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INVESTIGATING RELIGION

STUDY OF RELIGION FOR SENIOR SECONDARY STUDENTS



Activity writers

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INTRODUCTION

Australia is a nation of immigrants and a place where many religions exist and flourish. However, we have only begun to embrace religious pluralism in the last twenty years, and we are still learning. One way we begin to engage with religion is to learn about it, question it, plumb its depths and critique it. This is exactly what Study of Religion is all about.

We have designed this book specifically for Study of Religion teachers and senior secondary students in Queensland. The text develops the inquiry model required in the syllabus and provides an opportunity to investigate religion, and how religious issues affect today's world. Each chapter of the book provides a range of information related to the topic or core components of the syllabus. In addition, each chapter contains a wide variety of activities based on the inquiry process.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Investigating Religion provides a number of ways to study religion. The chapters model the application of the 2008 QSA Study of Religion syllabus to the topic areas. While the core is presented in some depth, these chapters are intended as a foundation and enriching reference material for grounding the topic chapters.

Ideally, elements of the **core components** should be integrated into **topics**.

Core components:


- Australian religious perspectives (including Aboriginal spiritualities and Torres Strait Islander religions; Religion in Australian society; and Religious diversity in Australia)
- World religions (including Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam)
- The nature and significance of religion.


Topics:

- Religion–state relationships
- Ritual
- Sacred texts

- Ultimate questions
- Religion, values and ethics
- School-based topic – religion and human rights.

When studying Chapter 2, Ritual, for example, cross-referencing this material with key concepts from the chapters discussing world religions may assist the investigation, as might something from Chapter 3, Sacred texts. In other words, moving from one section to another would be more beneficial than beginning at the introduction and working through to the conclusion. To study a topic in depth, you might find it useful to consider sections of four or five chapters, as well as drawing on other resources.

As you work through the book, you will be asked to complete a range of different activities. All of these activities are provided in electronic format on the Student CD-ROM. Whenever you see this icon  you will know that the corresponding worksheet or activity text for the activity is available on the Student CD-ROM. This will allow you to print them out and complete them by hand, or complete and submit them electronically.

As part of your learning, you will also be expected to access a number of resources online. Whenever you see this icon  you will know that an activity requires you to access the internet.

In order to provide a varied learning experience, this book uses a wide range of activities. Some of them you will no doubt 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
- Histogram graph
- Hot seat
- Info break
- Jigsaw
- KWHL
- K-W-L
- Mind Map
- PMI
- Six Thinking Hats
- Storyboard
- SWOT





- Flowchart
- Frayer Concept Model
- Graffiti wall
- T-chart
- Venn diagram
- Y-chart.

For more information and examples of each of these strategies and learning activities, access the Student CD-ROM.

THE INQUIRY PROCESS

In the 2008 Study of Religion syllabus, the first four elements in the inquiry process – Framing, Investigating, Reasoning and Judging – are assessable, and relate to the syllabus’ general objectives of Knowledge and Understanding, Evaluative Processes, and Research and Communication. These are linked to the exit criteria for awarding levels of achievement. The fifth element of the inquiry process, Reflecting, is not assessable and is linked to the affective objectives which describe the attitudes, values and feelings that the syllabus aims to develop.



The first of the general objectives, **Knowledge and Understanding**, should:

- develop students’ abilities to recognise, recall and demonstrate that they understand the meaning of key ideas and concepts from a range of sources and materials
- develop students’ abilities to comprehend, explain and apply key ideas and concepts about religion in familiar and unfamiliar contexts, drawing on a variety of materials, issues and phenomena related to religion.



The second objective, **Evaluative Processes**, refers to students’ abilities to analyse, synthesise and evaluate information about religion while simultaneously demonstrating rigorous inquiry, reasoned judgement and critical comment.

The third objective, **Research and Communication**, refers to the use of the inquiry process including gathering, selecting, sorting, organising and presenting information about religious issues and phenomena.

The Study of Religion inquiry process is not a linear process. It is fluid, enabling movement freely between framing, investigating and reasoning before judging. The fluidity with the inquiry process will depend on the unit and topic being studied and the particular emphasis taken for the area under investigation. The process of inquiry enables teachers and students to organise the selection, pacing and timing of knowledge transmitted and received as they investigate religion and its place in society.

Ethnographic investigations

An ethnographic investigation may run for the duration of a unit or for only part of a unit and may encompass one or more assessment instruments, such as a research assignment, a report, a multi-modal presentation or a piece of extended writing. The assessment tasks are completed at various milestone points throughout the process of inquiry.

The QSA Study of Religion syllabus clearly states that before the interview section of the ethnographic investigation, students should have a broad understanding of the phenomenon under investigation and have mastered the language involved. This means that the findings of their investigation will be based on comprehensive knowledge. *Investigating Religion* provides a number of support activities in each of the topics for the ethnographic investigations.

The ethnographic investigation ideas provided have been designed so that they might be adapted to suit a variety of school locations and access to resources (human and material). Where it is not possible to speak with people, it is possible to use documentary or other sources in which adherents describe or show what takes place in their religious communities.

FOR THE STUDENT

The inquiry process for Study of Religion is shaped by five aspects of inquiry (i.e. Framing, Investigating, Reasoning, Judging and Reflecting).

Framing asks you to become aware of matters and issues relating to the topic, outlining and defining the topic or issue, identifying a range of sources, exploring knowledge, viewpoints, questions and approaches and identifying, focusing and recording key points of the study. You might ask:

- What questions can I ask about this topic or issue?
- What resources and sources might I look for relating to this topic or issue?
- Where might I locate other materials?
- What do I know about this topic or issue? What is my point of view on this issue?
- What might be other points of view in this class, in the local community and in the wider community?

Investigating is concerned with identifying appropriate resources and methods, establishing validity of sources, formulating research questions, developing ideas for an hypothesis, gathering, organising, sorting, presenting data and evidence and investigating and researching issues related to an hypothesis. You might ask:

- Are the sources and resources I have located appropriate for, or relevant to, this topic or issue?
- What frameworks or methods have other people used to investigate this topic?
- Are some frameworks or methods more appropriate than others?
- What questions do I need to generate which relate to this topic?
- How might I collect evidence relating to this topic or issue?
- Do I have enough material?
- How might I sort the evidence I have gathered?
- How will I begin to shape a hypothesis?

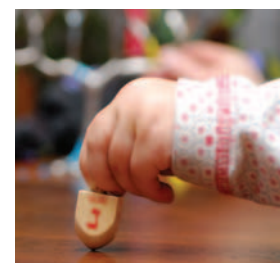
Reasoning requires you to speculate about sources including identifying bias, to propose/deduce interrelationships from data, to present findings and evidence using various genres, to move towards providing explanations and interpretations of religious beliefs, values, practices, events and to shape and reshape the hypothesis. You might ask:



- How reliable is the evidence I have collected?
- Is the material I have collected from authoritative sources?
- What ideas do the sources have in common?
- What ideas in the sources are different?
- What social, cultural, religious or gender bias might be present in what I have collected? Why might this bias exist?
- Do the sources present a range of perspectives and/or ideologies?
- In what socio-historical contexts were the sources located?
- How is the material I have collected assisting me to reason and think?
- How is the material I have collected assisting me to shape my hypothesis?

Judging requires you to synthesise, make decisions, draw conclusions and advocate a position. You will need to develop skills to draw conclusions based on evidence, justify conclusions about the hypothesis using evidence, and decide whether further investigation, reasoning, evidence or action is required. You might ask:

- What conclusions can I draw based on the evidence I have gathered?
- Do my conclusions relate to my hypothesis?
- Can my hypothesis be reshaped?
- Do I need to investigate this further?
- Do I need to collect more evidence?





- Have I thought this through?
- What is the most appropriate genre to use to present this information?

The final element in the inquiry process, **Reflecting**, invites you to reflect on your learning and on your actions. You might consider:

- How effective has my learning been?
- What problems did I encounter in the research and how did I respond to them?
- How could the investigation have been improved?
- How has this study helped my understanding of religion?
- What have I learnt about and from religion?
- How can I apply my personal learning to current religious issues?
- What action, if any, might I take?
- How might I improve my approach to Study of Religion?

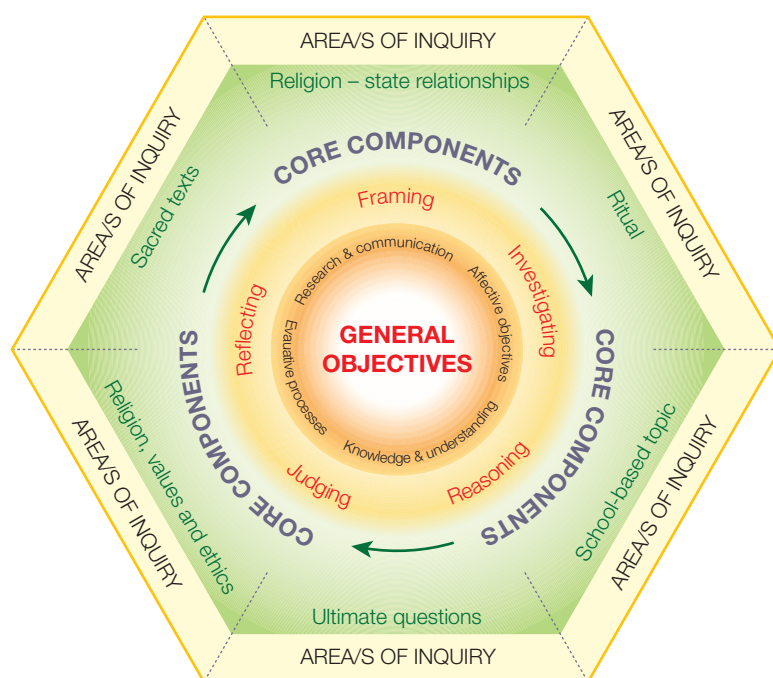
Throughout the inquiry process you will find that you will move back and forth between framing, investigating and reasoning before judging. Keep asking questions of the information you have sourced and keep investigating until you are satisfied that you have a sound grasp of the topic.

FOR THE TEACHER

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. The Study of Religion syllabus is grounded in such an approach to teaching and learning.

Investigating Religion is designed to assist you implement the 2008 Syllabus for Study of Religion by opening up topics and areas of inquiry in *Study of Religion*.

The Study of Religion syllabus (2008) states that the five aspects of inquiry – Framing, Investigating, Reasoning, Judging and Reflecting – should be used



as the basis for unit planning, for developing learning activities, and for designing assessment instruments.

The syllabus outlines six topics available for study. For each topic there are several areas of inquiry that provide ideas for how to investigate the topic. A topic may be explored through one or more areas of inquiry.

All topics and units of work should integrate the core components. Core components are considered central to *Study of Religion – Australian Religious Perspectives, World Religions, and the Nature and Significance of Religion*. If the topic chosen is Ritual, for example, elements of the rituals of various world religions could be investigated in order to analyse how they contribute to our understating of the Nature and Significance of Religion. While this does not exclude an in-depth investigation of rituals in one particular religious tradition, there should nevertheless be examples from other World Religions and examples that show Australian Religious perspectives.

The Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) Study of Religion (SOR) syllabus has over the past few years been moving along the path of inquiry learning. Since 2001, the Study of Religion syllabus has moved away from purely didactic or transmission models and suggested an inquiry-based approach which promotes a serious study of religion. The 2001 syllabus shifted from a mono-model approach (Smart's dimensions) to a dialogical approach, which required the use of multiple approaches including sociological, historical, feminist and phenomenological approaches. The syllabus also encouraged students to critique the content and approaches used. The 2008 syllabus is built on an inquiry model of learning and teaching.

Inquiry based learning is not new, in fact it was promoted by the American educator John Dewey (1859–1952) who revolutionised education in the early twentieth century. 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 2008 Study of Religion Syllabus 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 2008 Study of Religion syllabus, through 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.

Critical literacy draws from a variety of theoretical perspectives but is distinguished from the routine decoding of textual information and from 'compliantly participating in the established, institutionalized textual practices of a culture' (Unsworth, 2000, p. 6). 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 (2002) 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 of beliefs, religious traditions and ways in which these shape peoples' lives enable and enrich our own functioning religiously and politically in contemporary society. Since religions are dynamic and living entities, which are transformative for their adherents, understating something of the vital role religious practices play in the lives of their communities helps us to engage intelligently in Australian society, which is now characterised by religious pluralism.