

Chapter 1-Indigenous Religious Traditions Teaching Tips

Approach to Teaching

This class could be started with some general observations about indigenous religions and culture. For example the teacher could make the following statement “we live in a very diverse society, such diversity presents interesting challenges and opportunities for us. What are some of the challenges that religions present to society?”

This could now move the discussion into a crowd breaker exercise...

Crowd Breaker: What are some of the nationalities represented in our class?

Identify some of the countries represented in the class.

What are some of the indigenous religions present in your country?

This question might lead to defining the term indigenous religions. Engage in that discussion.

Lesson Goals:

- 1) To define indigenous religions
- 2) To examine the content and practices of indigenous religions
- 3) To identify some of the challenges ancient religions face today

The practice of indigenous religions takes place throughout the world. Whether it is the Ainu of Northern Japan, the Inuit of Canada, the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, the Maori of New Zealand and the many indigenous peoples of Africa and the Americas, their religious teachings have been passed on primarily orally rather than written.

Scholars and students of these religions speak of them as “traditional,” “aboriginal,” “indigenous,” “tribal,” “Non literate, primal, native, oral and basic.” Each of these terms has limitations. Explore the imitations. For instance the term native is offensive in Australia because of the colonial imports but the term might be fine in North America.

Oral describes accurately that many native religions are oral and not written but not all are. The Aztecs of Mexico and Mayans have long been writing their religious beliefs and practices.

Articles

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2012/01/03/violence-against-indigenous-religions.html>

Violence against Indigenous Religions- An Indonesians Perspective; Izak Lattu is a PHD candidate at Berkeley. The article is concerned with discrimination against some indigenous religions in Indonesia, such the Sunda Wiwtan and the Kejawen. These are traditional religions of Indonesia but have been removed from the political discourse of the country. This article underlines the struggles of indigenous religions to remain relevant or even to survive in the face of the challenges posed by modernism, globalization and Multinational Corporations.

<http://www.abc.net.au/religion/stories/s790117.htm>

Indigenous Traditions - Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders; This article was produced by ABC TV. It looks at the two main indigenous peoples of Australia, the Aborigines and the Torres Strait Islanders. Both groups practiced various forms of Indigenous religions. In spite of the diversities between these religions they share some common beliefs, such as; the earth and many ancestral figures as being eternal. These ancestral figures are thought to create human beings, plants and other forms of animals. The article further details the impact of European colonizers on the indigenous peoples and their religions. Through wars, disease, conversion and land dispossessions, these religions have been severely restricted.

<http://www.culturalsurvival.org/ourpublications/news/article/indigenous-religions>

This site gives a smattering of indigenous religious perspective from Central and South America. The Cultural Survival organization was developed in the 1960s when the Amazonian regions of South America opened up to some industries. Their explicit goal is to partner with indigenous peoples across South and Central America to defend their human rights. On this site the student will find helpful articles on various indigenous religions such as the Kallawayaya of Boliva, the Shhuar peoples of Ecuador, the Dagara people of Burkina Faso (Africa) among others. Cultural Survival was founded to help Indigenous Peoples in their struggles for human rights, sovereignty, and autonomy.

Videos

http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/wade_davis_on_endangered_cultures.html

Endangered Cultures

Wade Davis is an anthropologist with the National Geographic Society. He has done some incredible work on indigenous cultures and the dangers they face, dangers of extinction. This video gives a cryptic, but somewhat humorous presentation on indigenous peoples. It raises critical questions and issues relative to their survival.

Questions for Discussion

1. How does power affect the viability of indigenous religions?
2. What are some of the religious issues raised by this video?
3. How does power enhance or diminishes the spread of religions and their effects
4. What happens to a people when they lose their religions?

<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4831F3865B6AD352>

This site gives a number of clips from ancient African indigenous religions, especially religions from the Yoruba traditions. It covers religious ceremonies in religions such as Santeria, Voodoo, and Candomble. This set of video clips show the African roots to these religions as they blend with Portuguese, Spanish and French Catholicism in regions such as Brazil, Cuba and Haiti. The student will find contemporary blends of these religions in places like Miami.