


YEAR LEVEL	7 & 8	
TITLE	Searching for Answers	
STRAND	CHURCH AND TRADITION	
SUGGESTED DURATION	10 weeks (25 hours)	
ENDURING QUESTIONS	<p>How do religion and society influence each other?</p> <p>How can I respect the beliefs and faith traditions of others?</p>	

Unit Focus

Students explore the meaning of religion and the place of religious practice in life. Human beings are drawn towards the search for answers to fundamental questions such as the meaning and purpose of all life.

Achievement Standards

By the end of Year Eight:

Students articulate an understanding and an appreciation of the nature and role of religion in society and in people's lives.

Unit Outcomes

By the end of this unit students should be able to:

1. **Appreciate the role of religion in human society as a means of responding to questions of life's meaning and purpose.**
2. **Apply the elements of a religion to a study of the core features of Christianity (especially Catholicism), Judaism, and Islam.**
3. **Appreciate the ways in which Aboriginal Spirituality contributes to the life of the Church in Australia.**

Key Understandings for Students

- The dimensions of religion include beliefs; stories or myths; sacred texts; ethics; rituals; symbols; social structures; spiritual experiences; spaces and times.
- Religion offers a means of understanding life; it gives meaning to life and answers to life questions.
- Religious faith is a human response to the mystery of the creation, the journey of life, and what it means to be human.
- Religion is a system of belief in, and response to, divine mystery, including sacred texts, rituals, ethical practices and social organisation.
- Christianity, Judaism and Islam have common ancestry, rituals, stories and significant people.
- The Catholic Church teaches that all religions have religious truth.
- Dialogue with local religious communities enhances our understanding of various religious beliefs and practices, including our own.

- Australia's history and culture has been influenced by various religious traditions.
- Aboriginal spirituality is defined as at the core of Aboriginal being, their very identity. It gives meaning to all aspects of life including relationships with one another and the environment.
- Central to an understanding of Aboriginal spirituality is an appropriate understanding of Creation and connection to Country.
- Aboriginal spirituality continues to make a significant contribution to Australia's history and culture.

Student Context

Students in Year 7 and 8 have a natural curiosity. Therefore they are seeking answers to questions about the meaning of life. They are alert to various ways of acting and reacting and realise that there are various religious and spiritual responses to the meaning and purpose of life. At this level of development new intellectual capacities are in evidence as the students move from more concrete thinking to more abstract thinking. They are becoming competent in developing hypotheses, making predictions, interpreting data, generalising and drawing conclusions, and understanding conceptual thought.

They have an increasing capacity to reflect on knowledge and are able to see situations from various points of view. Their deepening understanding of how symbols can be connected to abstract concepts enables them in the study of this unit, to link spiritual and religious traditions to the ultimate question of the meaning of life. Likewise, this capacity enables them to comprehend various understandings of God and to appropriate these to different practices and beliefs that parallel their own faith experience.

It is important to acknowledge the students' past experience, or lack thereof, of family, school and parish community, and of Aboriginal culture, and to help them own their own experience and be able to build on it.

Theological Background for Teachers

- The human search for meaning is as old as humanity itself. For all other animals, there is no evidence for this level of consciousness. Only humans can ask questions about the meaning and purpose of their lives. For many, this revolves around belief in God and in the afterlife, and the practice of religion; for others meaning is constructed in spiritual, but not necessarily religious terms (human values, commitments etc.); for some, the meaning they decide is that "there is no meaning".
- The answers people develop are usually derived in some way from their social and community experiences.
- The need for young people to find ways of making meaning in their lives and to develop an authentic sense of self is fundamental to their moral and spiritual wellbeing.
- Meaning can be thought of as a satisfying theory or interpretation of one's life or of particular activities – it gives a plausible explanation, a positive understanding. Meaning is the theory that makes sense of one's experience. Meaning also helps to explain one's behaviour.
- Meaning can be a set of values, beliefs and principles to which the individual is committed as a purpose or general direction for living; it is the wisest answer individuals can give at the time about what motivates them.
- Ultimate meaning has to do with theories about how the individual interprets principal purposes in life; it also has to do with transcendent questions about death, afterlife, the existence of God and reward for the just.
- Providing meaning and purpose in life is a central role of religion. For many people religion is the principal source of meaning for life. Religion provides an overarching spiritual framework for life and it gives direction to a moral life as well as to prayer and other religious practices. Religion gives a sense of ultimate meaning not only to life but also to the universe, e.g. for Christians seeing it as a complex creation of God.
- Religious beliefs can be the core of meaning for individuals. They can motivate a spiritual life including prayer and worship as well as sustain a moral life. Also, religion provides answers to ultimate questions about the existence of God, joy and suffering, life after death and creation.
- A religion can give a person identity and answers to identity-forming questions:

Selfhood - "Who am I?" "Where did I come from?"

Meaning - "Why am I here?" "Where will I go when I die?"

Purpose - "What do I do?" "What is the purpose of life?"

These deep searching identity questions are a pervasive part of human experience and are thought by some to be the source of the world's great religions. Religions answer these questions for people in psychologically satisfying, multidimensional ways.

- Religion gives people understandable paradigms that guide behaviour.
- Religion is human involvement with what is considered to be the realm of the sacred (sacred space, sacred time, numinous experience, mystical experience). It is expressed in thought (theoretical thinking and speaking e.g. narrative stories and theoretical statements about reality in doctrines), action (practical acting and doing e.g. rituals, worships and ethics), and social forms (fellowship, community).
- Religion constitutes a total system of symbols with deep meaning. The religious map of human existence is made up of symbols (words, ideas, rituals, pictures, gestures, sounds, social groupings) that evoke the deepest feelings and most important meaning in our lives. The various symbols fit together in a circle, for they are all related to each other in such a way as to present a comprehensive and persuasive outlook on life.

The Abrahamic Religions

- Judaism, Christianity and Islam are all monotheistic religions (i.e. believing in and worshipping one God who is the source of all creation as well as of moral laws). Collectively they are known as the Abrahamic religions for, having each originated in the Middle East, they each accept the tradition that God revealed himself to the patriarch Abraham. Therefore these three religions share a common ancestry and their religious texts feature many of the same figures, histories, and places, although they present them with different roles, perspectives, and meanings. They are also often referred to as the Religions of the Book because of the central importance attached to their written scriptures (Torah, Bible and Koran respectively).

Aboriginal Spirituality

- While not formally considered a religion, Australian Aboriginal spirituality gives insights to many Australians particularly in regard to our relationship with creation. Aboriginal peoples believe that the world was created by ancestors from the spirit world during the time of the Dreaming (which continues today); these spirits formed the landscape, animals and people and left a complex system of Law and ceremony that establishes the rights and duties of individuals and groups today.
- Aboriginal people were formed from the land and continue to be part of it - and it of them. Their identity is closely linked to the land (Country).
- Over time some indigenous people have lived their Catholic faith and enculturated (or recontextualised) it in light of their spirituality. Aboriginal people have a significant contribution to make to the Australian Church, as Pope John Paul acknowledged when he said, "You are part of Australia and Australia is part of you. And the Church herself in Australia will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until you have made your contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others." (Address to Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, Alice Springs, November 29 1986)
- More recently, in regard to indigenous people around the world, Pope Francis has said, "It is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions ... For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values." n146 Laudato Si'

Major Assessment Task

TASK 1 (to be completed during the unit):

In pairs, create a Chart comparing the 8 elements of Christianity, Judaism and Islam (beliefs; stories or myths; sacred texts; ethics; rituals; symbols; social structures; religious experiences).

TASK 2:

Imagine that you are committed to **one** of the religious traditions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam) and someone asks you: "What is the meaning of life?" How would you respond? (In writing or a visual presentation).

TASK 3:

Write a creative story that informs others about the beliefs and cultural practices of Aboriginal Spirituality.

It is expected that students and teachers will co-construct an assessment rubric for this task beginning with the below. Teachers are encouraged to assess skills and knowledge from other learning areas that may be included in this task.

	Well Above Expected Level	Above Expected level	Expected Level	Working Towards Expected Level
Knowledge and Understanding	Has demonstrated a thorough understanding of each of the 8 elements for the 3 religious traditions. Catholic, Jewish, Muslim.	Has demonstrated a sound understanding of the 8 elements for the 3 religious traditions: Catholic, Jewish, Muslim.	Has demonstrated a good understanding of the 8 elements of a religious tradition: Catholic, Jewish, Muslim.	Has demonstrated a basic understanding of the 8 elements of a religious tradition: Catholic, Jewish, Muslim.
	Has demonstrated a deep understanding of the meaning of life from a religious perspective.	Has demonstrated a strong understanding of the meaning of life from a religious perspective.	Has demonstrated a reasonable understanding of the meaning of life from a religious perspective.	Has demonstrated a limited understanding of the meaning of life from a religious perspective.
	Has created a detailed story demonstrating an extensive understanding of the beliefs and cultural practices of Aboriginal Spirituality.	Has created a detailed story demonstrating a strong understanding of the beliefs and cultural practices of Aboriginal Spirituality.	Has created a simple story demonstrating a satisfactory understanding of the beliefs and cultural practices of Aboriginal Spirituality.	Has created a simple story demonstrating a basic understanding of the beliefs and cultural practices of Aboriginal Spirituality.
Reasoning	Has reasoned insightfully, the role of religion as a means of responding to questions of meaning and purpose in life.	Has reasoned clearly, the role of religion as a means of responding to questions of meaning and purpose in life.	Has reasoned the role of religion as a means of responding to questions of meaning and purpose in life.	Has reasoned the role of religion as a means of responding to questions of meaning and purpose in life to a minimal standard.

Suggested Teaching & Learning Experiences

Focusing activity

Consider where are the signs of religion in society? For example, roadside crosses, candlelight vigils, religious jewelry. Consider the origins of these practices and what meaning they provide for people. Conversely, where are the signs that the influence of religion in society is waning? For example, Mass attendance, euthanasia legislation. Find data, e.g. from the census, regarding religious affiliation and practice in Australia.

Outcome 1. Appreciate the role of religion in human society as a means of responding to questions of life's meaning and purpose.

- Students write their own definition of what they think religion is. Record their definition. Students are given a number of quotes about religion. In groups, discuss the various definitions of religion and their own, and create a collage of the way they see religion lived out in their community, or society in general.
- Interview someone of a different religion or a different generation, eg. grandparents, about the importance of religion in their lives.
- Conduct a media search identifying aspects of religious practice in Australia.
- What religious traditions are present in your school or local community? How are they represented? Who are their leaders? Where are their significant sites? Arrange to visit at least one of these sites. Develop a pictorial and written summary of the various rites used, forms of worship and methods of prayer observed during your visit.
- Some people turn to religion when they are in a crisis situation. Discuss.
- Some people are described as "Christmas and Easter Christians". Discuss why some people do not practise their religion on a constant basis.
- Using [de Bono's Six Thinking Hats](#), explore the topic "Religion plays a significant role in society".

Outcome 2. Apply the elements of a religion to a study of the core features of Christianity (especially Catholicism), Judaism, and Islam.

- Identify the nine elements of religion as they apply to Christianity. Students match definitions and examples with each element (beliefs, stories or myths, sacred texts, ethics, rituals, symbols, social structures, spiritual experiences, spaces and times - see **Appendix 1**)
- Next apply the nine elements to Judaism and Islam.
- Using Christianity as the starting point, look for similarities (there are many) and differences between the three religions.
- Listen to a speaker from Judaism and Islam discussing the relationship between their faith and Christianity.
- Research efforts at interfaith dialogue between the Catholic Church and the other two faiths. Pope Francis has been prominent in this dialogue: who has he met (where/when)? what has he said or written?
- Students complete Parts 1 and 2 of the Major Assessment Task.

Outcome 3. Appreciate the ways in which Aboriginal Spirituality contributes to the life of the Church in Australia.

- Invite an Aboriginal Elder/Representative to speak to the students about Aboriginal Spirituality and its importance for Aboriginal people.
- Go on Country, preferably with a local Elder or guide. Have them explain the significance of particular parts of that environment and how Aboriginal people have cared for it over time.
- Locate and read a range of Aboriginal creation stories. If possible, identify what part of Australia they come from. Identify what aspect of creation they seek to explain. In general, what is the purpose of indigenous creation stories (e.g. indicating morals or significant teachings)?

- The number of Aboriginal people continuing to connect to the Catholic faith is continually increasing. Investigate why, beginning with a look at <https://www.natsicc.org.au/statistics.html>
- Look at ways Aboriginal people have adapted elements of Catholic faith and practice to their own culture, e.g. the meaning and use of the message stick, the Aboriginal Our Father, artwork, priestly vestments.
- Visit the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry website <https://www.cam1.org.au/acmv> Find examples of Catholic symbols and practices that have been enculturated with an indigenous perspective.
- What are the differences between Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country? When is one more appropriate than the other?
- Aboriginal artist Troy Firebrace has married the Aboriginal story with the sacraments of the Catholic faith (see <https://www.ceosand.catholic.edu.au/catholicidentity/index.php/kalik/aboriginal-liturgy-and-prayers/aboriginal-sacramental-journey>) The document “The seven artworks” includes explanations from Troy and alignment with a Catholic understanding of the sacraments by Maria Weatherill. Students should study the artworks and read the commentary, comparing then describing each one. They should then represent one of the sacraments in their own way (e.g. by writing, drawing or using some other medium).
- Recall the nine elements of a religion. Can you identify any commonalities with what you have learnt about Aboriginal Spirituality?

Resources

Archdiocese of Melbourne (2003) *To Know, Worship and Love*. Year 8. 2nd ed. Melbourne: James Goold House Publications. Chapters 2, 9 & 10.

Aboriginal Catholic Ministry website <https://www.cam1.org.au/acmv>

National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council <https://www.natsicc.org.au/index.html>

Understanding Faith Series. No. 24. Australian edition. (1993). *Religions of the World*. Auckland, N.Z.: National Centre for Religious Studies.

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Morrissey, J., Mudge, P. & Taylor, A. (1998). *Out of the Desert*. Book 1. South Melbourne: Longman. Chapter 5.

Morrissey, J., Mudge, P. & Taylor, A. (1998). *Out of the Desert*. Book 3. South Melbourne: Longman. Chapter 7.

Pope Francis (2016) “Dear Pope Francis” Chicago: Loyola Press

Pope Francis, & Skorka, Abraham (2013 English translation) “On Heaven and Earth” New York: Image Books

Ryan, M. (1998). *The Catholic Church in Australia*. Katoomba, NSW: Social Science Press.

Senker, C. (2002). *My Christian Year*. Interger House, UK: Hodder Wayland

Senker, C. (2002). *My Jewish Year*. Interger House, UK: Hodder Wayland

Senker, C. (2003). *My Muslim Year*. Interger House, UK: Hodder Wayland.

Appendices

Appendix 1: The Nine Elements of a Religion