

Introducing *The Story of God, With Morgan Freeman*

Morgan Freeman, the actor who played God in the 2003 film *Bruce Almighty*, has undertaken a six-part series on world religions called *The Story of God*. The 78-year-old actor traveled almost 100,000 miles to trace the origins of the great world religions. He visited sacred sites—a Maya temple in Guatemala, the ghats of Varanasi in India, Vatican City in Rome, the pyramids of Egypt, and more. He interviewed monks and Monsignors, imams and rabbis, scientists and scholars. The result is a survey of themes that these religions share. They all ask the same great questions, but may answer those great questions in a variety of ways.

- How did we get here? Who or what created the universe? What do the creation stories of different religions have in common? What does the scientific theory of the Big Bang tell us?
- Is there a God? How has the idea of one or more supreme beings evolved over time? Is there any evidence in our brains that we are predisposed to believe in God?
- What is evil? Where does it come from? How is the need to control evil related to the rise of civilizations?
- Can miracles be real? How can we understand the existence of “impossible” happenings?
- How will the world end? Will there be a fiery apocalypse? What will bring about the end of the world as we know it?
- What happens after we die? How has belief in the afterlife evolved?

Humans have speculated about these questions for eons. Now Morgan Freeman takes the viewer with him as he attempts to learn more about how humans have tried to answer these questions across continents and millennia.

This curriculum guide has been prepared for use in secondary classrooms to help students understand more about the history and belief systems of the five major living religions the viewer encounters in the series: Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Notes to the Teacher

Teaching about world religions makes some teachers uncomfortable, but it is an important element of social studies classes such as world history, Advanced Placement World History, and Advanced Placement Human Geography. Moreover, it is an important part of any citizen’s education. As the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) said in a position paper:

Public schools can and should do more to take religion seriously in a world where religion—for better and for worse—plays a critical role in shaping events at home and abroad.

The Supreme Court concurred. In *Abington v. Schempp* more than a half century ago, Associate Justice Tom Clark wrote in his opinion:

[I]t might well be said that one’s education is not complete without a study of comparative religions or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization.

The root cause of teacher discomfort is in many cases a misunderstanding of the First Amendment to the Constitution on the part of teachers and administrators. To clarify the issue, the First Amendment Center has published “A Teacher’s Guide to Religion in the Public Schools,” a clear and concise set of guidelines for handling this subject appropriately that was developed by a consortium of diverse religious groups. A copy of this guide can be downloaded from <http://www.religiousfreedomcenter.org/resources/publications/>. (A fuller treatment of the subject, *Finding Common Ground* by Charles C. Haynes, can be downloaded at the same site.) The NCSS has summarized the main principles in “A Teacher’s Guide” as follows:

- The school’s approach to religion is *academic, not devotional*.
- The school strives for student *awareness* of religions, but does not press for student acceptance of any religion.
- The school sponsors study about religion, not the *practice* of religion.
- The school may expose students to a diversity of religious views, but may not *impose* any particular view.
- The school educates about all religions; it does *not promote or denigrate* any religion.
- The school may inform the student about religious beliefs, but should not seek to *conform* him or her to any particular belief.¹

This curriculum guide from *Journeys in Film* contains five lessons, one on each of the five largest living world religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Each lesson extends over several days and incorporates information about the history of the religion, its major beliefs, its founder if one is identifiable, and more. Each lesson is free-standing and can be incorporated into your curriculum where appropriate. Each uses clips from episodes of the series *The Story of God, With Morgan Freeman* to illustrate important points. Each conforms to the guidelines outlined above and each is aligned with Common Core standards.

¹ http://www.socialstudies.org/positions/study_about_religions



Judaism

Enduring Understandings

- Judaism was founded as a monotheistic faith at a time when monotheism was uncommon. It is a root of two other monotheistic world religions—Christianity and Islam.
- Judaism maintains a focus on study, community, good works, and equality as outlined in sacred texts, including the Torah, the Talmud, and *Pirkei Avot*.
- Jewish holidays are intimately connected with Jewish history.
- Despite tensions and occasional violence between Palestinians and Israelis, efforts are being made to promote intercultural collaboration.

Essential Questions

- What is monotheism, and how has this central belief of Judaism had a global impact?
- What are some other key beliefs of Judaism?
- What are significant Jewish holidays, and how are they celebrated?
- How are some artists using their talents to address the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis?

Notes to the Teacher

Structure of the Lesson

In the first part of the lesson, students will examine the founding and early history of Judaism. Before class, print copies of **HANDOUTS 1** and **2** for each student. In this first activity, students read part of an essay from *National Geographic* magazine on the early centuries of Judaism. The full article can be found at <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/print/2009/11/holy-land/sheler-text>. You should also find a map of the Middle East or locate one online that you can project. During this activity, students sketch four of the events described and share their drawings with a group. They learn the identities and roles of some of the most important figures in early Judaism.

The second part of the lesson concerns the religious beliefs, rituals, and sacred texts of Judaism. Students research online to learn about *mitzvot*, or commandments and the core texts of the Torah, the Talmud, and the *Pirkei Avot*. For this section of the lesson you will need copies of **HANDOUTS 3** and **4**.

Part 3 acquaints students with Jewish traditions concerning specific important holidays, including Passover, Rosh Hashanah (rawsh hah-SHAH-nah), and Yom Kippur (yahm kih-POOR). Students research in teams and prepare a presentation for the class on particular meaning, foods, and activities associated with each holiday. You may have them present the information in whatever form you choose: blogs, podcasts, PowerPoints, posters, or simple oral reports.

To prepare for Part 4 of the lesson, collect headlines from recent articles about conflict in the Middle East. You may find articles

about ISIS, the Arab–Israeli conflict, the Gaza Strip, recent attacks on Israelis, razing of homes in Gaza, etc. The disputed territory, officially called Israel but still known as Palestine in the Muslim world, became an independent country in 1948. After World War II, many European Jews who had survived the Holocaust settled there, since it was their traditional homeland. Conflicts arose with the Palestinian Arabs who lived there and there has been sporadic conflict between the two groups ever since. Today, most Palestinians live in two areas, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, also known simply as Gaza, and violent incidents between the two groups continue to occur. This part of the lesson acknowledges the ongoing conflict, but also highlights several attempts to coexist. The first is a mural initiated by an American artist, Joel Bergner, one of several attempts to use visual arts as a way to encourage cooperation. The second is the West–Eastern Divan Orchestra, which performs classical music with musicians from Israel and the rest of the Middle East. Links are provided for students to find information about these efforts; should the links become inactive, you can substitute other similar initiatives.

Part 5 is a concluding pair-share activity to give students the opportunity to review what they have learned in this lesson. Students formulate and then answer questions about the material covered.

Because the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is so often in the news and seems so intractable, you may wish to use the extension activity, which looks at examples of peaceful coexistence between these two groups at various historical periods and in various places. Another useful supplement to this lesson is a discussion in **LESSON 4: CHRISTIANITY** about similarities among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Background Information

The main branches of Judaism are Orthodox (including Hasidic), Conservative, and Reform; these groups vary in the degree to which they have adapted Jewish practice to modern life. A brief introduction to these branches may be found at <https://detroitjrc.org/about-us-detroits-jewish-community-branches-of-judaism>. A fuller treatment is available at <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaism.html>. Resources from multiple groups have been included in the readings and lesson.

In Judaism, many people do not write the name of God out of respect and tradition. So, while it is written below and in some source materials, students may well come across “G-d” in other sources as they complete the lesson.

Founding and Early History¹

[Earlier dates in Judaism can be the subject of much disagreement among historians. A general estimate, if dates are absolutely required, could be that Abraham’s covenant occurred around 2000 BCE, and that Moses led the Jews from Egypt around 1300 BCE.]

Abram was a shepherd in Ur, a city of ancient Mesopotamia. At age 75, he and his wife, Sarai, moved to Canaan, where God promised Abram that he would father a great nation. However, the couple was not able to conceive, so Sarai offered her handmaid, Hagar, to Abram. Hagar had a son, Ishmael. In Muslim tradition, Ishmael is the father of the Arab people.

After that, God told Abram that he and Sarai would have another son, this time together. God changed Abram’s name

¹ Adapted from Jeff Sheler, “The Rise of Three Faiths,” National Geographic, November 2009.

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to Abraham, and Sarai's to Sarah. Many years after leaving Mesopotamia, Abraham and Sarah had a son, Isaac. As a test of Abraham's faith, God told him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, but spared Isaac at the last moment.

Abraham is seen as the founder of Judaism, and his covenant with God was passed down to Isaac and then Isaac's son, Jacob. Jacob had 12 sons, the forebears of the 12 tribes of Israel. Jacob and his family moved to Egypt, where the Israelites flourished until they were enslaved by the pharaoh. Moses, a Hebrew slave who was adopted by the pharaoh at a young age, led the Israelites out of slavery as an adult after God came to him in the form of a burning bush. He later received the Ten Commandments from God and brought them to the Israelites. Later still, Moses led his people to the promised land of Israel, though he would never enter the land himself. [Details on Abraham and Isaac can be found in the episode "Who Is God?" in the series *The Story of God*. Discussion of Moses and the burning bush can be found in the same episode.]

After three centuries of separation among the 12 tribes, Saul united them around 1000 BCE. David, who became king after serving in Saul's army, strengthened that unity and built the capital at Jerusalem. His son Solomon, the king famous for his wisdom, then built a great temple in Jerusalem, at the site where Abraham was willing to offer Isaac as sacrifice centuries before.

After Solomon's rule, the nation eventually split into northern and southern rivals. Israel, the northern half, was conquered by the Assyrians in 720 BCE. Judah, the southern half, was conquered by Babylonians, under Nebuchadnezzar,

who sacked Jerusalem in 586 BCE and scattered the Jews. Under later Persian rule, some Jews returned home as the faith focused on reclaiming the Torah as the center of Jewish life. They also rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem during the rule of Herod.

From the 300s BCE, Judah fell under a series of rulers, including Alexander the Great. In 63 BCE, Rome conquered Judah (or Judea, as they called it). In 66 CE, Jewish Zealots rebelled against the Romans, who crushed the rebellion in 70 CE and destroyed the second temple in Jerusalem. Without a central temple, Jews would come to worship in synagogues as they again spread around the world into the Diaspora. These themes—belief in one God, holding Israel as a spiritual home while spread around the world, reliance on Torah and legal principle—have served as tenets of Judaism ever since.

From Judaism and the God of Abraham, two more monotheistic faiths grew. Jesus, a Jewish carpenter from Nazareth, led a new sect of Judaism in Roman-held Judea. That sect became Christianity, which sees Jesus as the messiah of Jewish teaching. Christianity grew rapidly, becoming the official Roman religion by the 300s CE. Three centuries later, Muhammad experienced visions of the angel Gabriel and received the verses of the Koran, and Islam began. In more examples of commonality, Islam traces its Arab roots to Ishmael and sees Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, and Jesus as prophets. The Hebrew word "*shalom*" (shah-LOME), for peace, has a cognate in Arabic, "*salaam*."² [Details on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam having the common God of Abraham can be found in the episode "Who Is God?" in the series *The Story of God*.]

² <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/print/2009/11/holy-land/sheler-text>

Beliefs and Rituals (*Chabad/Reform Judaism*)

There are numerous beliefs and rituals in Judaism, and some of those vary within the different branches of the faith. Some general descriptions of the more well-known beliefs and rituals:

- *Monotheism.* Judaism is monotheistic; this belief in only one God is central to the faith. The Ten Commandments begin by stating “I am the Lord your God, and you shall have no other gods before me.” The *Shema* (sheh-MAH), the foundational prayer of Judaism, states “Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.”³ [Details on monotheism in Judaism, and Jewish teachings of Abraham as the first monotheist, can be found in the episode “Who Is God?” in the series *The Story of God*.]
- *Prayer.* The *Shema* is foundational, but there are many formal prayers in Judaism. The *Shabbat* (sha-BAHT), or Sabbath ritual, includes multiple prayer services, one of which features the reading of the weekly Torah portion. There are prayers for all manner of regular and life cycle occasions—ranging from prayers before and after meals to prayers in remembrance and thanksgiving.
- *Mitzvot* (MEETZ-vot). Jewish law and rabbinic commentaries teach that there are 613 *mitzvot* (commandments) in the Torah. Judaism places a great emphasis on *mitzvot* that help others as part of its focus on *tikkun olam* (TEE-koon O-lahm), or repairing the world. Some *mitzvot* of which students might have

knowledge include *tzedakah* (tze-DAH-kah), or giving to charity; observing the dietary laws of *kashrut* (kahsh-ROOT); attending synagogue; keeping Shabbat; and saying the *Kaddish* (KAH-dish) prayer when in mourning. The study of the Torah is an important *mitzvah* as well—not just for rabbis, but for all Jews.⁴ *Mitzvah* is the singular form of *mitzvot*.

- Bar Mitzvah/Bat Mitzvah (bar MITZ-vuh/baht MITZ-vuh). At age 13, Jewish boys and girls become a Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah, respectively—literally translated, “son or daughter of the *mitzvah*.” In the ceremony that usually accompanies this rite, the boy or girl will lead services and read from the Torah as part of making the transition from child to adult. Under Jewish law, 13 is the age at which Jews take on the adult obligation of fulfilling the commandments of the Torah.⁵

Sacred Texts (Reform Judaism)

- Torah. The foundational sacred text of Judaism is the Torah, which contains the first five books of the Old Testament—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Each week at *shabbat* services, a specific portion of the Torah is read. The Torah scroll is made of parchment, and each scroll is written entirely by hand. The Torah scroll does not have vowels, so reading from the Torah takes a significant amount of practice and study. While the Torah encompasses the first five

³ http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/705353/jewish/The-Shema.htm

⁴ http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/756399/jewish/The-613-Commandments.htm
http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/325184/jewish/Mitzvahs-Traditions.htm

⁵ <http://www.reformjudaism.org/bar-and-bat-mitzvah>

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books of the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible also includes The Old Testament in two other sections—Prophets and Writings. Readings from Prophets are part of weekly Torah services, and Writings include Psalms and Proverbs.

- Talmud (TAHL-mood [mood as in “wood”]). Talmud translates from the Hebrew “to study.” It is a record of rabbinic teachings and commentaries on how the commandments of the Torah are to be carried out. It includes Jewish law and discussions on the law.
- *Pirkei Avot* (*PEER-kay Ah-VOTE*). Translating as “ethics of our fathers,” this text includes stories and sayings from early leaders of Judaism that detail the ethics and morals of the faith.⁶

Jewish Traditions

A good summary of Jewish holidays, along with other information about Jewish rituals, can be found at <http://jewishmuseum.net/collections/permanent-collection/permanent-collections/>.

Duration of the Lesson

Three to five periods

Assessment

Early History drawings

Beliefs and Rituals reading responses and theme activity

Sacred Texts responsive journal

Judaism discussion notes and discussion

Materials

Computers with Internet access

Map of Middle East

Colored pencils, pens, pencils

Electronic or paper copies of

HANDOUT 1: THE FOUNDING AND EARLY HISTORY OF JUDAISM

HANDOUT 2: THE RISE OF THREE FAITHS: JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, ISLAM

HANDOUT 3: JUDAISM: BELIEF AND RITUAL

HANDOUT 4: SACRED TEXTS OF JUDAISM

⁶ <http://www.reformjudaism.org/learning/sacred-texts>
<http://www.reformjudaism.org/torah-tree-life>
<http://www.reformjudaism.org/talmud>

COMMON CORE STANDARDS ADDRESSED BY THIS LESSON

CCSS.RH.9-10.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.RH.9-10.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.RH.9-10.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.

CCSS.WHST.9-10.9

Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.WHST.9-10.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Procedure

Part 1: Founding and Early History of Judaism

1. Tell students that they will begin by studying about the early history, founders, beliefs, rituals, and sacred texts of Judaism. Remind students of any specific state standards that require the study of Judaism and other world religions. Remind students that discussions of religion should be kept respectful, courteous, and factual.
2. Have students log on to their computers. While students are waiting, ask them to share anything they already know about Judaism. You can have students complete a “Think-Pair-Share” for this introduction if you feel it will yield better results.
3. Record student comments or have a student do so. If there are any specific misconceptions noted, address them at the end of the lesson. (Possible student answers: monotheism; founders and early historical figures such as Abraham, Moses, David, etc.; synagogues; Bar/Bat Mitzvah; the Ten Commandments; the Exodus; the Torah; the wearing of yarmulkes; the relationship between Judaism and Christianity.)
4. Once students have shared some ideas and the computers are ready, distribute **HANDOUTS 1** and **2**. Give students pencils for sketching. Read the first paragraph aloud on **HANDOUT 2** and have them define monotheism (belief in one god), patriarch (a male head of a family or tribe or one of the “founding fathers” of a religion), and symbiosis (a mutually beneficial relationship).

5. Have them read **HANDOUT 2** and then follow the directions on **HANDOUT 1** to draw sketches and write captions in the spaces below. Circulate among the students as they work through the lesson to assist any students who might have difficulty.
6. Review the reading and use the map of the Middle East to show where events occurred. Ask students:
 - Where did Abram live at first, according to the article? (Upper Mesopotamia)
 - What are the modern names for that area? (Iraq, Syria, and Kuwait)
 - To what place did he later move? (Canaan) What is the modern name for Canaan? (Israel)
 - What did you learn about each of these figures?
 - Abram/Abraham
 - Sarai/Sarah
 - Isaac
 - Hagar
 - Ishmael
 - Jacob/Israel
 - Moses (On the map, point out Egypt when discussing Jacob and Moses.)
 - David
 - Solomon
 - Where did Solomon build the temple? (Jerusalem)
7. Explain the meaning of the term “the Diaspora” (the dispersion of people from their original homeland). Why did the Diaspora happen? Point out that the enslavement of Africans and their transshipment to the Americas is also called a Diaspora.

Part 2: Jewish Beliefs and Texts

1. Explain that the work in this part of the lesson will require students to read on several websites in order to answer some questions about Judaism; then distribute **HANDOUT 3**. Read the first set of directions aloud. (Pronunciation of *mitzvot* is meetz-VOTE in Sephardic Hebrew; usually pronounced MEETZ-vot, by English speakers), Torah (taw-RAH in Sephardic Hebrew, usually pronounced TAW-ruh by English speakers).
2. Allow students to read, research, and complete the handout independently while you circulate to give assistance with unfamiliar words or concepts.

Suggested answers for **HANDOUT 3**:

Shema: The whole prayer is about monotheism—“the Lord is one.” Since the prayer is said multiple times each day, it makes sense that it is short and simple—easy to remember, easy to recite from anywhere. As with any declaration of faith, it is important that the statement be quickly understood and make sense to anyone who says it or hears it.

Group 1 Theme: Prayer, godliness, and learning the Torah are important in Judaism.

Group 2 Theme: Jews should speak, act, and think kindly toward others.

Group 3 Theme: Jews should not commit violent acts or take the possessions of others.

Bar Mitzvah/Bat Mitzvah: Jews usually become bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah around their thirteenth birthday. They lead prayers and are called to read from the Torah;

there is a great deal of study before that happens and some synagogues also include a service project. Most bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah ceremonies happen at the synagogue the family attends, but some families choose to travel to Israel and have the ceremony there. Becoming a bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah goes back as far as the 6th century and has always been a way to recognize the young person's entry into adulthood in the Jewish community.

3. Pull students back into the group and ask them to state one new thing that they learned from their reading. Clarify any questions that they may have.
4. If you have been studying other world religions as part of your course, ask students to recall the names of sacred texts from those religions. (For example, the Vedas from Hinduism, the Koran from Islam.) Tell students that there are three collections of texts that are important in Judaism. Distribute **HANDOUT 4: SACRED TEXTS OF JUDAISM**.
5. Give students time to read the articles about sacred texts and answer the questions on **HANDOUT 4**.
6. Ask for student volunteers to share their comments on the *Pirkei Avot*. To what extent did they find these quotations from more than 2,000 years ago to be relevant today?
7. Collect the handouts or have students complete them for homework.

Part 3: Jewish Holidays and Customs

1. Remind students that school calendars are often designed to incorporate Jewish as well as other holidays. Ask them what information they already know about Jewish holidays. If there are Jewish students in your class, by all means let them explain the holidays, but don't single them out unless they volunteer.
2. Have the class brainstorm about the holidays they celebrate. What is distinctive about them? (Holidays may have unique purposes, special foods, special gifts, special religious services; there may be different historical reasons behind them.)
3. Ask them if the holidays occur on the same date each year. (New Year's, Valentine's Day, Fourth of July, Halloween, and Christmas all occur on specific dates.) Point out that Easter, however, varies from year to year.) Explain that, while our secular, or nonreligious, calendar is based on the solar year, the Jewish calendar is based on the lunar year and so the dates of holidays change from year to year.
4. Tell students that they are going to research holidays that are special to people who practice Judaism. Divide students into seven groups and assign each group a different holiday to research: Shabbat (the Sabbath); Purim; Pesach (Passover); Rosh Hashanah (New Year's); Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement); Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles); Chanukah (Festival of Lights).
5. Tell each group to prepare a presentation (PowerPoint, poster, oral, podcast, video) that explains the special traditions and meaning behind the holiday.
6. Give students time to research and then time in class to present their findings.

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Part 4: Arts in Pursuit of Peace

1. Share with the class some of the headlines that you have collected about the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Give students background using Notes to the Teacher.
2. Ask students if there is any way in which art and music can help people address and solve problems. (Art and music are less formal than political efforts, people might understand them better, they might get people emotionally involved, and they might be more accessible to people regardless of education level or language spoken.)
3. Explain that American artist Joel Bergner traveled to Israel to lead a collaborative art project for Palestinian and Israeli youth. Have students view and read the article about the project at <http://joelartista.com/2015/06/07/palestinian-israeli-youth-collaboration-projects/>. Ask them to look at all the photos of the mural being created and to pay attention to the process itself. Have them look at the students' facial expressions and body language as they worked. Ask them to discuss, given what they see, how this project supports the idea that young Jews and Muslims can coexist peacefully?
4. Have students watch and listen to several video clips of music by the West–Eastern Divan Orchestra that enlists Jewish and Muslim musicians from throughout and beyond the Middle East as a way of fostering intercultural dialogue. Some possible clips can be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K22pkacxfNo>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K22pkacxfNo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OScJZWktQUY>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OScJZWktQUY>

They can also use the orchestra's website at <http://www.west-eastern-divan.org/> to learn more.

5. When they have completed their reading and listening, have them write a paragraph using specific examples to explain how artistic efforts are helping to foster common ground between Jews and Muslims.

Part 5: Concluding Discussion

1. Distribute index cards. Have each student write one open-ended question about the material on Judaism that has been covered in this lesson. On a second index card, have students write their names. Collect the index cards and separate them into two envelopes—question cards in one envelope and the students' name cards in the other.
2. Group students in pairs. Have one pair come to the front of the room. Have the first student pull out a question and read it aloud to the class.
3. Give student pairs two to three minutes to discuss the answer to the question, allowing them to look through their notes and any uncollected handouts. Then have the second student at the front of the room pull a student's name out of the envelope to answer the question.
4. Continue with this process until you feel an adequate review has been conducted. Make sure to address any remaining unanswered questions students may have about the religion.

5. Conclude by asking students to reflect on the fact that Judaism has survived despite other major religions branching off from it and despite many instances of persecution in history, including the genocide of the Holocaust. Why do you think this has been the case?

Extension Activity

1. Explain to students that Morgan Freeman began *The Story of God* series after visiting Hagia Sophia, an ancient Christian church in Istanbul, Turkey, which had been used for a while as a mosque. He asked the guide if the murals of the Biblical scenes and prophets had been covered up when it was under Muslim control. He was surprised to hear that they had not been, that Muslims accept the Biblical prophets and stories as part of their religion. In fact, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus are all recognized as prophets in Islam.
2. Remind students about what they have learned about contemporary troubles between members of the three Abrahamic faiths. Tell students that they are going to research some times and places in world history when Muslims and Jews coexisted and cooperated.
3. Divide the class into four groups. Give each group one of the following research assignments:
 - a. Read an article on the Prophet Muhammad and religions other than Judaism, which you can find at http://www.pbs.org/muhammad/ma_otherrel.shtml. Find evidence in this article to support the idea that Jews, Christians, and Muslims are all “People of the Book.”
 - b. Research the coexistence between Jews and Muslims in Spain during the Middle Ages. You may wish to use the blog post at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/patrick-burnett/jewish-muslim-relations-peace_b_8582412.html; focus on the section titled “Andalusia and Abrahamic coexistence in European history.” Another useful article: “From Golden to Grim: Jewish Life in Muslim Spain” at <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/from-golden-to-grim-jewish-life-in-muslim-spain/>; focus on the first three paragraphs. Using the two sources for evidence, write a persuasive paragraph, making and supporting the argument that Jews and Muslims shared common ground in Spain in the Middle Ages.
 - c. Once Ferdinand and Isabella took control of Spain, the period of Middle Ages coexistence came to an end—in fact, both Jews and Muslims were expelled during the Inquisition of the late 1400s. For the Sephardic (Spanish) Jews who escaped the Inquisition, the Muslim-led Ottoman Empire became a new home in the 1500s. Look at coexistence and common ground in the Ottoman Empire. Locate the article at <http://jewishhistory.research.wesleyan.edu/i-jewish-population/5-ottoman-empire/>. Read the first paragraph and the fourth paragraph (starting with “Most prominent and most studied among the Jews of Ottoman lands have been the Sephardim”). Then, use examples from the readings to answer these questions: As *dhimmi*, how were Jews (and Christians) treated in Muslim lands? What rights did they have, and what rights were they refused? At the height of Jewish–Muslim relations in the Ottoman Empire, what was life like for the Sephardic Jews? How did they contribute to the Empire?

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- d. Since the founding of modern Israel in 1948, relations between Jews and Muslims have been particularly turbulent—multiple wars, continued armed conflict, and mistrust on both sides. In contrast, discoveries made by U.S. forces after the fall of Saddam Hussein have given a clear picture of the common ground that existed between Jews and Muslims in Iraq for much of the 20th century. Now go to <https://www.ija.archives.gov/exhibit-pages/personal-communal-life.html> and read about the Jews of Iraq in the 20th century. Summarize your findings in a paragraph. Did these facts surprise you? Why, or why not?
5. Give students the opportunity to share their findings with their classmates.

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Handout 1 The Founding and Early History of Judaism

Read the article on pages 1–3 of **HANDOUT 2**, adapted from the November 2009 *National Geographic* article “The Rise of Three Faiths,” by Jeff Sheler. From the many events described, select four that stand out. In the frames below, sketch each event you selected (one per frame). Give each frame a short caption that summarizes what you’ve sketched.

Caption:

Caption:

Caption:

Caption:

Handout 2 ▶ P. 1

The Rise of Three Faiths: Judaism, Christianity, Islam⁷

By Jeff Sheler

They are the great ancient repositories of monotheism—the religions of Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad—and their visions and cultures often conflict, sometimes violently. Yet they are locked in an uneasy symbiosis, connected by history and a shared reverence for the land that bore them all from a single seed. Each traces its origins to the story of a solitary figure, an ancient patriarch and exemplar of faith, who undergirds the sacred literature of all three.

That founding father was Abram, an obscure shepherd and the reputed son of an idol maker, who packed his tents and his family and left his ancestral homeland in upper Mesopotamia, along with its manifold deities, in obedience to the command of the one true God: “Go... from your father’s house to the land I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great.”

And so at the age of 75, Abram and his wife, Sarai, set out for the land of Canaan. There he would live the life of a nomad, tending his flocks, first at Shechem, a great walled city guarding a strategic pass between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, and later at Bethel, Ai, Hebron, and other cities to the south.

It was at Shechem, according to the Hebrew Scriptures, that the Lord first appeared to Abram and promised that his descendants would inherit the land around him. Out of gratitude, Abram erected an altar—an act of veneration he may have learned from his forebears’ worship of Nanna, the

great moon god of Ur, and his son Utu, the sun god. In years to come, Abram would build many altars and offer many sacrifices to the one God he had come to believe was over all creation, a God he knew as Yahweh.

Despite God’s promise that Abram would father a great nation, Sarai remained childless in her 70s. Despairing, Sarai offered Abram her handmaid, Hagar, who bore him a son. They named him Ishmael. (According to Islamic tradition, Ishmael would become the father of the Arab people.) The Lord appeared to Abram again, saying the promise would be fulfilled not through Ishmael but through a son to be born to Sarai. God changed Abram’s name to Abraham, father of a multitude of nations, and Sarai’s to Sarah, meaning “princess,” and a year later, at the age of 90, Sarah gave birth to Isaac. As a test of Abraham’s faith, God commanded him to sacrifice Isaac but stayed his hand at the last moment.

God’s covenant with Abraham was passed to Isaac and to his son, Jacob, who was given the name Israel—one who wrestled with God. Jacob’s 12 sons would become progenitors of the 12 tribes of Israel. Seeking refuge from famine, Jacob and his clan migrated to Egypt, where they settled in the eastern portion of the fertile Nile Delta—the biblical land of Goshen—and their descendants “multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.” After a few generations, their fortunes turned: They were enslaved by the pharaoh, who “made their lives bitter with hard service.” Through strange chance, a young

⁷ Sheler, Jeff. “The Rise of Three Faiths.” National Geographic, November 2009. The full article may be found at <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2009/11/holy-land/sheler-text/4>.

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Hebrew slave named Moses was adopted into the pharaoh's household and became a prince of Egypt before he fled to the wilderness after killing a guard. There God called to Moses from a burning bush and told him to go to the pharaoh "that you may bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt" and lead them to the Promised Land.

The biblical accounts that follow are familiar—Moses' confrontation with the pharaoh, the sending of plagues and the striking down of the firstborn of every household, the marking of Israelite doorposts with lamb's blood so that death would pass over their houses—and they resulted, as intended, in the Israelites' release. Moses led his people out of Egypt and into the Sinai, where he received the Ten Commandments and the other laws of the Torah. After wandering for 40 years, the Israelites arrived at the Jordan River and crossed into the land God had promised to their fathers.

Roughly 300 years later, faced with a growing military threat from the Philistines, the independent-minded Israelite tribes began to unite, according to the Bible, first under Saul and subsequently under David, who forged them into a powerful nation with Jerusalem as its capital. The reigns of King David and his son Solomon marked the glory years of ancient Israel, roughly 1000 BCE to 930 BCE. During Solomon's reign, vast wealth poured into the kingdom, funding massive construction projects.

Of all Solomon's buildings, the grandest was the temple in Jerusalem, a mammoth, elaborately adorned edifice of quarried stone and Lebanon cedar that would become the House of Yahweh, the focal point of the Israelite religion.

Built on Mount Moriah—the site where Abraham was said to have offered up Isaac—the temple became a place of daily prayer and burned offerings, replacing the crude altars that had been scattered throughout the countryside. It stood for more than 370 years. (A second, more modest temple was later built on the same site. It would be renovated and expanded by Herod the Great about 10 BCE.)

When Solomon's reign ended, the nation descended into religious and political turmoil and split into rival northern and southern kingdoms. Israel, the northern kingdom, came to an end with an Assyrian conquest in 720 BCE. The southern kingdom, Judah, survived until the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem in 586 BCE. and carried the people into captivity. It was a period that saw the rise of prophets—stern men of God who chastised the people for their faithlessness and who warned of calamities that would befall them unless they repented. After the Persians overthrew the Babylonians in 539 BCE., many Jews returned home. Their religious leaders set about instituting reforms that emphasized the role of the Torah in Jewish life and rooted out cultural influences that had encroached on Jewish traditions during captivity.

From the middle of the fourth century BCE onward, the Holy Land came under the control of a succession of military rulers, starting with Alexander the Great in 332 BCE. and ending with the Romans, who conquered Judaea in 63 BCE and held it for centuries. During Roman rule, four groups vied for attention among the Jews: the Sadducees, the priests of the temple and overseers of its ceremonies; the Pharisees,

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lay religious scholars; the Essenes, an apocalyptic sect based near the Dead Sea; and the Zealots, advocates of violent resistance.

In 66 CE, the Zealots and others revolted against the Roman garrison in Jerusalem. After some initial success, the rebellion was crushed by overwhelming Roman force, and both the city and the Second Temple were destroyed in an event that sealed the future direction of Judaism. Without a temple, the party of the Sadducees ceased to exist, and the practice of burned offerings and animal sacrifices came to an end. The Pharisees, with their emphasis on the synagogue and the oral and written law, became dominant. With Jerusalem in ruins and Jews scattered, Judaism became a religion of the Diaspora.

Handout 3 ▶ P. 1

Judaism: Belief and Ritual

A. Jewish Belief: Monotheism and Prayer—Reflecting on the *Shema* (Sheh-MAH)

Directions: Read about the *Shema* at http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/705353/jewish/The-Shema.htm. (Note that in Judaism, the name of God often is not written or spoken—so, “G-d” is used in place of “God” in this source.) Explain how the words of the *Shema* reflect the importance of monotheistic belief in Judaism. Also, consider the prayer itself—why is it short and simple? How might that be important for a “declaration of faith”?

B. Jewish Belief: Themes of the Commandments

Directions: The Ten Commandments are just a start; there are actually 613 *mitzvot* or commandments in the Torah, the primary sacred text of Judaism. Below, you will find three groups of *mitzvot*. Read each group, and then write one sentence that explains the theme you see in that group.

Group 1

- To know there is one God
- To love God
- To pray each day
- To learn the Torah
- To teach the Torah

Group 1 Theme: _____

Group 2

- Do not embarrass other people.
- Do not gossip.
- Do not oppress the weak.
- Do not take revenge.
- Do not break your word.
- Give charity.

Group 2 Theme: _____

Lesson 3 (JUDAISM)



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Judaism: Belief and Ritual

Group 3

- Do not murder.
- Do not kidnap.
- Do not rob or steal.
- Pay your debts.
- Do not scheme to acquire the possessions of others.

Group 3 Theme: _____

C. Jewish Belief and Ritual: Bar Mitzvah/Bat Mitzvah

At age 13, Jewish boys and girls become Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah, respectively, meaning “son or daughter of the commandments.” Once you read about the ritual at <http://www.reformjudaism.org/bar-and-bat-mitzvah>,⁸ write a summary paragraph below, addressing each of the “5 W’s”—Who, What, When, Where, and Why.

⁸ Note that Hasidic or Orthodox girls don’t lead services or read aloud from the Torah.

Lesson 3 (JUDAISM)



Handout 4 ▶ P. 1 Sacred Texts of Judaism

Directions:

Earlier, you found themes in some of the Torah’s 613 commandments. Now, you will respond to readings about the Torah and two other Jewish sacred texts—the Talmud (TAHL-mood [mood as in “wood”]) and *Pirkei Avot* (Peer-KAY Ah-VOTE). After you read each section, answer the questions below.

The Torah

Locate the website at <http://www.reformjudaism.org/torah-tree-life>. Read the quotation from Proverbs at the top of the page and the paragraph that follows. Then slip down on the page and read “How We Read *Torah*.” Write a summary of your reading that addresses the “5 W’s”—Who, What, When, Where, and Why.

The Talmud

Read the first paragraph of this article about the Talmud at <http://www.reformjudaism.org/talmud>. Then write one sentence here that explains how the Torah and Talmud are related.

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Sacred Texts of Judaism

Pirkei Avot

Pirkei Avot is translated as “ethics of the fathers.” In this text, Jewish scholars and rabbis discuss the morals and ethics of the faith. For each of these *Pirkei Avot* quotations, write a response to the right. Consider your own reaction to the quote and how it might apply to modern life.

QUOTE	RESPONSE
Rabbi Hillel, who lived in Jerusalem about 2,100 years ago, used to say, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? Yet, if I am for myself only, what am I? And if not now, when?”	
Rabbi Akiva, who lived at the end of the first century and beginning of the second, said, “Everything is foreseen, yet free will is granted; by goodness is the universe judged, yet all depends on the preponderance of (good) deeds....”	
Simeon Ben Zoma, who lived in the second century CE, said, “Who is wise? The one who learns from all people... “Who is mighty? The one who subdues the evil inclination... “Who is rich? The one who rejoices in his portion.... “Who is honored? The one who honors other human beings....”	