

Sacred Sites, Evolving Spaces

Using ancient religious structures as guideposts for charting historical developments and current realities



Content Area Relevance: World History, Global Issues, Human Geography, World Religions

Grade Level: Grades 9-12; suggestions for modifications provided throughout lesson.

Duration: 2 60 minute class periods

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Driving Question

- To what extent do ancient religious structures provide tangible evidence of broad, historical developments and valuable insight into contemporary social, political, and cultural trends?

Supporting Questions

- What are the common architectural features and symbols associated with the three Abrahamic religions?
- How can scholars use sacred sites to examine and assess the existence of interfaith harmony and collaboration in the past and present?
- To what extent do religious structures reflect the collision of cultures and historic contests for power?
- How have past and present leaders used monumental architecture to establish/reinforce their power?
- If religious structures with a shared history often inflame religious tensions, how can these structures be reimagined such that they encourage an inter-faith dialogue and a nuanced understanding of history?

Enduring Understanding

- Monumental structures (churches, mosques, and synagogues) are not simply markers of historical developments; they are also barometers of ongoing change. Just as a structure's architectural elements reflect historic changes in function and ownership, current debates regarding the preservation and use of these same monuments reflect broader political trends, demographic shifts, and attempts at cross-cultural collaboration.

Overview

This two day lesson invites students to examine three monumental structures of religious significance (the Hagia Sophia, the Mosque–Cathedral of Córdoba, and the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron) to assess how sacred sites with ancient origins can enrich our understanding of the past and the present. Students will begin with a brief introduction to the architectural elements and symbols closely associated with each one of the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). They will then use this information to analyze a set of 20 images made available through Quizizz. The teacher will use the survey results from the Quizizz activity to guide students through a discussion of the images and the revelation that oftentimes one building possesses symbols and architectural elements representing multiple faiths. Students will then leverage their understanding of history and geography to attempt to account for this confluence of religious representation. They will test their theory with a video clip detailing the history of the Mosque–Cathedral of Córdoba. Finally, they will read the assigned article(s), examining how ancient monumental structures serve as both testaments to historical developments and barometers of ongoing changes (e.g. political trends, demographic shifts, and cultural conflicts). Their insights will be shared in a Harkness-style discussion.

Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to identify four or more common architectural elements/symbols associated with each one of the three Abrahamic religions.
- Students will be able to describe at least two broad historical developments (e.g. the spread of Islam, the Crusades, the Reconquista, etc) that relate to world religions and explain how/why these developments resulted in changes to religious structures' form and function.
- Students will be able synthesize information from assigned news articles, connecting historical developments with ongoing tensions/debates, while participating actively in a Harkness discussion.

Content Expectations

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.3 Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9 Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

Key Concepts

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Lesson Handouts/Materials

- [Google Slide Presentation](#) for teacher use
- "[Christianity, Islam, and Judaism: 5 FYZfybW; i lXYZcfFYI lci gCdUWj](#)": Student reference guide outlining the symbols and architectural elements of the three Abrahamic faiths
- [News articles](#) examining the historical developments and ongoing debates that relate to the Hagia Sophia, the Mosque–Cathedral of Córdoba, and the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron

Teacher Preparation and Instructional Resources

This lesson will be most effective if students already have some familiarity with [Judaism, Christianity, and Islam](#). Teachers should consider using this lesson as part of a broader unit that examines the Abrahamic religions, the ancient Roman Empire, the Crusades, the Byzantine Empire, Zionism, or the establishment of the state of Israel. This lesson does not require an extensive knowledge of any/all of these historic developments, but a cursory knowledge of one or more of these topics would enrich students' insights. Students will need access to the internet in order to complete the opening

activity. For ease of use, teachers should have some experience with Google Slides and Quizizz. The entire lesson can be easily converted to an online format if needed. The articles included in the independent practice/assignment will require at least a 9th grade reading level, but modifications to the texts can be made within Google docs to make the texts more accessible to students with lower reading levels. The final assessment includes a [Harkness style discussion](#). Teachers should familiarize themselves with this method or adapt the assessment portion of the lesson to meet their needs. Suggestions for modifications are provided throughout the lesson.

⚡dfYdUfUjcb Zcf H Y`YggcbzhYUW Yfg'k J`bYYX'lcÅ`

- Print copies of "[Christianity, Islam, and Judaism: 5 FYZfybW; i JXZcfFYJlci gGdUWg](#)" or make this resource available to students electronically
- Ensure that students have an electronic device and internet access (for BBC resource and the Quizizz activity)
- Access and project the [Google Slide Presentation](#) for students to view as a class
- Print copies of the [news articles](#) or make these resources available to students electronically
- Print copies of the [Harkness Style Discussion](#)/description and rubric (if students are unfamiliar with the Harkness method)

Opening

1. Engage students' understanding of the three Abrahamic religions by asking them to brainstorm the different symbols and items they would expect to find in a church, a mosque, and a synagogue. Record their answers on the board in three columns, one column for each religion. You can phrase the question as, "If you entered a church, what would you expect to see? What are the visual clues that you're in a church? A synagogue? A mosque?"

Inside the Synagogue: An Interactive Diagram (created by BBC)

Access the BBC [clickable diagram](#) online to (1) identify the common features of the synagogue AND (2) briefly describe their function/purpose. Record the information next to the appropriate number in the table below the image. One feature has been done for you as an example.

1. Prayer Room	For prayer to occur, there must be at least 10 people present.	5.	
2.		6.	
3.		7.	
4.		8.	

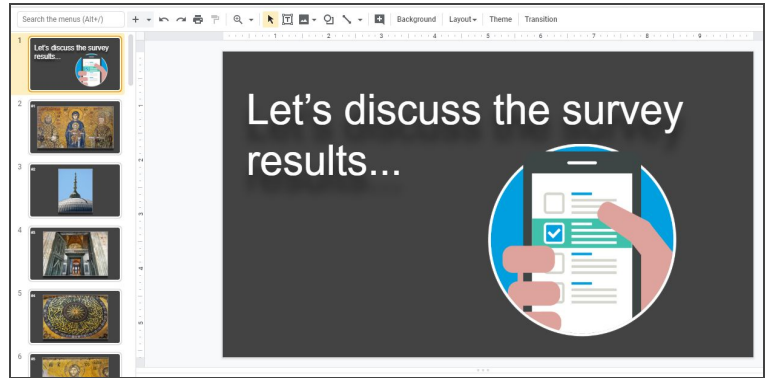
2. Distribute "[Christianity, Islam, and Judaism: 5 FYZfybW; i JXZcfFYJlci gGdUWg](#)" to students. Briefly discuss the details included in the chart on the first page. After discussing this brief overview of symbols, etc., instruct students to use the BBC online resource to complete the handout's three tables. Each table highlights the distinguishing features of a [church](#), [mosque](#), and [synagogue](#). Tell the students that in 10-15 minutes (more time if needed) they will use their completed chart and tables to respond to an online survey (available through Quizizz).

3. As students complete their notesheet, give them the link to the [online survey](#) made available through **Quizizz**.

The 20 question survey will challenge them to identify the location (church, mosque, synagogue) in which a photo was most likely taken. **NOTE: The images appear small within the Quizizz survey, but students can enlarge any image by simply clicking on the image as it appears in each question..**

Guided Inquiry

- Once the class has completed the survey online, reveal the results. Keep this tally open in one tab on your screen for ease of reference. In a second tab, access the [Google Slide Presentation](#). As you project each image, identify the most popular answer from the survey (church, mosque, or synagogue) and challenge the students to justify their choice using evidence from the image. For the sake of time, you will want to limit the discussion of each slide or, if desired, shorten the presentation by deleting some of the images included in Slides #2-21.



- Transition: Appearances can be deceiving. Using slides #23, 25, 26, reveal that the symbols and architectural features from 2-3 distinct religions can actually be found in **one** sacred structure (e.g. The Hagia Sophia, the Mosque–Cathedral of Córdoba, and the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron).¹ If you have time, allow the students to explore the [3D virtual tour of the Hagia Sophia](#) using the link provided on Slide #24.

- Now that students can (a) identify the symbols and architectural elements of the three Abrahamic religions and (b) recognize that the symbols and elements of different religions can be found in ONE building, challenge the students the use their knowledge of history and geography to explain why a cathedral might have a mihrab or why a mosque might have mosaics of Jesus and the Virgin Mary. Facilitate a discussion of their theories and insights.



- After the initial brainstorming of possibilities, project Slides #28-29 on “Geography” and “History”. Invite students to share any added information these slides can offer. (Üc â^} • Á q|ÁQ] ^~||^ Á^& *} a^ Á^CœA@Á ~} äq * Á -R äaa { É@Áç] ä} q} Á -Ö Qa cœq æ Á^} q * Á@Á Ü[{ ä Ö[] a^ Äq äÁ@^æ;É@Á] ^æÄ -Á|æ É@Á^ ~|ç * ÁÖi^ •æ^ Áq äÁ^& } ~^ • Éq äÁ@Á ^ •æ|ä @ ^} ö^ -Á|æ|Áç^ Á^ Á^ |c äÄ Á d^ &c^ |æD^ } &ç} æ&ç^ *^ Á^ Áæ!^ äÁæ • Áq Á@Á ää^ Á^Öæ dÄ P[|cÖE äæÄq äÁ@Á^ äq Á^} q • ~ |æÉ
- Invite students to test their theory: show the [video clip detailing the history of the the Mosque–Cathedral](#) of Córdoba (Slide #31). After showing the clip, allow students time/opportunity to revisit their theory and evaluate its accuracy in light of the video’s content.
- Synthesis: **Í H YgYVi JX]b[g'UFY`cWUHX`cb`UbXg'h Uh\ Uj YW Ub[YX\ UbXg'a Ubmif]a Yg'cj Yf'H Y Wbhi f]YgZUbX'h cgY\ UbXg\ Uj Y`YZih Yf'a Uf_`cb'h YUWV]hYWi fYUbX`cfbUa YbU]jcb`cZh YUbV]Ybh a cbi a YbHU`gffi Wi fYgí`** Challenge students to identify the historical events/developments that have resulted in changes to the structures’ architecture and ornamentation. Their list should include all or some of the following:
 - the founding of the three Abrahamic religions
 - the spread of Christianity during and following the Ancient Roman Empire
 - the spread of Islam throughout the Middle East, North Africa, Southern Europe and Southeast Asia
 - the long-term political and cultural consequences of the Crusades
 - the establishment of Israel in the 20th century

¹ Note that although the Tomb of the Patriarchs is considered one of the holiest sites among Jews and a cherished location for prayer, it is not a synagogue.

