

Ask the students to apply all of their previous knowledge to determine about whom this passage is written. Students should highlight keywords in class that provide clues or leads. (These keywords are emboldened above, but let the students find them for themselves to develop better reading strategies.) Allow guesses. Then allow some research. What was the "truth"?

The allow the student to present their information, fill in the blanks as necessary.

KEY POINTS

The passage refers of course to the Mormons, or formally, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Briefly, this Christian sect was established in the early 1800's by Joseph Smith, a man of visions and spiritual revelation. Thus inspired, he spoke out a new bible called The Book of Mormon, one that borrows heavily both in style and content of the canonical bible, but with important differences that authorizes Smith as the head of a new church. They won converts and organized the first Mormon church at Manchester NY in April of 1830. Smith saw the possibility for expansion in the western territories and moved his operations to Ohio, then Missouri. Though the church flourished and won notable converts, such a Brigham Young, he ran afoul in his business dealings and soon became a wanted man. The church leaders, or apostles, backed Smith and declared him to be "superior to all earthly magistrates." The Mormons armed themselves and soon defied all state and federal laws. In the end they fled to Illinois where they were warmly welcomed and again established a city, called Nauvoo. Smith held near absolute power and influence in the city; he took a position of high command in the military corps called the Nauvoo Legion. He also took as early as 1838 several "spiritual wives" though he had a lawful wife of nearly eleven years. In 1843 he defended his polygamy by stating he had received a divine revelation authorizing men to have more than one wife. The idea caught on within the Mormon community and in 1852 the doctrine of polygamy was openly announced a divine revelation and tenet of the Church. But others within the Mormon community joined the shocked nation at the scandal that Smith's licentiousness caused. He was condemned as a corrupter of virtue. Sixteen woman swore out that he had tried persuade them to make them his "spiritual wife." Smith attacked his accusers. They attempted to jail him, but were put off by armed Mormons. Eventually he and his brother Hyrum were taken into custody. When a mob stormed the jail, both the "Prophet" and his brother were shot dead. Brigham Young assumed leadership of the Church, and led the believers again westward, this time to the territory of Utah, far outside the "gentile Government" spoken of in the opening text.

The Mormons disregarded the authority of the United States in Utah. Several federal judges were forced by threats of violence to leave the territory. In 1856 armed Mormons stormed a federal court prompting the government to send a military force to quiet the scene. The Mormons promised to submit to federal authority, but did not. In 1862 Congress passed an act prohibiting polygamy in the various territories. The Mormons ignored, defied, and then challenged the law. They continued to contract plural marriages. The Edmund-Tucker Act of 1887 clarified the federal position and was used to imprison or fine over 1000 Mormons. The Mormons called to test the constitutionality of the act. The issue was put to the court on May19, 1890.

Evaluation:

You be the judge. Decide if the Mormons complaint has merit.

End of Unit Evaluation

For a grand finale, review and study the experiences of the groups that you have studied. Choose three groups to best argue for or against continuing the founding father's concept for freedom of religion.

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