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Teaching Tolerance in Regard to Religion

**Name of the Article:** “Taking a Closer Look at Religions Around the World”

**Population:** Students of all learning abilities who are encouraged in diversity relating to religion.

**Objective:** Students will improve understanding of other religions through group discussion.

**Age/Grade Level:** 6-8, 9-12

**Procedure:**

**Introduction:**

This study was created in an attempt to bring students of various religions together and allow them to discuss and bring understanding and suggest religious tolerance. The more we educate ourselves about something new, the more that we can understand what drives people and come to a resolution to treat people equally regardless of their passions and beliefs. This particular strategy attempts to teach students about where religions come from and learn about them from a different angle.

**Summary:**

The strategy begins by asking students to define religion and asking them why we should learn about different religions. The strategy then answers those questions by stating that religion helps answer questions that we have about life and purpose and the afterlife to understand the world we live in, and that learning about other religions helps us to understand each other better. It suggests that we allow students to get into groups to discuss these questions and find out how our interpretations are different. Following these definitions, the strategy suggests that students create lists of what makes a religion and what separates them from something that people do not consider to be religions. Discuss whether or not letters from one side do anything to promote tolerance. Divide the students into groups based on which way they side and then require them to research the opposite viewpoint and be prepared to defend their new topic. The goal of these debates is for the students to come to an agreement and then individually write a summary of how the process went for them and seeing dual sides of the same coin. It then recommends that students read “A Muslim Letter to Christians” by Emily Flynn Vencat, and go through words and details that may be confusing so that they can broaden their understanding. The strategy says that students should break up into pairs work out the confusing or new parts and discuss how they felt about the letter. Finally, bring the class back together to talk about what else can be done to promote tolerance, what in history has proved that understandings can be reached between people of religious groups, and what can we do as individuals to make the world a better place for people with religions different from our own, then open up for questions.

The strategy also gives suggestions for an extension activity to research different world religions and assign groups to explore each religion and create a presentation for their classmates so that the entire class can gain an understanding about multiple religions. Another option is to invite guest speakers so that students can gain information from people who are confirmed in their knowledge about the religion. It suggests having a pre-discussion period where students can begin thinking about questions to ask the speakers. It is also important that the students remember that religion means something different to each individual and that the speaker cannot be the sole expert on the way people from his or her religion believe. The strategy also reminds the class to write a thank-you note. Regardless of what aspect of the strategy used, the article reminds the educator the importance of impressing upon the students a non-judgement, respect safe space so that everyone can feel able to speak freely on what they believe, as this is such a sensitive subject.

**Possible Adaptations:** This strategy is great for young people. It is important to discuss difficult subjects such as religion early so that students can have a more extensive knowledge about people different from themselves. I think that this could also be adapted to younger students in late elementary school as well though. I definitely think that this strategy is important in inclusion so that all students may interact and have a voice so as to promote understanding. It also helps with understanding perspectives in literature with authors and characters and I will use strategies like this one to help my students understand how to analyze literature in my classroom in the future. My only concern with the project is that it promotes an environment of defensiveness with the extended activity to debate other religions. I also think this strategy needs to be broken up into several days to fully explore the implications of religion. Discussion based classes like this would most likely take more than fifty minutes.

**Reflection**: I enjoyed the study, and it is definitely something I could use in my future classes. I especially liked the part where students were to switch points of view in debates. The only thing that helps it is that the goal is to reach an agreement or compromise, but it is important to realize that it could actually create more tension and not achieve the goal of equalization because religion is something people are passionate about.

**Reference**

<https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/taking-a-closer-look-at-religions-around-the-world>