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Religion: Contexts and Expressions

Study of Religion for QLD

Peta Goldberg



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INTRODUCTION

Religion: Contexts and Expressions is designed to address the requirements for *Study of Religion* for senior secondary students in Queensland. The material presented is also relevant for a variety of religion programs in other Australian states and beyond. The book provides students with opportunities to investigate and study a variety of religious traditions and how religion influences the lives of people.

The opening section of *Religion: Contexts and Expressions* focuses on five major world religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, and Australian Aboriginal spiritualities and Torres Strait Islander religion. The material in the opening section is foundational to a broad understanding of religion and should be cross-referenced when engaging with the key concepts in each of the four units. The four units are sequential with each unit building on the previous unit.

Religion: Contexts and Expressions is based on an inquiry and investigative approach to learning whereby a range of instructional practices are used to stimulate student learning through structured, guided and open learning approaches. The inquiry approach used consists of four broad components: Forming, Finding, Analysing and Evaluating. Forming requires students to describe the task and its components, to develop questions about the task and to write the methodology; Finding involves exploring sources, informing, locating and gathering data from a variety of sources; Analysing involves matching, comparing and interpreting relationships, patterns and trends; Evaluating requires students to make decisions and judgements, draw conclusions, synthesise findings and verify findings. Central to this metacognitive activity is reflection, which connects the four inquiry components.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Peta Goldberg

Peta Goldberg, RSM FACE, a leading educator in the field of Religious Education and Study of Religion, is Professor of Religious Education at Australian Catholic University. Peta has extensive experience in curriculum development and has chaired the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) Syllabus Committee for Study of Religion in 2001 and 2008. She was invited to be a member of the writing team for the new QCAA *Study of Religion* syllabus implemented in 2019. Peta works with teachers across Australia and she has published religion textbooks for students from Years 7 to 10, as well as students in Years 11 and 12 completing Religion and Ethics and Study of Religion. Her expertise in religious education has been recognised nationally through various awards including a Carrick Australian Award for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning and her appointment as a Fellow of the Australian College of Education.

The activities provided throughout the book have been designed by Peta and a small team of respected educators: Ellen Bow, Anne Browning, Kathryn Dore, Kate Hall and Judy Harris.



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


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For a list of websites and links related to this book, go to:
www.cambridge.edu.au/religioncontexts

As you work through the book, you will come across a range of icons indicating that an additional resource is available in the Interactive Textbook. Some of these resources are linked to activities while others are there for enrichment only.

-  Interactive test
-  Interactive widget
-  Video clip
-  Audio clip
-  Gallery of images
-  Weblink

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Religion: Contexts and Expressions begins with a general introduction to the five major world religions of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism; Australian Aboriginal spiritualities and Torres Strait Islander religion are also addressed. The material in the opening section provides a foundation for the four formal units of study. Students are then introduced to the four units of study, each of which is divided into two topics.

Unit 1: Sacred texts and religious writings consists of two topics: Sacred texts, and Abrahamic traditions. In this unit, students study various sacred texts and religious writings, identifying how these texts offer insight into life, provide guidance for living and express a relationship between people and a higher being.

Unit 2: Religion and ritual consists of two topics: Lifecycle rituals, and Calendrical rituals. In this unit, students expand their understandings of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Australian Aboriginal spiritualities and Torres Strait Islander religion by investigating religious rituals that mark significant times and events in the religion itself as well as in the lives of adherents. Assessment in Units 1 and 2 is formative.

Unit 3: Religious ethics has two topics: Social ethics, and Ethical relationships. Social ethics considers how ethical principles and theories in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism are understood and applied to social-ethical issues. The assessment for Topic 1 is a summative internal examination which requires students to respond to a provided question, scenario and/or problem. Ethical relationships requires students to use and apply their understandings of religious ethics and ethical teachings studied in Topic 1 to one contemporary ethical issue from the perspective of one of the five major world religions. The assessment for Topic 2 is a summative internal

assessment requiring students to investigate one contemporary ethical issue selected from the list provided in Unit 3 Topic 2. The response is written in the form of an analytical essay. The issue is to be analysed from the perspective of one of the five major world religions and students are required to devise a hypothesis that is the focus of their enquiry.

Unit 4: Religions, rights and the nation-state is divided into two topics, Religion and the nation-state, and Religion and human rights. In this unit, students investigate how religion affects and influences people's understanding of culture, history, politics and social interaction with a particular focus on rights and religion–state relationships. The assessment for Unit 4 is summative. For Topic 1, a summative internal assessment requires students, in the form of an analytical essay, to investigate the ways in which religion has interacted with nation-states through one example selected from the list provided in the syllabus for Unit 4 Topic 1. The summative assessment for Unit 4 Topic 2 is an external examination contributing to 25 per cent of the student's overall subject result.



This external examination is common to all schools and administered under the same conditions, at the same time, on the same day. Students will be required to respond to unseen stimulus materials related to Unit 4 Topic 2: Religion and human rights. The items will allow students to use their understanding of the five major world religions in order to explain the ways religious traditions have formed and informed perspectives on human rights. The examination has three parts: Part A requires students to respond to two or three short items requiring sentence responses and/or short paragraph responses of no more than 50–100 words; Part B consists of two short items each requiring paragraph responses of 100–150 words; and Part C consists of two short items requiring responses of 200–250 words.

As you work through the book, you will be asked to complete a range of activities. Worksheets for all activities are provided with the *Interactive Textbook* at Cambridge GO (www.cambridge.edu.au/GO). The worksheets can be printed out and completed by hand, or you could complete and submit them electronically. As part of your learning, you will also be expected to access a number of resources online.

In order to provide a varied learning experience, this book uses a wide range of activities. Some of them you will have heard of before, whereas others will be completely new to you. The learning activities and strategies used in this book include:

- ✿ 5Ws & H
- ✿ Alphabet list
- ✿ Annotated bibliography
- ✿ Annotated timeline
- ✿ Blog entry
- ✿ Character map
- ✿ Collage
- ✿ Comic strip
- ✿ Compare and contrast chart
- ✿ Consequences wheel
- ✿ Fishbone diagram
- ✿ Flowchart
- ✿ Frayer model
- ✿ Graffiti wall
- ✿ Histogram graph
- ✿ Hot seat
- ✿ Info break
- ✿ Jigsaw
- ✿ KWHL
- ✿ K-W-L
- ✿ Mind Map
- ✿ PMI
- ✿ Six Thinking Hats
- ✿ Storyboard
- ✿ SWOT
- ✿ T-chart
- ✿ Venn diagram
- ✿ Y-chart.

Your teacher will share more information and examples of each of these strategies and learning activities.

The Study of Religion syllabus advocates and promotes an educational approach to the teaching of religion and is designed to be available to all students in all schools, irrespective of the existence or absence of individual religious beliefs. Educational approaches to the teaching of religion encourage rigorous and critical study rather than confessional interest. Good education about religion should inform, be based on sound education theory, and take account of educational research to inform its practice.

Inquiry learning is focused on the learner rather than the teacher and describes a process where students formulate investigative questions, obtain information that builds knowledge and then critique that knowledge in the light of the information gathered.

The Study of Religion Syllabus is grounded in an inquiry approach to learning and teaching and provides a process of inquiry which should act as a guide for you and the students. With your leadership, students will, over time, develop skills to enable them to formulate investigative questions, obtain information which builds knowledge and then critique that knowledge in the light of the information gathered. The inquiry process encourages students to move beyond the mere acquisition of facts to metacognition. It also encourages teaching and learning approaches which will develop critical religious literacy.

To be critical is to employ self-critical scholarship. It does not refer 'to one's attitude toward the content . . . , but to ways of thinking that enable us to recognise the assumptions and bias that we . . . might impose' (Boys, 2004, p. 150). Unsworth (2001) describes the steps in the process towards critical literacy as moving through three phases: recognition, reproduction and reflection.

Recognition literacy involves learning to recognise and produce the verbal, visual and electronic codes that are used to construct and communicate meaning as well as cultural practices present and central to common experience of everyday life. Reproduction

literacy involves understanding and producing the conventional visual and verbal text forms that construct and communicate the established systematic knowledge of cultural institutions. Reflection literacy necessitates an understanding that all social practices and literacies are socially constructed. Reflection literacy involves learning how to read inclusion and exclusion, analysing and interrogating verbal and visual codes to expose how choice of language and image privilege certain viewpoints and how other choices of visual and verbal resources could construct alternative views.

Critical literacy challenges the status quo in an effort to discover alternative paths; it connects the political and the personal, the public and private, the global and local, the economic and pedagogical. It is not only concerned with identifying and deconstructing the conditions of production but also with the conditions of interpretation, including other standpoints and positions. There are several interpretations of critical literacy underpinned by different theoretical approaches, but the one element they have in common is that they involve analysis and critique of the relationship among texts, language, power, social groups and social practices. A critical literacy approach challenges us to examine how we read the world, to examine what we take for granted and to critique the particular culture in which texts are constructed. It enables us to look at written, visual, spoken and multimodal texts to question and challenge attitudes, values and beliefs that lie beneath the surface.

Classrooms are places where students learn about worlds through socially constructed texts. In religion, as in all subject areas, teachers select, distil and organise information on behalf of students. One challenge teachers of religion face is providing students with a variety of materials, including contestable materials, so that students can engage in critical analysis.

It might begin by inviting students to ask:

- ✿ What or whose view of religion is presented as normal by the text?
- ✿ Why is the text written this way? How else could it have been written?
- ✿ What assumptions does the text make?
- ✿ Who is silenced or heard in the text?
- ✿ Whose interest might be served by the text?
- ✿ What are the possible readings of this situation/event/character?
- ✿ What moral, political or religious position does the reading promote?
- ✿ How might it be challenged?

A critical literacy approach assists students to question information presented in the text, and reinforces the idea that there are multiple readings and realities. Through such an approach students are encouraged and enabled to identify, examine and critique problematic, contradictory and multiple ways of viewing the world. Reading texts from different positions could also open doors to issues of plurality and religious diversity, to critiquing the home religious tradition as well as the religious traditions of others.

Study of Religion invites an understanding and appreciation of the meaning and significance of religion. In a world in which we are now more likely to encounter the religious other, learning about beliefs, religious traditions, and the ways in which these shape people's lives, enables and enriches our own functioning religiously and politically in contemporary society. Since religions are dynamic and living entities, which are transformative for their adherents, understanding something of the vital role religious practices play in the lives of their communities helps us to engage intelligently in a world characterised by religious pluralism.

