Creating a Mandala of Hindu Beliefs

Interactive Slide Lecture

Overview

This Interactive Slide Lecture introduces students to the basic beliefs of Hinduism, one of the main religions of past and present India. Working in pairs, students view five slides, each of which depicts a basic Hindu belief: Brahman, multiple Gods, dharma, karma, and samsara. For each slide, pairs read a description of the belief, record key points, and create a symbol to represent it. Afterward, students use their symbols to create a mandala showing the relationships among the beliefs.

Objectives

Students will be able to
- describe five basic beliefs of Hinduism
- create symbols to represent five Hindu beliefs
- design a mandala that shows the relationship among five Hindu beliefs

Materials

- overhead projector
- slide projector
- colored pencils or crayons
- tape
- Slides 2.1A-2.1F
- student copies of Student Handout 2.1A
- student copies of Student Handout 2.1B
- student copies of Student Handout 2.1C
- student copies of Student Handout 2.1D
Procedures in Detail

Before class, review the intent of this activity. This activity is designed to introduce students to five basic Hindu beliefs: Brahman, multiple Gods, dharma, karma, and samsara. By describing and creating symbols for five basic Hindu beliefs, students will be better able to understand one of the main religions of past and present India.

**Prepare seating chart.** Before class, place students in mixed-ability pairs. Prepare an overhead transparency that shows students how to arrange their desks. Each student should be able to see the slide screen.

Have students move into their correct places. When students enter the classroom, project the transparency with the seating chart, and ask students to move into their correct places.

**Idea for Student Response** To preview this activity, tell students that people in India often greet each other by placing their palms together as if in prayer and saying "namaste" (pronounced na-MAH-stay), which means "I bow to the Divine in you." Have students write a two-sentence response on the left side of their notebooks to this prompt: What do Indians mean by "the Divine in you"? Once students have finished writing their answers, have three or four share their ideas with the class. Afterward, explain to students that in this context "Divine" means "God." Tell students they will be studying a religion called Hinduism and that one of its key beliefs is that everything is part of God.

Introduce students to Hinduism. Tell students they will view five slides that depict the basic beliefs of Hinduism, one of the main religions of past and present India. Project Slide 2.1A, which shows Hindus praying in a temple in Palitana, India. Use the following information to introduce students to Hinduism: Hinduism is an ancient religion whose origins predate recorded history. It has no single human founder, and it has developed over thousands of years. Its most sacred scriptures are the Vedas, which means "knowledge" in Sanskrit, the ritual language of Hinduism.
The Vedas began as an oral tradition, and modern scholars have speculated that they date back as far as 6500 B.C.E. Historians believe that the Vedas were written down around 1000 B.C.E. or earlier. Other elements of Hinduism—such as sacred symbols and the worship of certain Gods—can also be traced back to the seventh century B.C.E.

The word Hindu was first used by the ancient Persians to describe the practices and beliefs of people who lived east of the river Sindhu, or the Indus River. Hindus call their religion "Sanatana Dharma" (the eternal religion) or "Vedic Dharma" (the religion of knowledge).

Over the millennia Hinduism has continued to evolve, and in modern times it incorporates a wide variety of religious beliefs and practices. Hinduism has historically been tolerant of other religions, believing that all religions can be legitimate paths to God. As of 1997, there were nearly one billion Hindus in the world, more than 900 million of them living in India.

5 Pass out Student Handouts 2.1 A and 2.1 B. After students have been introduced to Hinduism, pass out Student Handout 2.1A: Descriptions of Hindu Beliefs and Student Handout 2.1B: Basic Hindu Beliefs to each student.

6 Project Slide 2.1 B and have students discover information from the image. Project Slide 2.1B, which shows a painting depicting Brahman. Encourage students to discover information from the image by asking the questions, which spiral from the basic to the critical-thinking level, that appear in the Teacher's Guide to Slides.

7 Have students read the description of the belief on Student Handout 2.1 A and record key points on Student Handout 2.1 B. Once students have analyzed the painting of Brahman, have them read the corresponding description on Student Handout 2.1A and record two or three key points about the belief on Student Handout 2.1B. Use Teacher's Guide 2.1B to check their answers for accuracy and thoroughness.

8 Have students create a symbol for the belief. After students have recorded key points about Brahman, have them create a simple symbol to represent the belief and sketch it on their handout. Acknowledge that creating a symbol might be difficult for the first belief, but explain that it will become easier as students grow more familiar with the task. Refer to Teacher's
Guide 2.1B for an example of what a symbol for each belief might look like.

9 Repeat steps 6 through 8 with the remaining slides. Once students have created their symbol for Brahman, repeat the process for Slides 2.1C through 2.1F.

10 Pass out Student Handouts 2.1 C and 2.1 D and explain what a mandala is. After students have recorded key points and a symbol for all of the beliefs, tell them they will now use the symbols they developed to create a mandala of Hindu beliefs. Pass out Student Handout 2.1C: Brainstorming Ideas for a Mandala of Hindu Beliefs and Student Handout 2.1D: A Mandala of Hindu Beliefs to each student. Use the following information to explain what a mandala is:

_Mandala means "circle" in Sanskrit. Mandalas are circular diagrams that originated with Hinduism and are used in both Hinduism and Buddhism to increase spiritual awareness. Hindu mandalas usually consist of a combination of lines and triangles within a circle and a square, and designs range from simple to very complex. Mandalas symbolize the cyclical nature of the universe, and people often use mandalas to focus themselves during meditation._

11 Have students brainstorm ideas for their mandalas. Once students understand what a mandala is, explain that they will now brainstorm ideas for their mandala on Student Handout 2.1C. Tell them they will answer questions to analyze the relationships among beliefs, create a draft of their mandala, and write a four- or five-sentence explanation of the placement of symbols in their mandala. Emphasize that pairs should lay out their symbols to reveal the relationships among the beliefs. For example, the symbol for karma could be placed next to and before the symbol for samsara, indicating that people's actions in one life affect the kind of life into which they are reborn. Before pairs begin the final draft of their mandala, have them bring their brainstorm sheets to you. Carefully review what they have written and the placement of symbols in their mandala.

12 Have students create their final drafts. After you have reviewed students' rough drafts, have them create a final draft on Student Handout 2.1D. Encourage students to add color and other creative touches to their mandala. Make sure they transfer the explanation of their mandala to the bottom of the handout.
A completed mandala might look like this:

Brahman is at the top because it is the source of everything. Multiple Gods is next because the Gods are all parts of Brahman. Dharma is before karma because when people follow their sacred duty, it contributes to their karma. Karma is next to samsara because people's actions in one life affect the kind of life into which they are reborn. Samsara is last and next to Brahman, because reunion with Brahman (moksha) is the goal of all Hindus.

Wrap Up

1. **Have students share their mandalas.** When all students have completed their mandalas, have them post the mandalas on the classroom walls, and allow students to circulate around the room to see them. After students have examined all the mandalas, ask them to explain which mandalas they think best represent the relationships among basic Hindu beliefs and why.

**Idea for Student Response** After students complete this activity, have them create a matrix on the left side of their notebooks that compares Hinduism with another religion such as Judaism. A completed matrix might look like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Nature of God</th>
<th>Life After Death</th>
<th>Guide for Proper Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hinduism</strong></td>
<td>Brahman is Supreme God and everything is part of Brahman</td>
<td>Hindus believe in samsara, or cycle of birth, death, and rebirth</td>
<td>Obey your dharma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Judaism</strong></td>
<td>Yahweh is the all-knowing, all powerful, personal God</td>
<td>Some Jews believe in afterlife in which good is regarded; others do not believe in afterlife</td>
<td>obey the Ten Commandments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Slide 2.1 A In this slide we see Hindus praying in a temple in Palitana, India.

Slide 2.1B: Brahman In this slide we see a symbolic representation of the individual soul (atman) separating from the Supreme God (Brahman), which is depicted as the cosmos.

What do you see in this slide? What are some details in the slide that make the scene unrealistic? How many objects in this slide contain water? What might the relationships among the objects be?

Brahman is the name for Hinduism's one Supreme God or Spirit. Brahman creates, maintains, destroys, and re-creates the universe in a never-ending cycle. Everything in the world, including each human soul, or atman, is a part of Brahman. Just like a single drop of water in a great ocean, the atman is both separate from and one with Brahman (God). A Hindu's spiritual goal is to unite his or her soul with Brahman.

Slide 2.1 C: Multiple Gods In this slide we see four Hindu Gods and Goddesses. From the upper left, moving clockwise, we see the Goddess Sri Vishwaroopa, shown here as containing all the Gods within herself; the God Brahma, the creator; the Goddess Durga, the wife of the God Shiva; and the God Vishnu, the preserver.

What do you see here? In what ways are the figures in this slide different from one another? In what ways are they similar? What do you think these figures might represent?

Hindus worship many Gods and Goddesses, but they believe the Gods are all aspects of the one Supreme God, Brahman. Hindus believe that the multiple Gods represent the countless different qualities and powers of Brahman. Some Hindu Gods have humanlike personalities, and others represent such things as success, good luck, and war. Each Hindu person or family may be especially devoted to a particular God or Goddess. Three of the most important Gods are Vishnu, Shiva, and Brahma (not to be confused with Brahman).
Slide 2.1 D: Dharma  In this slide we see people performing the duties of their varna, or class, thereby honoring the Hindu God Vishnu in the center. From the upper left, moving clockwise, these classes include the brahmins (religious scholars), the kshtryiyas (lawmakers and warriors), the shudras (laborers), and the vaishyas (merchants).

What do you see in this slide? What types of jobs are shown? How is the figure in the center of the slide different from those who surround it? Why do you think the artist chose to arrange the parts of the image in the shape of a flower?

*Dharma* means "to hold or support." Part of dharma relates to sacred (holy) duty or moral responsibility. It is the system of rules and values Hindus follow in their everyday life. Another way to think of dharma is as "the right thing to do" in any situation. Hindus believe in a universal dharma that includes values all Hindus accept and practice, such as nonviolence. However, Hindus also believe they have an individual dharma that they should follow. People's dharmas are determined by different things, such as personality, age, sex, and inherited social class, or varna. Hinduism teaches that when people follow their dharma, they contribute to the harmony and balance of society and the universe.

Slide 2.1 E: Karma  In this slide we see different levels of existence into which people can be reborn, depending on their past actions, or karma.

What do you see in this slide? What details indicate that this image is divided into three sections? How would you describe the behavior shown in each section? What message or messages do you think the artist is trying to convey?

Hindus believe that *karma* is the sum of good and bad actions a human soul, or *atman*, carries with it from life to life. They believe that when people die, the soul leaves the body and is reborn into another body. Hinduism teaches that people's good and bad actions in one life influence their destiny in future lives. In Hinduism, karma determines whether a soul is reborn as a human or an animal, into a rich family or a poor one, and some of the things a person will experience in each lifetime. For example, Hindus believe that a person who steals in this life may be robbed in a future life, or that someone who harms animals may be reborn as an animal.
Slide 2.1F: Samsara  In this slide we see a human's progress through various life stages, ending with death and then rebirth in a different body.

What do you see here? Which eight figures represent the same person? What might the breath rising from the body in the lower left represent? What does the arrangement of these figures tell you about Hindu beliefs concerning life after death?

In Hinduism, *samsara* is the continuous cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. The process of rebirth is sometimes referred to as reincarnation. The goal of a Hindu's life is to be released from samsara and united with the Supreme God, Brahman. Hindus call this release *moksha* and it is achieved after a person's soul has lived through many lifetimes. Hindus achieve *moksha* by following the path of *dharma*, balancing their karma (both good and bad actions), worshipping the Gods faithfully, and having a direct and personal experience of God by following certain spiritual practices.
Descriptions of Hindu Beliefs

**Brahman:** I is the name for Hinduism's one Supreme God or Spirit. Brahman creates, maintains, destroys, and recreates the universe in a never-ending cycle. Everything in the world, including each human soul, or atman, is a part of Brahman. Just like a single drop of water in a great ocean, the atman is both separate from and one with Brahman (God). A Hindu's spiritual goal is to unite his or her soul with Brahman.

**Multiple Gods:** Hindus worship many Gods and Goddesses, but they believe the Gods are all aspects of the one Supreme God, Brahman. Hindus believe that the multiple Gods represent the countless different qualities and powers of Brahman. Some Hindu Gods have humanlike personalities, and others represent such things as success, good luck, and war. Each Hindu person or family may be especially devoted to a particular God or Goddess. Three of the most important Gods are Vishnu, Shiva, and Brahma (not to be confused with Brahman).

**Dharma:** *Dharma* means "to hold or support." Part of dharma relates to sacred (holy) duty or moral responsibility. It is the system of rules and values Hindus follow in their everyday life. Another way to think of dharma is as "the right thing to do" in any situation. Hindus believe in a universal dharma that includes values all Hindus accept and practice, such as nonviolence. However, Hindus also believe they have an individual dharma that they should follow. People's dharmas are determined by different things, such as personality, age, sex, and inherited social class, or varna. Hinduism teaches that when people follow their dharma, they contribute to the harmony and balance of society and the universe.
Karma: Hindus believe that karma is the total of good and bad actions a human soul, or atman, carries with it from life to life. They believe that when people die, the soul leaves the body and is reborn into another body. Hinduism teaches that people's good and bad actions in one life influence their destiny in future lives. In Hinduism, karma determines whether a soul is reborn as a human or an animal, into a rich family or a poor one, and some of the things a person will experience in each lifetime. For example, Hindus believe that a person who steals in this life may be robbed in a future life, or that someone who harms animals may be reborn as an animal.

Samsara: In Hinduism, samsara is the continuous cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. The process of rebirth is sometimes referred to as reincarnation. The goal of a Hindu's life is to be released from samsara and united with the Supreme God, Brahman. Hindus call this release moksha and it is achieved after a person's soul has lived through many lifetimes. Hindus achieve moksha by following the path of dharma, balancing their karma (both good and bad actions), worshipping the Gods faithfully, and having a direct and personal experience of God by following certain spiritual practices.
## Basic Hindu Beliefs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hindu belief</th>
<th>Key Points about the belief</th>
<th>Symbol for the belief</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brahman</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Gods</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dharma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samsara</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Basic Hindu Beliefs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hindu belief</th>
<th>Key Points about the belief</th>
<th>Symbol for the belief</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brahman</strong></td>
<td>▪ Supreme God</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Symbol" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Everything part of Brahman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Goal in life to unite atman with Brahman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multiple Gods</strong></td>
<td>▪ Hindus worship many Gods and Goddesses</td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Symbol" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Gods and Goddesses part of Brahman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Important Gods: Vishnu, Shiva, Brahma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dharma</strong></td>
<td>▪ Sacred duty</td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Symbol" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Individual dharma determined by personality, age, sex, social class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Following dharma promotes harmony</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Karma</strong></td>
<td>▪ Sum of good and bad actions atman carries from life to life</td>
<td><img src="image4" alt="Symbol" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Good and bad actions affect future life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Samsara</strong></td>
<td>▪ Continuous cycle of birth, death, and rebirth</td>
<td><img src="image5" alt="Symbol" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Goal in life is to achieve moksha and be released from samsara</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Brainstorming Ideas for a Mandala of Hindu Beliefs

Directions: Brainstorm ideas for your mandala by answering the questions below.

1. What are some ways in which the basic beliefs of Hinduism are related to each other?

2. How can you arrange your symbols in the space below to show the relationships among the Hindu beliefs?

3. Write a four- or five-sentence explanation of how your mandala reveals the relationships among the beliefs.
A Mandala of Hindu Beliefs

Directions: In the space below, use your ideas from Student Handout 2.1C to create a mandala of basic Hindu beliefs. Below your mandala, write a four- or five-sentence explanation of how the placement of your symbols reveals the relationships among the beliefs.