

Christian Leadership in a Multifaith World Curriculum Designed by Interfaith America & CCCU

Module 2 – Religious Literacy
Activity 3 – Walking in Another’s Shoes

Overview

In this activity, students will choose from two or more selected films to expand their knowledge of religious experience and practices in the US and begin to engage in empathetic thinking towards religious identities outside of their own.

Learning Outcomes

Students who successfully complete this activity will:

- Expand knowledge (*appreciative knowledge*) of American religious and spiritual experiences outside of Christianity.
- Cultivate empathy (*narrative imagination*) for diverse experiences.
- Consider the intersectionality of religion and culture in personal experiences.
- Consider the role of religion and culture in building community ties and support.

External Materials

- *Welcome to Shelbyville* (2011; 60 minutes) shows longtime residents and new immigrants in a small Tennessee town searching for ways to build community.
- *Fordson: Faith, Fasting, and Football* (2011; 90 minutes) follows a high school football team in Deerborn, MI as it prepares for a major rivalry game during the last 10 days of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.
- *Arranged* (2007; 90 minutes) centers on the friendship between an Orthodox Jewish woman and a Muslim woman who are fellow teachers at a public school in Brooklyn. They learn that they have much in common, including the fact that both are going through the process of arranged marriages.
- *Maine Girls* (2017; 27 minutes) focuses on a diverse group of high school girls learning to develop relationships with those who don’t look or live the same way that they do.
- *Fremont, USA* (2009; 57 minutes) offers a glimpse of religious diversity in a California town where Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Buddhist, and Sikh community members seek to learn to be good neighbors.
- *Hinduism in America: Part One* (1999, 7 minutes) and *Part Two* (1999, 6 minutes) provides pictures of Hindus seeking to establish their faith and traditions in this country.

Activity Content

There are many wonderful benefits to attending a school that is distinctly Christian. Sharing a faith commitment can make for rich academic experiences and life-long friendships. However, what is often missing from campus life is engagement with broader religious diversity. Building relationships and learning to partner with those that hold to different traditions or beliefs are necessary life skills that will be essential in students’ future workplace and community. Learning about the ways people from other religious communities live out their beliefs also tends to lead

to self-reflection and the strengthening of one's own religious convictions.¹ In order for this to happen, we can seek out the stories of those who may not be present in our classes or dormitories.

If we want to truly get to know others it is imperative that we make space for others to speak for themselves - in their own words or forms of artistic expression. As religious scholar Martin Marty observes, "through stories the stranger becomes a person!"² The goal here is to use these films to supply you with greater intellectual understanding, but also to give them the opportunity to "know" and "connect" with religious others. Though face-to-face interaction is essential, films can provide a productive starting place for audiences who do not have daily exposure to religious diversity. Films provide an opportunity to invite in the voices of those who may not be well-represented on your campus or larger community.

Put simply, it's essential for Christians to take the time to walk in the shoes of those who have different religious identities. When applied to film, you as the viewer can gain *appreciative knowledge* and expand your *narrative imagination*. Acquisition of these through engagement with a film can foster empathy and admiration - moving you as the viewer from tolerance to appreciation. Ultimately, it results in a self-reflection that prepares you as a Christian to begin to consider and articulate how to live out the commandment to love thy neighbor.

Student Assignment Options

Choose two films to watch from the list above and respond to the following questions:

1. How can you approach these films with *appreciative knowledge*? What appreciation and insight did you gain? What did you learn? **Identify 5 bullet points.**
2. Consider how you can approach these films with a *narrative imagination*. What looks hard? What, if anything, made you uncomfortable? **Brainstorm a free response 1-2 paragraphs in length.**
3. Where did you see the themes of identity/ community/ and faith commitment present in the film?
4. **Consider if you agree or disagree with the following statement:** The US is a good place to live if you want to actively engage your belief in God in all aspects of your daily life. (If you struggled with answering this question - consider why and how you would respond to someone who responds with a confident 'yes' or 'no.')
5. What are both the unique challenges/advantages of being a person of devout faith in the United States? **Try and identify two observations for each.**

Going Deeper: Additional Resources

Explore: Try investigating other forms of media (podcasts/blogs/comedy routines/Instagram accounts/art exhibits) that present the stories of religious experiences in the United States. Intentionally listen/view with the goal of growing in knowledge and building empathy. Here are a few podcast suggestions to get you started:

Podcasts:

¹ "IDEALS - About the Survey." *Interfaith America*, 9 Sept. 2020, <http://legacy.interfaithamerica.org/ideals/about-the-survey> .

² Martin E. Marty, *When Faiths Collide* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 145.

- *Tell Them, I Am* (podcasts range in length from 15-30 minutes) features American Muslims discussing the “small moments that define who we are and who we are not.”
- *Wholly Jewish* (podcasts about 20 minutes each) highlights varied experiences, and complex identities among Jews of Color, hoping to help American Jews see what they have in common with each other and how each person helps to create a more vibrant Jewish community. Many of the contributors to this podcast are also members of the LGBTQ+ community.
- *BackStory* (2019; 63 minutes) explores the history of Buddhism in the United States
- *Preach!* (2020-2021; most episodes about 30 minutes) represents voices from a number of religions engaging topics like belief and doubt, finding joy and dealing with struggle, and why people want to believe even when faith is messy.