

- Are there religions other than that of the Native Americans which encourage people to be in harmony with nature, respect animal life and live in balance? Explain your answer.

Follow-up Activities

- Have students select an animal totem for themselves that suits their personality and background. Ask them to develop a decorative poster for the class depicting their totem and providing an explanation as to why this particular totem is of such value. The poster should also show how the totem can be a guiding force to help them focus their attention both on their weaknesses and their ultimate goals in life.
- Circumpolar religions believe that man and animals are separate and different but essentially equal in the sight of the supernatural and the way of the world. Have students research Western scientific experimentation, especially over the last twenty years, which seeks to learn about animals and their capabilities. Discuss if there is more we must learn about animals before we reach the truth on this subject. Is this belief Westerners have about the superiority of humans species centric or reality? Debate the issue.
- Research issues of stereotype and prejudice from a Native American perspective about religion, culture, language and identity. Lead the class in a discussion about how these terms and practices can be hurtful and inappropriate.
- Shamans are often credited with out-of-body practices as a part of their religious duties. Is this type of behavior possible in light of modern science? What is the European/Western view on the topic? Have students research these issues and discuss them.

Internet Resources

www.hanksville.org/NAresources/

Index of Native American Resources on the Internet — Provides an index of interesting links for and about the Native American community.

www.nativeweb.org

Native Web — Resources for indigenous cultures around the world. This site provides lists of organization and links to other sites, in addition to information about Native American culture, art and technology.

<http://weber.ucsd.edu/~anthclub/quetzal.htm#home>

Quetzalcoatl: The Man, The Myth, The Legend — Serves as an excellent introduction to the great Aztec god and provides in-depth information about his place in Native American history.

(Continued)

www.nhc.rtp.nc.us:8080/tserve/eighteen/ekeyinfo/natrel.htm

Divining America: Religion and the National Culture — Designed to help high school American history teachers link to an article specifically about Native American religions.

Suggested Print Resources

- Adkinson, Robert (Editor). *Native Americans. The Sacred Symbols Series.* Thames & Hudson, 1996.
- Gustafson, Frederick R. *Dancing Between Two Worlds.* Paulist Press, 1997.
- Harrod, Howard L. *Becoming and Remaining a People: Native American Religions on the Northern Plains.* University of Arizona Press, 1995.
- Time-Life Books Ed. *The American Indian Series. The Spirit World.* Alexandria, VA: Time Life, 1995.

TEACHER'S GUIDE:

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NATIVE AMERICAN SPIRITUALITY

The study of world religion is the examination of the specific beliefs, customs and traditions of a particular religion as well as its impact on world culture and history. *The Religions of the World* video series and its accompanying Teacher's Guides are designed to supplement World Cultures and History curriculum. These teaching aids are meant to invite classroom study and dialogue and challenge students to make connections between the past and the present. Questions and insights are likely to develop and will reveal striking similarities and vast differences among the world's major religions as well as the unique perspective of its many individual cultures.

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Historical Overview

Native American Spirituality is as diverse as the hundreds of tribes that make up the Native American community. This broad spectrum encompasses customs, practices and rituals that vary from group to group. Yet these numerous spiritual expressions share common precepts that are thread throughout Native American beliefs about the cycles of life and death, and the relationship of the individual to the community and with nature. The roots of these traditions are ancient, dating back to 9000 B.C.E. and the arrival of the Amerinds in North America from Asia. These ancestors of the Native Americans brought a spiritual life that was strongly connected to the environment — a spiritual philosophy that is still alive today.

Time Line

@40,000 years ago — Ancestors of the Native Americans cross the frozen Beringia land bridge from Asia into Alaska and begin moving south and eastward, bringing their culture and religions with them.

c9,000 B.C.E. — The Amerind peoples reach the southern tip of South America.

c7,000 B.C.E. — The Na Dene peoples reach the northwest coast of present-day United States and western Canada.

c3,000 B.C.E. — The Eskimo and Aleut peoples arrive in Alaska and northern Canada, the last Native Americans to arrive in the western hemisphere.

c2,000 B.C.E. — The first Meso-American advanced cultural tradition develops in the Americas.

c1,000 B.C.E.–200 C.E. — The pre-classical period of Meso-American culture develops, of which the Pueblo culture is an example.

c200 C.E.–900 C.E. — The classic Meso-American era during which the Mayan culture thrives in southern Mexico.

c1325 C.E. — The post-classical period begins, and the Aztecs flourish in the Valley of Mexico.

1487 C.E. — Dedication of the “Great Temple” on the site of modern-day Mexico City by the Aztecs.

1492 C.E. — European powers begin to colonize the Americas.

1750–1880 C.E. — The rise and fall of the Plains cultures.

Vocabulary

Circumpolar Religions — The shared religious beliefs that satisfy the spiritual needs associated with the harsh physical conditions experienced by northern tribes of migratory peoples. Circumpolar religions tend to be traditional in nature, which means they are more experiential than intellectual.

Amerinds — The first wave of indigenous people to migrate across the Beringia land bridge to North America. *(Continued)*

Na Dene — The second group of people to migrate from Asia to North America circa 7,000 B.C.E. They settled along the northwest coast and western Canadian mainland.

Eskimo & Aleut — The third wave of the migration. These groups came to the Americas approximately 5,000 years ago.

Shaman — A religious leader who calls upon the supernatural in order to treat disease. A shaman may also intercede with the supernatural at the request of an individual.

Totem — A type of guardian angel or spirit, usually represented in the form of an animal or plant, who carries important mystical, social and ritualistic associations for the people. The totem usually guides, teaches or protects its followers.

Manitou — A Native American name for all that is spiritual and supernatural.

Taboos — Actions or practices forbidden by a particular culture or religion.

Vision Quest — The journey to seek spiritual guidance undertaken as a rite of passage by some Native American cultures.

Anthropomorphism — The practice of ascribing human characteristics to crops or animals.

Pre-viewing Discussion

- Ask students to share an experience they have had with nature that was particularly moving (i.e. a beautiful sunset/sunrise, a walk in the woods, an interaction with wildlife). Discuss how such an experience is in many ways akin to a religious experience. The goal of this discussion is to raise the students' comfort level with the spirituality of nature in Native American religious traditions.
- Discuss the social pressures and religious changes that often come when two cultures with differing value systems collide, such as the meeting of the Native Americans and the Europeans.
- Develop an annotated map designating the geographic location of Native Americans who settled in this hemisphere over the past thousands of years. Use this as a basic graph for later discussions of differing practices in Native American religions throughout the entire hemisphere.

Focus Questions

1. Where does the program suggest was the geographic origin of Native Americans?
2. What are some common characteristics of a circumpolar culture with regard to their religious practices?
3. What is a key difference between circumpolar religions and most European religions? *(Continued)*

4. In your opinion, what is the most remarkable feature of circumpolar religions? Do you agree with this belief? Explain.
5. Who are the shamans? What are their roles in circumpolar societies?
6. What is the concept of two souls in one body?
7. Are circumpolar religions monotheistic or polytheistic?
8. What is the role of the Earth Mother?
9. What is the significance of an initiation rite?
10. What is a vision quest? Describe the typical process.
11. What is the Native American view of the afterlife, both before and after contact with the Europeans?
12. What was the social and religious role of women in some Native American religions, such as the Iroquois?
13. What are the essentials of the classical Mayan religion?
14. Why did the Mayans and Aztecs practice human sacrifice?
15. Who is Quetzatcoatl?
16. What is the outcome of the interaction between the Spanish and the Aztecs?
17. Why did Montezuma, the Aztec king, believe the Aztec world order would collapse without human sacrifice?
18. How does the Pueblo faith differ from that of the Aztecs?
19. What are the main elements of the Zuni religion?
20. What is the significance of the medicine lodge and the Sun Dance to the Lakota?
21. What is the modern status of Native American religions?

Follow-up Discussion

- What are the strongest similarities that circumpolar religions share with mainstream European faiths? What are the greatest differences?
- Discuss the following questions. Is mankind superior to the other species of creation? Are humans and other life forms essentially equal? How is this determination made? Do animals and plants have abilities above and beyond human ones? Do animals think?
- What are some examples of civil, social and religious initiation rites practiced by students in their society/religion? Discuss and compare these to those of the Native Americans.
- How does the culture and means of livelihood influence a society's religious rituals and practices? Find examples from societies around the world, (i.e. early Native American concerns about hunting, the importance many Westerners place on the pursuit of money and wealth) and discuss whether or not it has affected the practice, or non-practice, of religion in different social groups. *(Continued)*