

SEARCHING FOR PEACE: A Youth Look At Religion

An EVC Study Guide



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Acknowledgements

STUDY GUIDE

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Introduction

The Educational Video Center is a non-profit youth media organization dedicated to teaching documentary video as a means to develop the artistic, critical literacy, and career skills of young people, while nurturing their idealism and commitment to social change. Founded in 1984, EVC has evolved from a single video workshop for teenagers from Manhattan's Lower East Side to become an internationally acclaimed leader in youth media and education. EVC's teaching methodology brings together the powerful traditions of student-centered progressive education and independent community documentary.

EVC CORE PROGRAMS

DOCUMENTARY WORKSHOP is a 15-week credit-bearing course that teaches high school students from underserved communities across New York City to research, shoot, and edit compelling documentaries that examine issues of immediate relevance in their lives.

YOUTH ORGANIZERS TELEVISION (YO-TV) is a ten-month pre-professional paid internship that jumpstarts the college and media careers of graduates of the Documentary Workshop.

EXTERNAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS provide workshops and resources in media production and EVC's methodology, including EVC's *Youth-Powered Video* DVD Curriculum, for K-12 teachers and after-school educators, nationally and abroad.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT promotes dialogue and social change through the screening of EVC's youth produced documentaries in collaboration with strategic partners. An important component of the Community Engagement program is the Youth Speakers Bureau, a group of EVC alumni who receive training in public speaking and facilitation skills and who use this training to lead screenings in local schools and community organizations and encourage audience members to engage with important social issues.

Guidelines For Using This Tape

EVC documentaries are powerful, and often deal with sensitive issues. For this reason, we recommend that you preview the *Searching for Peace* documentary and supporting materials before using them in the classroom. The curriculum we've prepared represents suggestions for using *Searching for Peace*. If any of the activities are not useful to you, feel free to modify them and design your own.

Before using these materials, consider the following questions.

- How similar/different are your students and their experiences from the students who made this video?
- How does this video relate to the subject you are teaching?
- What results do you hope to see from using this video?
- What concerns do you have about your students' responses to the issues raised in this video?
- What background information will your students need before viewing this tape?

Assumed in this guide are the following beliefs about teaching and learning:

- Writing deepens thinking and is one of the best ways to explore sensitive issues, even before discussion.
- All learning starts from the students' own experiences.
- Diversity of opinion is useful in a classroom and must be respected.
- Students can make a difference in the world.
- Students can learn from each other.
- Social issues and community problems are an integral part of the school curriculum.
- Students learn from a variety of methods.
- Students learn best through experience.
- An active viewing experience leads to a richer understanding of the documentary.

For many teachers, having students write or take notes while viewing is not something new. For others, this aspect of active viewing is a bit controversial. Some feel it gets in the way of their viewing experience, while others feel it enhances it. You may want to show the tape twice: the first time to view it, and the second time to complete the viewing exercise. Your comments and questions are always welcome. Contact us at info@evc.org.

Background Information

RUNNING TIME: 20 minutes

SYNOPSIS: In *Searching for Peace: A Youth Look at Religion*, 11 teens are driven by the diversity, questions, and doubts within their own group to explore a variety of religious experiences. The youth producers also investigate if and how religion has brought peace, both to individuals and the world. They hope to encourage open-mindedness among today's youth.

EXPERT INTERVIEWS (in order of appearance):

- Firoz Shaik, Board President, Ar-Rahman Mosque
- Kamau Butler, SGI-USA
- Dion Flynn, Spiritual Teacher and Writer
- Michael Ellick, Assistant Minister, Judson Church
- Mark Larrimore, Religious Studies at Eugene Lang College
- Kina Ghaznavi, Program Officer for Youth, Religions for Peace

RELEVANT STATISTICS:

Below are statistics for the 5 most widely practiced global religions. Each religion with the exception of Hinduism is explored in *Searching For Peace*.

BUDDHISM

- Thailand has the highest practicing percent of its population, at 95%
- China has the largest number of practicing people, though not the largest population percentage, with 102,000,000 (compared to Thailand's 55,480,000).
- There are three main sects of Buddhism:
 - Mahayana
 - Theravada
 - Vajrayana (Tibetan)
- Buddhism follows the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, who became known as the Buddha. He was born in the sixth century B.C. in what is now modern Nepal¹
- In all, Buddhism has about 365 million followers, or 6% of the world's population, making it the fourth largest religion.²
- Buddhists believe in karma and the law of cause and effect.
- Karma is the life tendency each individual creates through thoughts, words and deeds.

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¹ First four facts taken from www.buddhanet.net.

² www.religioustolerance.org

CHRISTIANITY³

- Christianity is the most practiced religion in the world, followed by approximately 2 billion people.
- The United States has the largest practicing Christian population with 224,457,000 people.
- There are about 38,000 Christian denominations in the world. Major denominations include:
 - Roman Catholic
 - Eastern Orthodox
 - Protestant
- The Christian religious text is the Bible, which includes the Old Testament and the New Testament.
- Christianity is a monotheistic religion (one God) that worships Jesus of Nazareth.

JUDAISM

- Judaism is one of the first monotheistic (one God) faiths and one of the oldest religions still practiced today.
- The values and history of the Jewish people are a major part of the foundation of Christianity and Islam.
- Jews make up 0.2% of the world's population, or 14 million people.
- The Jewish sacred text is the Tanakh, but it also has sacred scrolls including the Torah and the Talmud.
- There are several Jewish denominations including Orthodox, Reform, Conservative and Hasidic.⁴

³ Christianity.about.com

⁴ www.religionfacts.com

HINDUISM

- Hinduism is the world's third largest religion. It has approximately 837 million followers, or 13% of the population.
- Hinduism began in India around 1500 BC and is generally considered the oldest religion.⁵
- There are three major sects:
 - Saivism
 - Vaisnavism
 - Saktism
- One Hindu belief is in reincarnation. According to Hinduism, if karma is unresolved the soul is born into a new body; if karma is resolved the soul attains moksa (liberation).⁶
- Hinduism is polytheistic (belief in more than one god).

ISLAM

- Islam is a monotheistic religion (it believes in a single God) that believes in the God Allah. Its sacred text is the Qur'an.
- Muslims (followers of Islam) believe that Mohammad is its prophet.
- Islam is practiced by 21% of the world's population.
- 20% of Muslims come from Arab countries
- Islam is the world's second most practiced religion.
- The country with the largest Muslim population is Indonesia, with 182,570,000 followers.⁷
- There are several sects of Islam which include:
 - Ahmadiyya
 - Shi'a
 - Sufism
 - Sunni

⁵ First two facts from www.religioustolerance.org

⁶ Second two facts from www.religionfacts.com

⁷ www.godweb.org

Before Viewing the Tape

PREPARATION: It is important for you to watch *Searching For Peace: A Youth Look At Religion* before showing it in class. This will make your preparation and post-discussion more fruitful. Make sure your students will have paper for note taking and that you will have markers and poster paper (or you can use the chalkboard). Test out the TV and DVD player and make sure the TV volume is set to a good level. Ideally, all students will sit close enough to the TV that they can read all the captions in the video. If this isn't possible, we recommend that you use your remote to pause the video long enough to read important captions aloud.

UNDERSTANDING DOCUMENTARIES: If necessary, familiarize your students with the concept of documentary film. Here are a few guiding questions:

- Have you seen a documentary film before?
- Based on what you have seen, what is a documentary film?
- Why do you think someone would want to create a documentary?
- How are they different from other kinds of films?

Here are some points that you may want to incorporate into this discussion:

- Documentary films are often referred to as "documentaries" or "docs."
- Docs are significantly different from narrative or fiction feature films (even the feature films that are based on true stories).
- Mainly, documentaries are different because they record events as they happen, without a script or actors.
- Documentary filmmakers incorporate several resources in order to accurately report the truth. Examples include the use of archival footage (of past and present people or events); interviews with experts in the field they're working on; interviews with the general public or members of a community to gather opinions or information on a subject.

OPTIONAL BRAINSTORM WARM-UP ACTIVITY (5-10 min): This activity can be administered in groups or as a class. You can have students break up into groups of 3 or 4 and have them draw a vertical line down the center of a sheet of paper or split a blackboard / butcher paper into two columns. Have students generate a list of positive words associated with religion in the left column and negative words associated with religion in the right-hand column. Make sure to let students know that these words do not have to be their own personal beliefs about religion. If done in groups, have each group share some ideas from each column. The two lists of words can be used to unpack some ideas about religion after viewing the film.

Lesson Plan- Day One

FOCUS QUESTION: What role does religion play?

- In my own life, in my community, in my country, in the world

OBJECTIVES:

- To explore how religion affects people from a personal level to a global scale.

INTRODUCING THE DOCUMENTARY: (3 minutes)

It may be helpful to say a few words before watching *Searching For Peace*. Here are a few suggestions.

- Eleven high school students from the Educational Video Center in New York City produced this video.
- The stories told in the video are all true.
- This can be a sensitive topic. Please view this tape respectfully, even when you hear points of view you may not agree with.

SCREEN SEARCHING FOR PEACE: (20 minutes)

Ask students to take notes while watching the video. Have them write down anything that surprises them, whether a story or a statistic, or anything they may feel strongly about. Screen the video.

AFTER VIEWING IN-CLASS ACTIVITY (10-20 minutes):

If you choose to do the optional brainstorm activity, it is helpful to revisit some of the words generated in each list—positive and negative—and to discuss what the class learned about these associations from the film. You can add to each list after viewing.

Another optional activity or homework assignment after viewing *Searching for Peace* is to ask students to write a letter to one of the characters in the film. They can write to someone they identified with, someone they disagreed with, someone they have questions for or any other character in the film that piqued their interest.

Lesson Plan - Day Two

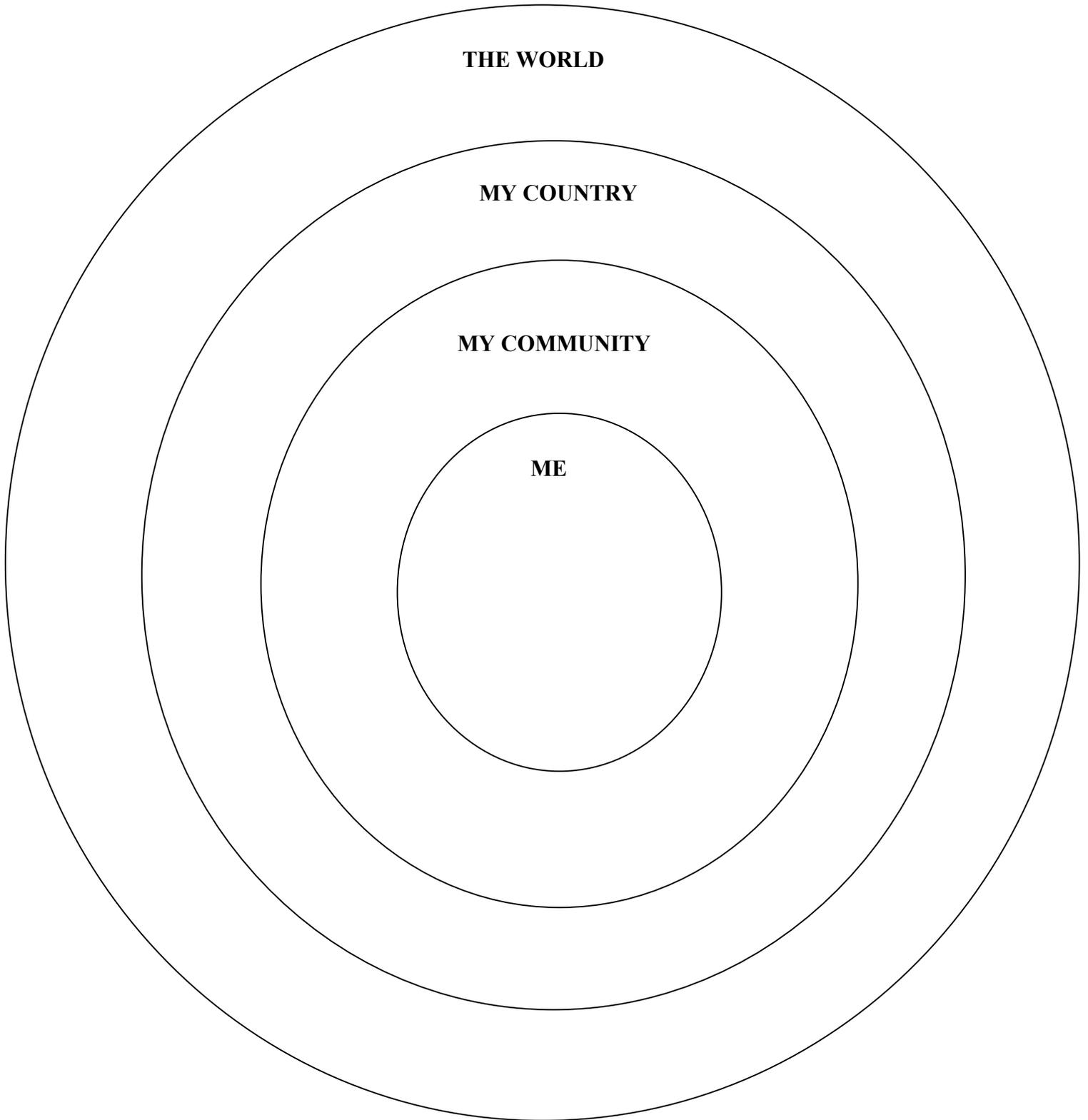
IN-CLASS CONCENTRIC CIRCLE ACTIVITY: (30 minutes)

Step One: Distribute two copies of the worksheet below to each student, which consists of three concentric circles. This first worksheet should concentrate on the subjects in the documentary.

- **Me:** Have the students write some words for the relationship that the youth producers had to religion;
- **My Community:** Write words that describe the relationship that communities in the film had with religion;
- **My Country:** Write words that describe the relationship that different countries have with religion;
- **The World:** Write words that relate to global relationships with religion.

Step Two: On the second sheet, have the students write about their own experiences and observations using the same breakdown for each circle. If there is class time leftover, have each student share some of their ideas from the two worksheets with the class as a whole.

SEARCHING FOR PEACE GROUP ACTIVITY



Resources

As a follow-up or homework assignment, you can ask your students to research one of the organizations listed below and write a short paper that includes what these organizations are doing to promote individual and global peace through religion.

ORGANIZATIONS & WEBSITES:

United States Institute of Peace

www.usip.org

The United States Institute of Peace is an independent, nonpartisan institution established and funded by Congress. Its goals are to help prevent and resolve violent international conflicts, promote post-conflict stability and development, and increase conflict management capacity, tools, and intellectual capital worldwide. The Institute does this by empowering others with knowledge, skills, and resources, as well as by directly engaging in peacebuilding efforts around the globe.

The Pluralism Project at Harvard University

<http://pluralism.org/>

Our mission is to help Americans engage with the realities of religious diversity through research, outreach, and the active dissemination of resources.

World Conference on Religion and Peace

<http://www.wcrp.org/>

Respecting religious differences while celebrating our common humanity, Religions for Peace is active on every continent and in some of the most troubled areas of the world, creating multi-religious partnerships to confront our most dire issues: stopping war, ending poverty, and protecting the earth.

Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs at Georgetown University

<http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/>

The Berkley Center is at the heart of a university-wide effort to make Georgetown a global leader in the interdisciplinary study of religion and the advancement of interreligious understanding.

Religions for Peace

www.rfpusa.org

Religions for Peace USA envisions a nation in which people of distinct religious communities live together in respect and mutual support, creating paths to peace and justice.

The World Council of Religious Leaders

<http://www.millenniumpeacesummit.com/>

The formation of the World Council of Religious Leaders was one of the stated goals of the Millennium World Peace Summit. The objective of this Council is to serve as a resource to the United Nations and its agencies around the world, nation states and other international organizations, offering the collective wisdom and resources of the faith traditions toward the resolution of critical global problems.

Decade of Overcoming Violence

<http://overcomingviolence.org/>

The Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace 2001 – 2010 (DOV) is an initiative of the World Council of Churches. It is a global movement that strives to strengthen existing efforts and networks for preventing and overcoming violence, as well as inspire the creation of new ones.

National Study of Youth and Religion

<http://www.youthandreligion.org/>

The data collection efforts of the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) provide rich data with which researchers can assess the pattern of religious affiliation, belief, practice, and commitment over time in the lives of emerging adults in the U.S. In addition, these multi-wave data allow for rigorous assessment of the causal processes in relationships between religion and other life outcomes and aspects of the lives of teens and young adults.

Tanenbaum Center

www.tanenbaum.org

Tanenbaum - a secular, non-sectarian organization - works to reduce and prevent the violence perpetrated in the name of religion by supporting religious peacemakers who struggle in areas of armed conflict and by overcoming religious intolerance in workplaces and schools.