



The California Three Rs Project

Rights, Responsibility, and Respect

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Religion in California's New History-Social Science Framework

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In California, the State History-Social Science Framework outlines a program of public-school social studies education for K-12 students statewide. It is a document that provides subject-matter and methodological guidelines for teachers when they teach the history social-science standards. It also includes guidance for best practices in teaching about religion in social studies courses that are in line with the principles of the California Three Rs Project, promoting rights, responsibility, and respect in matters of religion in public schools.

The state first adopted the Framework and California History-Social Science Standards in 1998. The state board of education approves the framework, but the California legislature must approve new standards. Largely because of political challenges in

enacting legislation as opposed to enacting executive policy, the standards remain as they were first adopted in 1998.

The framework is a different story. The board first updated it in 2005 and recently completed a more comprehensive update process. In July 2016, the California State Board of Education adopted the new History-Social Science Framework, and, as many readers of this *Bulletin* know, the adoption was a significant event for social studies instruction in the state.

In the framework, the world's religions and the history of religions in the United States are prominent subjects. This article will focus on some of that content, as well as the important guidelines for teaching about religion that are included in the framework.

The Appendices

There are several appendices to the framework, and Appendix A outlines seven key themes that teachers and students can address as part of history instruction. Key themes include patterns of population; expressing identity; and science, technology, and the environment.

Key Theme 7 is "Spiritual Life and Moral Codes." The section examines the meaning of spirituality in history, the use of symbols, and archaeological and anthropological evidence for how humans have developed spiritual ideas in the past. A teacher could apply inquiries in this section to multiple areas of history, such as

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Religion in California's New History-Social Science Framework 1

The California Three Rs Project is co-sponsored by Constitutional Rights Foundation, California County Superintendents Educational Services Association, and the Religious Freedom Center at the Newseum.



RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CENTER
OF THE NEWSEUM INSTITUTE

The Constitution “provides the tool for negotiating consensus on how to live with our deepest social and cultural differences.”

“How have ideas of morality and spirituality shaped history? How has human spirituality changed in the course of history?”

Appendix E, “Religion and History-Social Science Education,” provides the most comprehensive approach to what teaching about religion means. The substance of Appendix E focuses less on the specific content areas in the grade levels and more on the place of religion in the curriculum generally.

The emphasis of Appendix E is placed on what instructional practices are constitutional under the First Amendment’s establishment and free exercise clauses. Under “Support for Educators,” the framework notes that the Constitution “provides the tool for negotiating consensus on how to live with our deepest social and cultural differences.”

In addition to the constitutional emphasis, the framework adds that “all people are born with the right to freedom of conscience” under “Guidelines for Teaching About Religion.” *Freedom of conscience* is one way of defining religious freedom borrowed from James Madison. “The Religion then of every man,” Madison wrote in his *Memorial and Remon-*

strance Against Religious Assessments (1785), “must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man; and it is the right of every man to exercise it as these may dictate.”

The “Guidelines for Teaching About Religion” section borrows from consensus documents cited in *Finding Common Ground* by Charles Haynes and Oliver Thomas for the First Amendment Center, now the Religious Freedom Center at the Newseum, to articulate a distinctly Madisonian approach. To avoid religious indoctrination or advocacy (including anti-religious indoctrination or advocacy), the section advises protocols that establish an academic and not devotional approach to religion, as well as exposing students to a diversity of religious views without imposing any particular view.

This section also encourages educators to adhere to the treatment of religion in the present framework and the standards: “A good rule of thumb for teaching topics related to religion is to make sure that they are firmly grounded in the curriculum required by the California frameworks and content standards.”

The language of Appendix E properly admonishes against teachers using role-

playing or simulating activities of religious rituals. Teacher-led or teacher-assigned practice of a religious ritual is inappropriate, even in a role-play with the secular purpose of teaching about a historical period.

What is a religious role-play or simulation? In one example in California, a middle-school teacher offered extra credit to students who fasted for part of the month of Ramadan in order for them to learn about Islam as part of the 7th grade world-history curriculum. Even though the extra credit was an opt-in assignment and required parental consent, fasting during Ramadan is a devotional practice for Muslims. Offering it as a school-based practice is akin to giving extra credit to students who perform the Christian Eucharist (perhaps with grape juice and bread) in order to learn about Christianity, or who enact a Passover seder to learn about Judaism. These assigned activities would simulate devotional practices and therefore unconstitutionally blur the line between role-play and actual religious observance.

A helpful section “Legal Parameters of Religion in Public Schools” provides the relevant constitutional and statutory provisions related to the treatment of religion, including the First

Amendment to the Constitution, as well as sections from the California Constitution and the California Education Code.

Religion: Grade-by-Grade

In the early elementary grades, students focus learning on beliefs of Americans generally and their own kin.

As early as the first grade, students learn “various cultural backgrounds” of Americans that allow them “to have increased awareness of the beliefs, customs, and traditions of others.” In second grade, students investigate their own family backgrounds, looking into the cultures from their families came, including “their religious practices.”

In the third grade, students look at the cultures of American Indians as well as the history of their local community. (The framework and standards use the term American Indians. In places, the framework refers to Native Americans, as well.) The framework suggests that a teacher could invite local California Indian representatives to share cultural information with students. This enrichment is valuable for students, as long as the teacher keeps in mind the guidelines from Appendix E and advises the representatives not to lead students in any religious or spiritual practices.

Fourth grade curriculum focuses on California’s history. The meeting of Spanish and Indian cultures is central, and the framework provides an introduction to the Catholic Church as the institution behind the mission system, and the practice of converting California Indians to Christianity. For context, teachers are encouraged to have students “consider cultural differences, such as gender roles and religious beliefs, in order to better understand the dynamics of Native and Spanish interaction.”

Religion is important in fifth grade content about the American colonial and revolutionary periods. Subjects include the religious backgrounds of New World settlers, various religious motivations for settlement, religious traditions of American Indians, the ideas of the Enlightenment, and religious settlement patterns. Puritans, Quakers, and episodes of religious persecution in the colonies are part of the curriculum.

In the sixth and seventh grade curricula, students are introduced to the concept of world religions. The historical span begins with early humans and ancient history (sixth grade) and continues through the medieval and early modern world (seventh grade). Within this broad span, students learn about the religions of Asia and the Near East. For example, in the Grade Six Global Overview

of the framework, students learn that “the religions of Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, and Christianity and the philosophies of Confucianism and Greek thought emerged and spread within empires and along trade routes.”

There is too much content within these middle school grades to fairly address in this *Bulletin*, but it is crucial to note that here the diversity of world religions and philosophies is likely to encompass the beliefs of most of California’s students or their families. The advisement against any religious or religious-seeming simulations and role-plays must be emphasized here, especially as students learn about religions that are well represented in the state (e.g., Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism).

In the eighth grade, students learn about the Constitutional Convention and the debates that formed its provisions and the amendments that followed. This is a prime opportunity to introduce students to the First Amendment and its religion clauses. The section “The Divergent Paths of the American People: 1800-1850” includes significant discussion of Charles Finney and the Second Great Awakening with emphasis on its importance to social reform and abolitionism.

Several ninth grade elective courses afford discussion or

application of religious content. Discussions of the historic and contemporary roles of religion are apt in World and Regional Geography, Survey of World Religions, The Humanities, Anthropology, Women in United States History, and Law-Related Education.

The 10th grade’s modern historical content provides areas for rich discussion and also potential controversy. The curriculum covers democratic revolutions; imperialism and colonialism in the 19th and 20th centuries; and modern political, economic, and technological revolutions. Significantly, the framework includes the events of 9/11 and its aftermath, which are not included in the standards that have not been updated since 1998. In the “Rights, Religion, and Identity” section, the framework makes note of “the resurgence of religion” in many parts of the world, including “the appearance of deep conflict between the Islamic and Western worlds, especially since 9/11.”

The 11th grade U.S. history curriculum begins with a review of our nation’s history, emphasizing the impact of the Enlightenment and the role of religion in the nation’s found-

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The California Three Rs Project (CA3Rs) is a program for finding common ground on issues related to religious liberty and the First Amendment in public schools. The CA3Rs' approach is based on the principles of American democracy and citizenship, reflected in the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights and applied in a public school setting.

For over two decades, the CA3Rs has provided resources, professional development, and leadership training for teachers and education professionals in order to disseminate essential information about religious liberty, freedom of conscience, and the history of religion in America.

Common Ground Resources

Haynes, Charles C., and Oliver Thomas. *Finding Common Ground: A Guide to Religious Liberty in the Public Schools*. Nashville: First Amendment Center, 2007. <<http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/madison/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/FCGcomplete.pdf>>

Religious Freedom Center at the Newseum. <<http://www.religiousfreedomcenter.org/>>

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ing, and then focuses on 20th century history to contemporary society. In each unit, the framework calls for students to examine American culture, including religion, literature, art, music, drama, architecture, education, and the mass media.

Finally, the 12th grade "Principles of American Democracy" course offers ample opportunities for teachers to introduce constitutional principles through units organized around case studies of specific issues, e.g., fundamental freedoms in the First Amendment. Among other landmark cases, the framework names *Engel v. Vitale* (1962), the case in

which the Supreme Court ruled school-sponsored prayer in public schools to be unconstitutional, as an appropriate illustration of the tension between individual rights and majority social interests.

Connecting to the CA3Rs

The California Three Rs Project has always emphasized that a public-school teacher is on solid ground when approaching the subject of religion provided that the teacher relies on an academic rather than a devotional basis for instruction. If there is only one takeaway from the above description of the framework's treatment of religion, it should be the word *about* in "teaching about reli-

gion," because that distills the academic approach. The concept is simple, but effective classroom application of the concept takes practice.

Fortunately, the framework enables that practice by elucidating the concept for educators throughout California, and it is available 24 hours a day online. (See sidebar for the URL.) California students will benefit greatly, becoming knowledgeable of the diverse society in which they live and more secure as a part of that diversity, regardless of their own religious or non-religious identities.

The 2016 History-Social Science Framework

The curriculum framework was adopted by the State Board of Education on July 14, 2016. A professionally edited and formatted version of the framework will be available at a later time.

Access it online:

www.cde.ca.gov/ci/hs/cf/sbedraftthssfw.asp