

READING COMPREHENSION ACTIVITY

3 RELIGIONS

- READ CAREFULLY EACH READING AND ANSWER ACCORDING TO THE INFORMATION, CHOOSE ONLY ONE OPTION

What Is Islam?

Islam is the second largest religion in the world today, with about 1.3 billion followers called Muslims who mainly live in the Middle East, Southeast Asia and Africa. According to the U.S. State Department, there are about six million Muslims in the United States and Islam is expected to be the second largest

religion in this country by 2010. The church building of Muslims is called a mosque and there are 2,000 mosques in the U.S.

Muslims follow the teachings of the prophet Muhammad who lived in Saudi Arabia around 600 CE. Islam was quickly adopted by the people of the Arabian peninsula and within one hundred years the religion had spread from the Atlantic Ocean on the west to China in the east. The first Muslims to come to the U.S.



were West African slaves who arrived before the Civil War.

By 650 CE though, the religion had split into Sunni and Shia sects but both groups follow the same core Islamic beliefs. Muslims believe in one god who is called Allah and also believe that Jesus was a true prophet of god. Muslims read the Qur'an, also spelled Koran, as their holy book. The Qur'an contains only the writings of Muhammad.

The main symbol associated with Islam is a combination of a crescent on the left with a star centered on the crescent on the right. However, religious historians tell us that this is not a true symbol of Islam. Instead, historically this symbol comes from the Ottoman Empire and became part of Islamic culture when these Turkish peoples adopted the Islamic faith. Turkey and Pakistan, both Muslim countries, have the crescent and star as part of their flags. Instead of particular symbols, colors are important. The color green is a symbol of Islam and is prevalent in mosques. Saudi Arabia has a green flag.

Muslims observe Ramadan during the ninth month of the Muslim religious calendar. Devout Muslims fast, that is do not eat or drink, from dawn to sunset during the entire month of Ramadan. The festival called Id Al-Fitr or "Festival of the Breaking of the Fast" begins at dawn of the first day of the month after Ramadan and lasts for three days. This is a time for visiting friends and relatives, giving gifts and wearing new clothes.

What Is Islam? - Multiple Choice Questions

Choose the correct answer.

1. The church building of Islam is called a

- a. Cathedral
- b. Mosque
- c. House of worship
- d. Chapel

2. The prophet who founded Islam is

- a. Muhammad
- b. Jesus
- c. Both a. and b. above
- d. None of the above

3. The Islamic religion began in

- a. Pakistan
- b. Palestine
- c. Turkey
- d. Saudi Arabia

4. The first Muslims to come to the United States came from

- a. Saudi Arabia
- b. West Africa
- c. Europe
- d. All of the above

What Is Buddhism?

Buddhism is the fourth largest religion in the world today, with about 360 million followers called Buddhists who mainly live in northeastern India as well as China, Japan, Korea, Tibet, Mongolia and Southeast Asia. According to a U.S. State Department report in 2004, there are about three million Buddhists in the United States. The first Buddhists in the United States were Chinese immigrants who built the first Buddhist temple in San Francisco, California in the 1850s. The number of Buddhists in the U.S. is growing as more immigrants arrive from Southeast Asian countries like Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.

Buddhists follow the teachings of Siddharta Gautama, an Indian prince, who is known as the Buddha. Buddhism began around 500 BCE. The Prince had lived a sheltered and privileged life; he was shocked to learn of the amount of suffering that other people experienced. He sought and found enlightenment and became the Buddha, the Enlightened One. According to Buddha, the purpose of life is to end suffering.

There are almost countless sects (groups) within Buddhism that developed as the religion spread across Asia. The first major split in the religion occurred in the first century CE. Theravada Buddhism flourished in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Laos, and Cambodia while Mahayana Buddhism spread northward to Tibet and Mongolia as well as China, Taiwan, Japan, and Korea. The Dalai Lama is a great spiritual teacher of Tibetan Buddhists. Many Americans are familiar with some of the teachings of Zen Buddhism. With so many Buddhists sects there are lots of religious books that Buddhists read, some of which were written by the Buddha.

Over the centuries, famous statues of the Buddha have been created. Followers of Buddhism will visit shrines where these famous statues are located. Many statues show a seated Buddha but the laughing Buddha is shown standing. Statues of Buddha are popular items sold in the United States.

The most important holiday in Buddhism is the Buddha's birthday which is celebrated on the first day of the full moon in May. Another major festival occurs on the New Year; New Year's is celebrated at various times in different countries.



What Is Buddhism? - Multiple Choice Questions

Choose the correct answer.

1. The first Buddhists in the United States were

- a. Chinese immigrants who lived in California
- b. Vietnamese immigrants who lived in Boston
- c. Laotian immigrants who lived in Iowa
- d. None of the above

2. The founder of Buddhism was

- a. Siddharta Gautama
- b. A prince from the country of India
- c. Both a. and b. above
- d. None of the above

3. The term Buddha means

- a. Enlightened Prophet
- b. Holy Prophet
- c. Enlightened One
- d. Holy One

4. The Dalai Lama is the leader of Buddhists in the country of

- a. Laos
- b. Tibet
- c. Mongolia
- d. All of the above

What is Hinduism?

Hinduism is currently the third largest religion in the world, with approximately 900 million followers all around the world. The majority of Hindus live in India, followed by the United Kingdom and the United States, in that order. Many Hindus live in the United Kingdom because for many years India was a British colony. The U.S. Department of State estimates that there are about 1.5 million Hindus currently living in the United States.



Hinduism is an ancient religion with its origins in India. Hinduism is a collection of beliefs but Hinduism is not a religion with an organized set of beliefs and principles like, for example, those found in Christianity or Judaism. Instead, Hinduism has evolved into its current form over the last 4,000 years. Hinduism is the oldest religion in the world that is still practiced today.

Over the centuries four sects of Hinduism have emerged but these are not considered to be divisions of the religion because Hindus freely mix the pieces of the sects together. That's part of why Hinduism is not considered an organized religion. Two major sects within Hinduism are Vaishnavism where the supreme god is called Vishnu and Shaivism which calls the supreme god Shiva. Even though there may be many gods in the Hindu faith, each god is believed to be some part of the Supreme Being. Yoga, which is a popular form of exercise and meditation in the United States, is a practice in Hindu philosophy.

A prominent Hindu symbol is the bindi which is traditionally worn on the forehead of married women. The bindi is usually done in red and it is placed between the eyebrows. The bindi is believed to protect men and women while it symbolizes female energy. In modern times a bindi has been worn by young girls and unmarried women.

Since Hinduism is such an old religion and it is not an organized religion, there are literally hundreds of holidays, some coming from ancient local festivals that celebrated harvests and other cycles of nature. Other festivals are held in honor of special gods and goddesses. Holi is one Hindu holiday that is celebrated across India. Holi announces the arrival of spring and at the same time celebrates events in ancient Hindu folklore. Holi is a time for merrymaking.

What Is Hinduism? - Multiple Choice Questions

Choose the correct answer.

1. Among the religions of the world, where does Hinduism rank in number of followers?

- a. First
- b. Second
- c. Third
- d. Fourth

2. Among the religions of the world, where does Hinduism rank in age?

- a. It is a new religion within the last 200 years
- b. It is a religion that arose along with Protestantism in Europe
- c. It is a religion that dates back to Roman times
- d. It is the oldest religion dating back about 4,000 years

3. Hinduism originated in

- a. India
- b. United States
- c. Europe
- d. Africa

4. One part of Hinduism that is practiced by many Americans is

- a. Yoga
- b. Vaishnavism
- c. Shaivism
- d. None of the above