



Friends In Faith

An Interfaith School Guide



Introduction

Building bridges of understanding among people of all **faiths**.

As religious conflicts divide neighbors and nations and the threat of violence hangs over us like a shadow, many people see religion as a force of divisiveness and violence, rather than as a force for unity and peace.

In a world that is increasingly interconnected, we must identify new ways to respect our religious differences while forging peaceful bonds based on our common humanity.

Jews, Catholics and Muslims share a common religious heritage and we are united by the fundamental belief in the dignity of human life and the call to social responsibility. Our challenge today is to turn these common values into positive action.

Friends in Faith is a unique interfaith action guide dedicated to building bridges of understanding among people of all faiths. Through simple, engaging classroom activities, the guide offers a chance for teachers, students, religious leaders and community members to explore the many religious and cultural traditions that are part of our shared experience and create opportunities to work together to build a better society.

By exploring our shared heritage and shared beliefs – and joining together in common positive action – participants will understand that what unites us is greater than what divides us.

By acting on our common values, we can bring people of all faiths together in a spirit of mutual respect and genuine understanding – and make religion a force for good.



Friends in Faith – Lesson Plans

The following activities are designed for middle school and high school-aged students in an educational setting such as a religious school, community center, after school program, etc. The goal of the activities is to help students gain a deeper understanding of other religions – specifically Islam, Judaism and Christianity – by experiencing these religions through the eyes of the people who practice each faith.

The guide will also help students gain a stronger sense of their own religious beliefs as well as the concepts of open dialogue, mutual respect and interfaith understanding.

The guide is based on two key principles that can help promote interfaith discussion and action:

1. **Shared values:** By exploring the core values of the Christian, Islamic and Jewish faiths, participants will understand the commonalities that bridge our religious beliefs and cultural traditions.
2. **Interfaith encounters:** Through a series of engaging interfaith activities, students, teachers, religious leaders and community members can gain a deeper understanding of their own faith, the religious beliefs of others, and ultimately, gain a better understanding of ourselves.

The lesson plans are loosely formatted so that they can be adapted in ways that meet your own teaching objectives, requirements and needs. The lesson plans can be combined with a pre-existing curriculum or serve as the basis of an entire class session. We invite you to use these activities with students of different faiths. Feel free to make them your own.



Activity 1: Interfaith Holiday

Objective:

To use the core values of Christianity, Judaism and Islam to develop a new interfaith holiday.

Lesson Steps:

1. Designate a certain day (approximately 1-2 months away) as a new interfaith holiday.
2. Explain to your students that they are in charge of designing the holiday. This includes designating the reason why the holiday exists, developing the holiday story and creating the way the holiday is celebrated.
3. Study various holidays of different faiths. Pay special attention to the holiday customs, religious text and core values (see Resource Guide).
4. Ask the students to determine the values that should be emphasized in the interfaith holiday. Examples may include celebrating the values of love, service, unity, equality, mutual respect, open dialogue, etc.
5. Ask the students to develop the following important features of the new holiday:
 - The holiday name
 - Story
 - The text used for celebration (could be a compilation of different scriptures, something created by the students, essays, interviews, etc.).
 - How the holiday is celebrated (could be a prayers service, pledge, a candle ceremony, moments of silence, song, procession, meal, etc.). It is also important for the students to figure out who should be invited (i.e., if one religious school is implementing this new holiday, consider inviting schools of different faiths and asking them to help you organize the event).
 - Develop ways the holiday can be celebrated each year (i.e., create an interfaith holiday committee, invite your local paper, include the holiday as part of a pre-existing annual event, etc.).
6. Reflect with your students upon the completion of the holiday and celebrate your accomplishments. Address these questions (or lead a discussion):
 - What is the core belief or value (such as atonement, celebrating God) behind the holiday that you selected?
 - Is that core belief or value important to your religion as well?
 - Why did you select that particular holiday? What does your new holiday teach you?
 - What did you learn through this activity?



Activity 2: Interfaith News

Objective:

Develop a consistent opportunity for your students to explore, learn about and celebrate people of different faiths.

Materials:

A newsletter can be created in many different ways, from photocopying typed documents to creating a template in a graphic design program, such as QuarkXpress or Powerpoint. (Download sample templates at <http://www.faithindialogue.org>)

Lesson Steps:

1. Facilitate a discussion on the notion of interfaith understanding with your students:
 - What is your definition of “interfaith understanding”?
 - Why is “interfaith understanding” important? What are the benefits of educating students about interfaith efforts? What are the biggest challenges?
 - What are the benefits of promoting “interfaith understanding” for humanity?
 - Can you promote “interfaith understanding” and also practice one religious faith? Explain.
3. Based on your discussion, help your students develop their “interfaith credo” that will serve as the basis of your newsletter. Examples of a credo might be that “everyone is equal,” “dialogue promotes understanding,” or “God loves all human beings.”
4. After creating your credo, identify the resources that are available to you (such as computers, paper, copy machines, etc.). Next, facilitate a discussion to determine the format of the newsletter.
5. Your students can choose the contents of the newsletter. Following are some recommendations for possible sections of the newsletter: interfaith current events; interfaith features (people of different faiths share their beliefs, customs, daily lives, etc.), Did You Know? (a column with facts on how various religions are similar); Project Ideas (highlighting various interfaith activities, like these lesson plans); Belief-Corner (spotlighting beliefs from various religions); stories on young people taking the ideals of interfaith understanding into their own hands to promote unity and peace.
6. Determine a format, schedule and roles/responsibilities.
7. Get started!
8. Organize a discussion with the students before the newsletter goes to print:
 - What did you learn by creating this issue?
 - What was one thing that you did not know before that surprised you? Why did it surprise you?
 - What are your interfaith objectives for the next issue?



Activity 3: Social Justice Story

Objective:

To dig deeper into the common value of social justice that is central various religions, such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Materials:

Pen and paper, resources on various religions (see Resource Guide).

Lesson Steps:

1. Facilitate a discussion on “social justice.” You can create your own definition of social justice or use the following one: A God-given right that provides each individual with equal and fair access for all to laws, resources, opportunities, and institutions to achieve their potential without direct or perceived prejudice.
 - How does your faith express “social justice”?
 - What are examples of stories (fables, traditions) that explain social justice?
2. Ask students to write their own short story that describes how the value of social justice came to be using their own religion as a basis.
3. Rewrite the plot as an interfaith story (3-5 pages) and include representatives from various religions and belief-systems.
4. Ask a few students to share their stories with the group.
5. Facilitate a discussion:
 - What does the value of social justice teach you about interfaith understanding?
 - What did completing this exercise teach you about social justice? About various religions?
 - How does the concept of social justice make an impact on your life?



Activity 4: Holiday Memory Game

Objective:

To learn about various holidays within Christian, Jewish and Islamic faith.

Materials:

Markers, paper and/or notecards.

Lesson Steps:

1. Using the information provided below (or your own research), create two “memory cards” for each major religious holiday celebrated by Jews, Christians and Muslims. On one card, write the name of the holiday. On the other, write the name the religion and a brief explanation.
2. Shuffle the cards and place them face down on a table. The object of the game is for the students to find the pairs. The person with the most matched pairs wins the game. Note: this game is best played with a small group.
3. Before you start the game, ask your students about their knowledge of various religious holidays, including those of their own faith.
4. Facilitate a discussion on holidays, For more information, visit:
http://www.uri.org/kids/world_chri_cele.htm (Christianity),
http://www.uri.org/kids/world_isla_cele.htm (Islam) and
http://www.uri.org/kids/world_juda_cele.htm (Judaism).
5. Set up the game, explain the rules and begin the game.
6. Holiday Information
 - Chanukah (Jewish): Festival of Lights
 - Rosh Hashanah (Jewish): Jewish New Year festival
 - Yom Kippur (Jewish): Day of Atonement
 - Passover or Pesach (Jewish): marks the liberation of the Jews from slavery in Egypt
 - Shavuot (Feast of the Weeks: (Jewish): Celebrates the harvest season in Israel and commemorates the anniversary of the giving of the Ten Commandments to – Moses and the Israelites at Mount Sinai
 - Id ul-Fitr (Islam): A time of thankfulness for Allah’s blessings immediately proceeding Ramadan.
 - Hajj (Islam): Pilgrimage to Mecca to worship in the Ka’bah.
 - Id ul-Adha (Islam): The festival that ends Hajj, in which a sheep or goat is sacrificed. This is a reminder of the sacrifice Ibrahim (Abraham) was asked to make of his son, Isma’il (Ishmael).
 - Milad an-Nabi (Islam): The birthday of the Holy Prophet.
 - Lailat al-Qadr (Night of Power) (Islam): The night in which the prophet Mohammed received the first revelation from God.



- Ramadan (Islam): Falling on the ninth month of the Muslim calendar, it is during this month that Muslims observe the Fast of Ramadan. Lasting for the entire month, Muslims fast during the daylight hours and in the evening eat small meals and visit with friends and family. It is a time of worship, contemplation and a time to strengthen family.
- Advent (Christian): Four-week season of preparation for the birth of Christ, and for the Second Coming.
- Christmas (Christian): Jesus' birth.
- Epiphany (Christian): The visit of the three wise men to Jesus and their announcement of the news of his birth throughout the world.
- Lent (Christian): The period leading up to Easter commemorating the 40 days – Jesus spent in the desert fasting and praying.
- Holy Week (Christian): Last week of Jesus' life, including Palm Sunday, which celebrates his entry into Jerusalem the week before he was crucified; Maundy Thursday, the Last Supper with the disciples; and Good Friday, the day Jesus was crucified on a cross.
- Easter (Christian): Jesus' resurrection from the dead.
- Ascension Day (Christian): Jesus ascended into Heaven.
- Pentecost (Christian): God's presence in the world, to Jesus' followers in the form of a strong wind and fire.
- Saints' Days (Christian): Celebrating people who have exemplified the ideals of Christianity are recognized as official saints.



Activity 5: Interfaith Architect

Objective:

To learn about Christianity, Judaism and Islam by becoming more familiar with their structures and symbols.

Materials:

Drawing materials and paper.

Lesson Steps:

1. Facilitate a discussion about religious buildings and structures:
 - Describe your religious structure.
 - What do you know about it?
 - What are your favorite symbols, designs, etc.?
 - What do you know of other religious structures?
2. Ask your students to design an interfaith building with the following criteria:
 - Includes at least three structural elements from Christian churches, Jewish synagogues and Islamic mosques.
 - Includes symbols from all three religions.
 - Name the structure.
 - Outline the activities that are to take place in the structure.
 - Ask your students to share their designs and activities.
3. As part of the discussion, ask students to reflect on the following questions:
 - What are three things you learned about other religions through this exercise?
 - Why did you select particular symbols and structures?
 - Would this structure exist in your community? Why or why not?
 - If you were to try to build it, how would you begin to get support?



Activity 6: Pulpit Exchange

Objective:

To build connections among local religious organizations and to facilitate a safe, educational setting for interfaith discussions and studies.

Lesson Steps:

1. Invite a rabbi to your mosque or church to speak, listen and learn. Invite a priest to your synagogue or mosque. Invite an Imam to your church or synagogue. Have other young people attend the services.
2. Ask the visiting religious leader to focus his/her words on two themes:
 - The core beliefs of his/her own religion
 - Interfaith understanding and ways to forge ties between the two religions
3. Once you facilitate a connection with a partner religious organization, develop a comprehensive partnership for ongoing meetings, activities, events and connections.
4. You can create a pen-pal program, a quarterly exchange/ceremony, a joint community service project, or a monthly dinner.
5. Reflect with your students about their experiences. Address these questions (or lead a discussion):
 - What did you learn about the other religion that you didn't know?
 - What were the core beliefs or values that the religious leader expressed? Are these values important to your religion as well?
 - What would you say about your religion if you were the speaker at a different religious institution?



Activity 7: Sacred Objects

Objective:

To use sacred objects to learn about religious beliefs, values and customs.

Lesson Steps:

1. Invite students of a different religious faith to your church, synagogue or mosque (or create an exchange program to visit each other's religious institutions).
2. Have your religious leader or teacher welcome students for a tour of your faith's sacred spaces. Where appropriate, show them your sacred objects. At a synagogue, this might include the eternal light, the ark, the Torah and/or the Ten Commandments. At a church, this might include the crucifix, the stations of the cross, holy water, the sacraments, as well as statues or art depicting the Madonna and saints. At a mosque, this might include sacred inscriptions on the walls, the janamaz (prayer rug) or photos of Mecca.
3. Include a question and answer session so students can learn about your faith's history, beliefs and customs through the sacred objects.
4. Facilitate a discussion that reflects on the following questions:
 - What did you learn about the other religion through this exercise?
 - What symbols and objects were most interesting to you? Why?
 - Are any symbols and objects similar to sacred objects of your own faith? Why do you think they are similar?



Activity 8: Who is Abraham?

Objective:

To help your students gain a deeper understanding of the commonalities of various faiths through exploring Abraham.

Materials:

Writing materials. Stories of Abraham.

Lesson Steps:

1. Islam, Christianity and Judaism are all called Abrahamic religions. What is the story of Abraham for Christianity, Judaism and Islam?
2. What are the similarities and differences?
3. What is the significance that Christianity, Judaism and Islam include the story of Abraham?
4. Why are the stories of Abraham important to each faith?

Activity 9: Peace Passages

Objective:

To demonstrate that Christianity, Islam and Judaism all promote peace.

Materials: Key passages from the Torah, Qur'an and Bible.

Lesson Steps:

1. Find passages in each representative religion on peace and understanding (see Resource Guide).
2. Based on these passages, do you see similarities?
3. What are the differences?
4. If there are similarities, what is the source of religious conflicts?
5. How do you bring these scriptures to life everyday?
6. Provide examples of how these scriptures on peace and understanding become alive in your own life.



Activity 10: Stereotypes Skit

Objective:

To help students experience the impact of religious discrimination and stereotypes.

Materials: Writing materials

Lesson Steps:

1. Facilitate a discussion on religious stereotypes. Create a list of the stereotypes that people hold of different religions as well as your own. Encourage your students to be honest about their own perceptions of the different faiths. Ask students to share experiences (personal or second-hand) of religious stereotyping.
2. What is the impact of the stereotypes (i.e., creates anger, creates divisions among friends, increases hate crime, keeps people apart)?
3. Ask your students to come up with a quick list of solutions to stereotyping (i.e., more interfaith activities, teaching interfaith understanding in schools, teaching conflict resolution skills, working with the media to combat stereotypes and promote interreligious understanding).
4. Explain to your students that they are going to write and perform a skit using both the examples of negative stereotyping, the impact as well as possible solutions. An example might be a 14-year-old boy/girl who stood up to someone who was discriminated against as a result of his/her faith and taught that person a lesson on stereotypes.
5. Debrief after the skit is performed:
 - What did writing this skit teach you?
 - What did performing this skit teach you?
 - Would you be able to act as the main character(s) in the play did and stand up against negative religious stereotypes in real life?
 - What will you do now if you witness negative religious stereotypes?



Friends in Faith – Resource Guide

Many of the Friends in Faith activities require students to conduct research on various religions. Listed below are a variety of different websites that contain information that your students may find helpful.

Youth Organizations:

<http://www.ifyc.org> (interfaith youth corps)

<http://www.youthlink.org/us> (Youth in Action, award program)

<http://www.takingitglobal.org/opps/sfgdir.html?tag=hd.dd> (youth grants and fellowships)

<http://www.youthventure.org> (youth action projects)

<http://www.global-action.org> (media)

Interfaith Organizations

www.interfaithalliance.org (The Interfaith Alliance)

<http://www.uri.org> (United Religious Initiative for adults)

<http://www.uri.org/kids> (United Religions Initiative for kids, including basic information on various religions)

<http://www.interfaithcall.com> (Interfaith Call for Freedom of Worship and Human Rights)

<http://www.nccj.org> (National Council of Community and Justice)

<http://www.interfaithcalendar.org> (Calendars for many faiths)

www.aicongress.org (American Islamic Congress)

www.cpwr.org (Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions)

www.episcopalchurch.org/ecumenism/interfaith/princip.html (Principles for Interfaith Dialogue)

Faith Sites

<http://beliefnet.com>

<http://www.holidays.net/shavuot> (Shavuot on the Net)

<http://people.enternet.com.au/~beswick/basicch.htm> (Basic Christian Beliefs)

<http://www.digital-librarian.com/judaism.html> (Digital Librarian: Judaism)

<http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/holo.html> (The Jewish Virtual Library- The Holocaust)

<http://www.islamic-knowledge.com> (Islam Knowledge)



Resource Organizations

<http://www.learn.org/projects/laws.html> (Laws of Life Essays—encourage your students to write Laws of Life essay using an interfaith perspective).

<http://www.adl.org/adl.asp> (Anti-Defamation League)

<http://www.friendshipthrougheducation.org> (Friendship Through Education)

<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~pluralism> (The Pluralism Project at Harvard University)

<http://www.sfcg.org> (Search for Common Ground)

<http://www.kerygma.com/courses/newbooks/shalom.htm> (Shalom: A Study of the Biblical Concepts of Peace by Old Testament scholar)

<http://www.adherents.com> (Statistics on Religions)

<http://www.worldprayers.org> (The World Prayer's Project)

<http://www.global-forum.org> (For the Common Good)

<http://www.seedsofpeace.org> (Seeds of Peace – Summer Camp for children from Countries at War)

<http://peace-center.org> (Interfaith Center for Peace)

<http://www.how-to-succeed-at-interfaith-dialogue.com/> (book on interfaith dialogue)

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/wvs/educators/lessons.html> (Peace Corps Lesson Plans – understanding other cultures)

<http://www.tolerance.org/teach> (Teaching Tolerance: Classroom Activities)

<http://www.nv.cc.va.us/home/lshulman> (Comparative Religion Sources and Information)

<http://www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/peace> (United Nations Peace Curriculum)

<http://www.worldpeace.org/peaceday> (International Peace Day)

<http://www.religioustolerance.org> (Religious Tolerance information)

<http://www.bible.gospelcom.net> (Researching Scripture)

<http://www.nsrny.org/EqResKit.htm> (Equity Resource Kit)

<http://www.holidays.net> (Holiday information)



Common Values: Sample Scriptures

Peace

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God. (Matthew 5:9, Christianity)

They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation. Neither shall they learn war no more. (Isaiah 2.4, Judaism)

Let there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression. (Qur'an 2:193, Islam)

Social Justice

Jesus said, "In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you (Matthew 7:12, Christianity)

You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feeling of the stranger having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt. When strangers reside with you in your land, you shall not wrong them. You shall love them as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. (Exodus 23:9, Judaism)

Follow justice and justice alone. (Deuteronomy,16:20, Judaism)

Let justice roll on like a river, and righteousness like a never-failing stream. (Amos 5:24, Judaism)

O you who believe, stand firmly for justice, as witnesses for God. (Qur'an 4:135, Islam)

Serving Others

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others. (Peter 4:10, Christianity)

Then the ones who pleased the Lord will ask, 'When did we give you something to eat or drink? When did we welcome you as a stranger or give you clothes to wear or visit you while you were sick or in jail?' The King will answer, 'Whenever you did it for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me.' (Matthew 25:37-40,



Christianity)

If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him as you would an alien or a temporary resident, so he can continue to live among you. (Leviticus, 25:35, Judaism)

None of you is a believer until you love for your neighbor what you love for yourself. (Islam)

Common Humanity

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Matt. 22:39, Christianity)

Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye. (Matt. 7.1, 5, Christianity)

No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and God's love is truly in our hearts. (John 4:12, Christianity)

Oh humankind, God has created you from male and female and made you into diverse nations and tribes so that you may come to know each other. (Qur'an 49:13, Islam)

About the Center for Interreligious Understanding (CIU):

The Center for Interreligious Understanding promotes honest dialogue, mutual respect and positive social action among people of all faiths. For more information, visit <http://www.faithindialogue.org> .

We welcome your feedback!

Please contact Marci Linke at 201.866.1411 or email marci@faithindialogue.org.

