



The California Three Rs Project

Rights, Responsibility, and Respect

What Is Yoga?

Lesson and Activities

Overview

In this lesson, students examine the history and contemporary meaning of yoga. First, students anticipate the reading by assessing their prior knowledge of yoga and the religion of Hinduism. Then students read and discuss an introductory reading about yoga, its religious context in Hinduism, its use as a form of physical discipline in the West, and why it is controversial when used in public schools. Next, in a U.S. government and civics activity, students use the First Amendment to analyze hypothetical examples of schools incorporating teaching about yoga into the curriculum. In a reading activity for English-Language Arts classes, students use context clues and apposition in the reading to define key terms related to yoga. Finally, in an activity for art or world history-social science, students describe examples of religious art to reflect on the history of Hinduism.

Objectives

- Define the term “yoga” as an expression of Hindu religious beliefs and as a form of physical discipline.
- Using the First Amendment, evaluate examples of a school incorporating yoga into the school’s curriculum.
- Define key terms using context clues and apposition.
- Analyze religious art to determine what, if anything, it can explain about yoga.

Materials & Preparation

Handout	Title	How many?
A	Anticipation Guide	One per student
B	What Is Yoga?	One per student
C	Vocabulary Instruction — Appositions	One per student
D	Analysis of Art as a Primary Source	One per student
E	First Amendment Application	One per student

Procedure

1. **Focus Discussion.** Have students read Handout A (**Anticipation Guide**) and check True or False for each item on the chart. Ask them, "What do you know about yoga?" Accept all reasoned responses and say, "Today, you're going to learn about the connections between yoga and the religion of Hinduism."
2. **Background Reading.** Have students read Handout B (**What is Yoga?**), silently or for homework. Conduct a class discussion using the **For Writing & Discussion** questions or assign them as an individual writing activity.
3. a. **Religious Freedom Discussion.** In small groups, students will now use Handout C (**First Amendment Application**). Distribute the handout to each student and assign a different case (1–4) to each group. If more than one group addresses the same case, then that is fine.

b. When the discussions are complete, have each group's spokesperson share back the group's analysis of their case in light of the First Amendment. Keep in mind the difference between teaching *about* religion in the right context (which is constitutional) and teaching that serves to either *promote or prohibit* religion (which is unconstitutional).
4. **English-Language Arts (Optional).** Distribute Handout D (**Vocabulary Instruction – Appositions**) and give students time to complete. Review answers as a class. NOTE: Students may use Handout D during the next activity to inform their small-group discussion of art as a primary source.
5. a. **Art or World History (Optional).** Form the class into small groups of four or five. Distribute Handout E (**Analysis of Art as a Primary Source**). Focus students' attention to the Discussion Guide on Handout E, which will provide instructions for their discussion.

b. When the discussions are complete, have each group's spokesperson share back group answers to the questions in the Discussion Guide.
6. **Debriefing.** Pair students with a partner and allow them to revisit their answers to Handout A. With their partner, each student should determine if any of their answers have changed or stayed the same, and they should give at least one reason why, based on the text. Conduct a class discussion to see if and why any students' ideas about yoga and Hinduism have changed.

Standards Addressed in the Lesson

History-Social Science Content Standards

- 6.5.3 Explain the major beliefs and practices of Brahmanism in India and how they evolved into early Hinduism.
- 11.3.5 Describe the principles of religious liberty found in the Establishment and Free Exercise clauses of the First Amendment, including the debate on the issue of separation of church and state.

History-Social Science Analysis Skills Grades 6-8

Historical Research, Evidence, and Point of View

- 4. Students assess the credibility of primary and secondary sources and draw sound conclusions from them.
- 5. Students detect the different historical points of view on historical events and determine the context in which the historical statements were made (the questions asked, sources used, author's perspectives).

Historical Interpretation

- 5. Students recognize that interpretations of history are subject to change as new information is uncovered.

Common Core ELA Standards

Grades 6-8

Writing Informative Text

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.2d](#) Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.1a](#) Introduce claim(s) about a topic or issue, acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.1b](#) Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant, accurate data and evidence that demonstrate an understanding of the topic or text, using credible sources.

Research

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.7](#) Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

Grade 11-12

Write Focused Arguments on Discipline Specific Content

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.1a](#) Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that logically sequences the claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

Research

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.7](#) Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

What Is Yoga?

Anticipation Guide

Before you read the information about yoga in the lesson, mark the following statements as either True or False. After you read, discuss your answers with a partner and include a statement in the third column on the chart below about why you agree with your first answer or why you now have a different answer.

Statement	True	False	After reading, has your answer changed? Why or why not?
Yoga is a form of worship in Hinduism.			
Yoga is a great form of exercise used to strengthen the body.			
Yoga is used to demonstrate that it is more important to focus on developing one's mind because the body is not important.			
The most important form of knowledge is the understanding of scriptures according to Hindus.			
Meditation is important for learning so should be practiced in public schools.			
Yoga comes from the ancient Indus Valley culture in India.			
Practicing yoga is a way to become perfect according to Hindus.			

What is Yoga?

Although many in the United States know yoga as a form of physical fitness, yoga is an integral, or essential, part of the Hindu religion. There is a saying in India, "There is no yoga without Hinduism and no Hinduism without yoga."

The history of yoga is long and ancient. Many Hindu scholars believe yoga-like practices and meditations began thousands of years ago in the Indus River Valley when the Vedas, the ancient sacred texts of Hinduism, were written. They believe that sages and holy men used yoga to quiet their minds and to unite them with the Divine, or God. In the Vedas, God is represented as *Brahman*, or the supreme and infinite reality.

The ancient holy men believed yoga led human beings to transform from their natural state into something more perfect. Reincarnation, a never-ending cycle of rebirth and suffering, is part of the natural state. Most Hindus believe that the perfected form enables people to achieve liberation (*moksha*) from the cycle of rebirth.

Hindu scriptures recognize two types of knowledge related to yoga: the lower knowledge and the higher knowledge. Lower knowledge of the rites, rituals, and scholarly study of scriptures is a form of *dharma*, or what people ought to do. Higher knowledge of Brahman is gained through personal experience or self-realization. Of the two, the higher knowledge alone is true, because it liberates, or frees, a person from the cycle of births and deaths.

Traditional yoga practice often involves meditation, or deep, focused thought. In meditation, the practitioner turns his or her attention inward, to concentrate on the inner self and to visualize, or see in one's mind, the next goal in the path to perfection.

There are many schools or forms of yoga emphasizing different aspects of meditation. Each uses concentration and focused breathing techniques to quiet and focus the mind. A popular form, Ashtanga yoga, involves purifying the mind through eight steps, which must be mastered in succession. Another form of yoga is Kundalini yoga, which focuses on spiritual consciousness associated with ascending parts of the body, from the lower spine to the top of the head.

Through yoga's 5,000-year-old history, the word "yoga" has been used to describe a wide range of practices and beliefs. For most of its history, yoga has been an effort by people to



The symbol for Aum (also spelled *Om*), a syllable or sound used to focus concentration in yoga practice, is often used as a symbol of Hinduism itself. This shows how yoga is an important part of Hinduism.



Yoga postures such as the lotus position are designed to stimulate body awareness and to quiet the mind for meditation.

achieve spiritual awakening as described above. Since yoga came to Western culture (Europe and North America), it has changed rapidly, often as a result of limited historical or cultural knowledge of the meaning of yoga practices.

The tree pose is one of many *hatha yoga* postures designed to build balance. Practicing balance poses allows a person to achieve tremendous control over the body. These poses develop muscle tone and increase coordination and concentration.

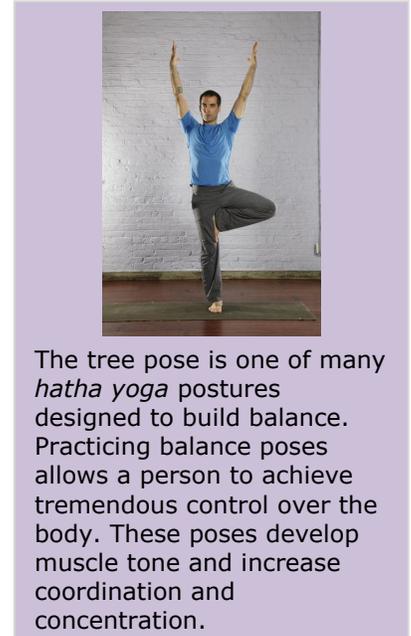
For yoga practitioners in the U.S. there is generally much less religious context and a much greater emphasis on body poses. With an emphasis on using physical postures, *hatha yoga* has captured the imagination and spirit of America. It is the branch of yoga that has flourished here. Never before in the history of yoga has the practice of *hatha yoga* assumed the importance that it has now in the West. It has become a basic offering in exercise studios and even as an alternative medical practice.

Because of the historically religious origins of yoga, both Hindu and Christian religious leaders have criticized Western culture's adaptation of yoga. From the perspective of some Hindus, the use of yoga as simply a tool of exercise or medicine is demeaning to their faith. From the perspective of some Christians, the origins of yoga as a Hindu practice means that it was and will always be a religious practice and, therefore, inappropriate for Christian believers.

Today, because of yoga's well-researched benefits for physical health and stress reduction, there is a strong movement to use some yoga practices in public schools. First Amendment interpretations by the courts have again and again warned that students should learn about religion, but in no way is it the role of schools to instruct students in a religion.

For Writing & Discussion

1. What do many Hindu scholars say is the original purpose of yoga?
2. Why do you think yoga has become so popular in the West?
3. Some people argue that the First Amendment forbids schools from offering any form of yoga in physical education classes. Do you agree? Why or why not?



First Amendment Application

In the United States, the First Amendment protects people's right to practice religion but also prohibits the government from imposing religion on anyone. Public schools must follow the First Amendment carefully because they are part of government.

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.

In your small group, discuss your assigned case and how you would apply the First Amendment to the situation. Explain your reasoning using what you know about yoga, Hinduism, and the First Amendment. Choose a spokesperson to present your group's analysis to the class.

Cases:

1. The athletic director has read that quiet meditation and focused breathing helps athletes improve their ability to perform. He requires students at ABC High School to practice breath control and visualization of accurate performance through meditation before each game. A parent objects that this is really practicing religion and is not appropriate for a public school.
2. A Centerville Middle School teacher wants to start an after-school yoga class for interested students. The principal is concerned that this would be endorsing religion.
3. A 6th grade teacher invites a local Hindu monk to demonstrate yoga postures and meditation techniques. Students are very interested in trying them also. The teacher is not sure what to do.
4. The teacher shows a film in class showing Hindu people practicing yoga postures and meditation. Students describe what they see in a narrative essay.

Vocabulary

Instruction Apposition

Writers often help readers figure out difficult words and phrases so that it is easier to make sense of their text. One way they do this is by putting the meaning after the word "is." Example:

A weeping willow is a large tree with drooping limbs.

Apposition is another way that writers tell readers what is meant by difficult words or ideas. In apposition, the word or idea is explained by a phrase set off with commas, enclosed in parentheses or brackets, or by the word "or." Examples:

- *Local laws must be in agreement with the Constitution, the main law of the land.*
- *The Constitution, or main law of the land, requires that local laws be in agreement.*
- *Local laws must agree with the Constitution (the main law of the land).*

What is the meaning of the following words, based on definitions or apposition, used by the author of the text "What Is Yoga?"

Integral

Vedas

Brahman

Moksha

Dharma

Divine

Liberate

Meditation

Aum

Liberate

Visualize

Other Vocabulary

Underline other words that are difficult and work with a partner to define them.

Analysis of Art as a Primary Source

Working in a small group, carefully examine the images below using the following

Discussion Guide:

1. Choose a spokesperson to share your findings with the class.
2. Discuss what you see in detail, what mood or feeling the image seem to convey, and why.
3. Do you think that this piece of art represents yoga? Why or why not? Does it show that the practice of yoga is restricted to Hinduism?
4. Does it lead you to believe that yoga is a religious practice or just a physical activity? Why?

Primary Source #1a Indus Valley seal showing a figure in meditation posture.

Several seals, such as the two on this page, were discovered at Indus River Valley archaeological sites. They date from ca. 3300–1700 B.C.E. and depict figures in yoga-like postures. Primary Source 1a is the “Pashupati seal.” According to archaeologist Gregory Possehl seals like this are evidence that “a form of ritual discipline, a precursor of yoga” existed in the ancient Indus Valley. While Possehl suggests that yoga goes back to the Indus Valley civilization, other scholars say that the similarities between the figure postures and Hindu meditation practices are just a coincidence.



Primary Source #1b Stamp seal with a seated male figure, ca. 2000–1900 B.C.E.



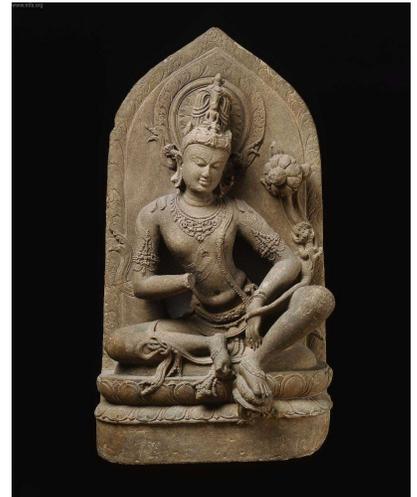
Primary Source #2
Shiva as Dakshinamurti

Dakshinamurti is Shiva in his aspect as the universal teacher. Here Shiva teaches sitting on the snowy mountains of the Himalayas. He faces south towards the Indian subcontinent. Dakshinamurti literally translated means "south Facing Lord." By Shiva teaching with his body pointed to the southern direction, he is showing that he is a manifestation of God and thus above any worldly traditions.



Primary Source #3
Avalokiteshvara
(Bihar, India (Eastern), 11th century)

This is an image of a bodhisattva. In Mahayana Buddhism a bodhisattva is a person who has reached enlightenment, but who chooses to help others reach enlightenment, too. Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion, is seated against an arched stele. The figure sits in a posture of leisure, with one knee up. He holds a lotus and has one hand up in a gesture of reassurance.



Primary Source #4
Shiva Statue in Bangalore, India

Shiva is the third in the Hindu trinity of the manifestations of God as creator, preserver, and destroyer. Brahma is the creator of the universe while Vishnu is the preserver of it. Shiva's role is to destroy the universe in order to re-create it. Shiva is responsible for change both in the form of death and destruction and in the positive sense of the shedding of old habits.



Primary Source #5
Marble Statue of Tirthankara

In Jainism, an ancient religion in India with some similarities to Hinduism, Tirthankara is a human who achieves enlightenment or perfect knowledge, through asceticism (self-denial) and meditation.



Primary Source #6
Guru Nanak Sitting in the Lotus Position

Guru Nanak founded Sikhism in India, a religion that combined elements of Hinduism and Islam. Guru Nanak opposed superstition, empty rituals, social inequality and injustice, renunciation, and hypocrisy. He sang sacred songs that formed the beginning of the Sikhs' sacred writings, later to become the Siri Guru Granth Sahib. In the West, many people have converted to a sect called Sikh Dharma after studying Kundalini yoga under a teacher known as Yogi Bhajan,



Sources

Image: Aum

Religion Facts: Hindu Symbols <http://www.religionfacts.com/hinduism/symbols.htm>

Image: Lotus Pose

Indian Yogic Science <http://indian-yoga.webs.com/kundalanyoga.htm>

Image: Tree Pose

Best Yoga Poses for Men <http://www.mensfitness.com/training/endurance/top-10-yoga-poses-for-men?page=3>

Image: Yoga Poses

<http://www.yogadownload.com/yoga-downloads-free-online-yoga-pose-guide-advanced-yoga-and-basic-beginner-yoga-pose-pictures.aspx>

Image: Primary Source #1a (Pashupati)

<http://peperonity.com/go/sites/mview/ampla/13969743/13969851>

Image: Primary Source #1b (Harappa Seal)

http://www.hindupedia.com/eng/images/thumb/b/bc/Harappa_meditation_seal.jpg/180px-Harappa_meditation_seal.jpg

Image: Primary Source #2 (Shiva as Dakshinamurti)

<http://www.bronzecreative.com/dakshinamurti-shiva-teacher-statue.html>

Image: Primary Source #3 (Avalokiteshvara)

http://www.nagoya-boston.or.jp/upload/200202_02.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.nagoya-boston.or.jp/exhibition/past/asiabuddhism-200210/outline.html&h=337&w=270&sz=20&tbnid=hye_k-LHjBIXaM:&tbnh=94&tbnw=75&zoom=1&usq=ocsFeoDMhPLF9eRryex8iRWgwSM=&docid=V-VeUZN9i80QBM&hl=en&sa=X&ei=GQAMUsemMYrQyAHwuoBY&ved=0CDkQ9QEwAq&dur=375

Image: Primary Source #4 (Shiva Statue)

<http://www.angelfire.com/nc2/cybertemples/Shiva.html>

Image: Primary Source #5 (Marble Statue of Tirthankara)

http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/cultures/asia/ancient_south_asia.aspx

Image: Primary Source #6 (Guru Nanak Sitting in the Lotus Position)

<http://sikhdharmaworldwide.org/about/sikhism>

Ashtanga Yoga

http://www.sanatansociety.org/yoga_and_meditation/tantra_yoga_ashtanga_yoga.htm

History of Yoga

http://www.hindupedia.com/en/History_of_Yoga

The Eight Limbs

<http://www.yogajournal.com/basics/158>

The Trouble with Yoga

<http://www.catholic.com/magazine/articles/the-trouble-with-yoga>

Yoga Beyond Asana: Hindu Thought in Practice

<http://www.hafsite.org/media/pr/yoga-hindu-origins>

What is Yoga?

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