Combating Racism and Prejudice in Schools: Keynotes

Keynote 11
Bahá’í Faith

The following information is also relevant to Keynote 11:

The Introduction: Background information outlining the context and purpose of the project.

Keynote 1 – Violence and Conflict: Issues and Strategies for Schools: A theoretical background to understanding conflict and violence and how schools can address issues of intolerance.

Keynote 2 – A Whole-School Approach to Combating Racism and Prejudice: An audit strategy for schools to plan and monitor their approaches to combating racism. This is adapted from Racism No Way (www.racismnoway.com.au/strategies/framework/body-Schools.html); a web site aimed at teachers seeking to challenge and counter racism.

The following Keynotes cover the nine most significantly represented religions in Australia and include suggestions for classroom activities:

Keynote 3 – The Abrahamic Religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam
Keynote 4 – The Abrahamic Religions: Judaism
Keynote 5 - The Abrahamic Religions: Middle Eastern Christians
Keynote 6 – The Abrahamic Religions: Islam
Keynote 7 – Arabs and Muslims in Australia
Keynote 8 – Indian Religions: Hinduism
Keynote 9 – Indian Religions: Sikhism
Keynote 10 – Indian Religions: Buddhism
Keynote 11 – Bahá’í Faith (this document)

You can also download a full version of Combating Racism and Prejudice in Schools, which includes all of the Keynotes listed above. This full document, as well as all of the above sections can be downloaded from the Keynotes Explained (http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/tchkeynotes.htm) web page on the Multicultural Education http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/default.htm) site.
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Introduction

The Bahá’í Faith, which originated in Persia 150 years ago, is the youngest of the world's independent monotheistic religions.

As Christianity had its roots in Judaism, the roots of the Bahá’í faith lie in Shia Islam. The Bahá’í faith recognises the divine nature of prophets of other religions, but Bahá’ís believe that its founder Baha’u’llah, was the manifestation of God promised by all religions, sent for a new era to redeem the world and to interpret God’s will.

The word Bahá’í derives from Baha meaning glory or splendour and signifies a follower of Baha’u’llah.

The faith has over six million adherents (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2002) spread throughout the world in more than 230 countries and territories making it the second most widespread religion.

Most Bahá’ís live in Asia (3.6 million), Africa (1.8 million), and Latin America (900,000). Some sources estimate that India has the largest Bahá’í community with 2.2 million followed by Iran with 350,000, and the USA with 150,000 (The World Almanac and Book of Facts, 2004).

The largest population of Bahá’í in the Pacific is in Papua New Guinea.

The Bahá’í faith is still viewed by many Muslims as a breakaway sect of Islam and in Iran, its country of origin, the followers of the religion have been persecuted at different points in history.

Consistent with its beliefs, the Bahá’í faith has a strong social agenda and is active in such areas as interfaith dialogue, human rights advocacy, support for aid and development projects, working for the advancement of women and global governance.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’í of the United States, has been represented at the United Nations since 1947 and the faith has a long tradition of working with the United Nations, see: Baha’is at the United Nations (http://www.bahai.us/bahai-united-nations).

Origins and historical background

In 1844 in Iran, Mirza-Ali Muhammad (1820–50), a Sufi Muslim, proclaimed himself to be the Báb (gate) of God and announced the coming of a new prophet. This contravened an essential teaching of Islam, that the Prophet Muhammad was the final prophet of God. The Báb and his followers were persecuted by the Muslim hierarchy and the Báb was eventually executed.

In 1863, one of the Báb's followers, Mirza Husain Ali (1817-92), a 19th century Persian nobleman revealed that he was the prophet proclaimed by the Báb. He called himself Baha’u’llah (Glory of God). Two years after the Báb's death, Bahá’u’lláh and some of his followers were accused of taking part in the
attempted assassination of the Shah of Persia. In prison in Tehran, Bahá'u'lláh had what he believed was a divine vision anointing him as the new messenger of God.

He was released into exile, spending the remainder of his life in places such as Baghdad, Constantinople and Palestine where he wrote his teachings and revelations, some in letters to rulers of other countries. Before his life ended in 1892 in Acca in Palestine, the Bahá’í religion had spread beyond Persia and the Ottoman Empire to the Caucasus, Turkistan, India, Burma, Egypt and the Sudan.

After Baha’u'llah’s death his son and appointed successor, Abdu'l-Baha, spread Bahá’í teachings in Europe and North America, and established the world headquarters of the Bahá’í faith in Haifa (now in Israel). He developed Bahá’í ideas of social reform and international justice and expounded on Bahá’í beliefs through a series of letters.

Abdu'l-Baha was succeeded by his eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi in 1921. He continued missionary work and the development of the administrative structure which currently directs the Bahá’í faith.

Shoghi Effendi translated the most important of Baha'u'llah's scriptures into English, wrote extensive interpretations and explanations of the Bahá'í teachings and oversaw the spread of the Baha'i Faith worldwide through a global missionary program known as the Ten Year Crusade (1953-1963).

When Shoghi Effendi died in 1957 without nominating a successor, the leadership of the faith passed to elected groups of believers who continued the work of the Ten Year Crusade which culminated in the election of the first Universal House of Justice in Haifa, Israel in 1963.

The Bahá’í faith has continued to expand, particularly in south-west Asia. There are over 70,000 centres worldwide, the largest in India, Africa and South America, although there is also a presence in Europe, the Middle East, North America, south-east Asia and Oceania.

Members of the Bahá’í Faith are still persecuted in Iran, where the government does not recognise the religion (Australian Broadcasting Commission, “Religion and Ethics, Bahá’ís ”).

Branches of Bahá’í faith

There are no sectarian divisions with the Bahá’í movement. The Faith maintains a commitment to religious harmony and unity. “Religion must be the cause of unity, harmony and agreement among mankind” (Abdul’l Baha).

Bahá’í beliefs and teachings

The following information includes some elements of Bahá’í beliefs and teachings. Readers are encouraged to refer to authoritative sources such as those listed in the Bibliography for a more complete account.
Oneness of God

Central to Bahá’í teachings is the idea of “oneness” of God. There is only one God, though people of different religions may call Him by different names. We can never really understand the true nature of God: we can only learn about God through His creation and His messengers.

Oneness of religion

Bahá’ís believe that all the great religions of the world are divine in origin. God has sent messengers at different times and places according to the needs of the people and the times.

Divine messengers have included Krishna, Abraham, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb and Baha’u’lláh.

Bahá’ís believe that this process of ‘progressive revelation’ will continue but that a new manifestation will not occur prior to 1000 years after Baha’u’lláh’s revelation.

Oneness of humanity

“The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens” (Bahá'u'lláh).

Bahá’ís believe that all people are equal in the eyes of God. Prejudice and racial distinction are seen as unnatural. Bahá’ís are expected to work towards the elimination of discrimination in their countries.

Bahá’ís affirm the desirability of the ‘unity in diversity’ principle, which states that while recognizing the unity of mankind, cultural diversity should be celebrated. “The diversity of colours in a rose garden adds to the charm and beauty of the scene as variety enhances unity” (Abdu'l-Bahá).

Gender equality is an essential belief. "There must be an equality of rights between men and women. Women shall receive an equal privilege of education. This will enable them to qualify and progress in all degrees of occupation and accomplishment." (‘Abdu'l-Bahá)

To Bahá’ís, achieving equality of the sexes requires fundamental change in society. More than allowing women to compete on equal terms, it means the creation of a society in which the masculine and feminine elements are more evenly balanced; in which competition, boldness and leadership are balanced with compassion, consultation and cooperation. The peace and well-being of humanity depend on the establishment of true equality between women and men. The Baha’i Faith in Australia (http://www.bahai.org.au).

Other beliefs and teachings

The immortality of the soul

At death, the soul is freed to travel through the spirit world which is viewed as "a timeless and placeless extension of our own universe – and not some physically remote or removed place."
Universal education

Bahá’ís believe that ignorance perpetuates prejudice and has been a principal reason for the decline of societies throughout history. Bahá’í scriptures state that every human has the right to literacy and deserves an education.

The compatibility of science and religion

"Religion and Science are inter-twined with each other and cannot be separated. These are the two wings with which humanity must fly." Religion and science should work together to advance the well-being and progress of humanity.

World unity

Humanity is a single race, which should be united in one global society.

Work as worship

Work performed in the spirit of service is a form of worship.

Social principles

The principles underlying the faith include:

- full equality between women and men in all departments of life and at every level of society
- harmony between science and religion as two complementary systems of knowledge that must work together to advance the well-being and progress of humanity
- the elimination of all forms of prejudice
- the establishment of a world commonwealth of nations
- recognition of the common origin and fundamental unity of purpose of all religions
- spiritual solutions to economic problems and the removal of economic barriers and restrictions
- the abolition of extremes of wealth and poverty
- the adoption of a world auxiliary language, a world script, a uniform and universal system of currency and of weights and measures.

Source: Bahá’í Faith, the official website of the Bahá’ís of the United States (http://www.bahai.us).

Sacred texts

The Bahá’í scriptures consist of the books, essays and letters written by Baha'u'llah, Abdu'l-Baha, and Shoghi Effendi. The most holy text is the Kitab-I Aqbash, the book of laws for the Bahá’í Faith written by Baha'u'llah.

Among the better known writings of Baha'u'llah are:

- The Most Holy Book
- The Book of Certitude
- Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah
• The Hidden Words
• The Seven Valleys.


Structure and organisation

The Bahá‘í community has no clergy. Following an administrative framework set down by Baha’u’llah, the faith is organized around a set of elected governing councils which operate at the local, national and international levels. Election is by secret ballot. Electioneering is forbidden and there is no system of nominations.

Spiritual assemblies

A local community of nine or more adult members can form a local spiritual assembly which annually elects a nine-member local spiritual assembly.

The local spiritual assembly coordinates community activities, represents the Bahá‘í community on an official level, enrolls new members, provides pastoral care and conducts Bahá‘í marriages and funerals.

Worldwide, there are about 20,000 local spiritual assemblies. There are approximately 200 Local Spiritual Assemblies in Australia.


Universal House of Justice

The Universal House of Justice is the international governing body of the Bahá‘í Faith. The nine members of this body are elected every five years by the national spiritual assemblies. Although the equality of women is an essential tenet of the Bahá‘í Faith, Bahá‘í law states that women are not eligible to be chosen.

The Universal House of Justice today oversees the growth and development of the global Bahá‘í community. Some of its responsibilities include:

• adapting aspects of the Bahá‘í Faith not explicitly covered in the Bahá‘í sacred texts in accordance with the needs of society
• legislating on matters promoting the spiritual qualities that characterise Bahá‘í life individually and collectively
• preserving the Bahá‘í Sacred Texts
• defending and protecting the global Bahá‘í community
• preserving and developing the world spiritual and administrative centre of
the Bahá’í Faith

- encouraging the growth and maturation of the Bahá’í community
- exerting a positive influence on the general welfare of humankind.

(Adapted from Wikipedia, Universal House of Justice

Religious observances

The Bahá’í faith has no clergy or sacraments and virtually no rituals. Independent investigation of truth, private prayer, collective discussion and action are all ways in which Bahá’ís observe their religion.

There are only three Bahá’í rituals:

- obligatory daily prayers
- reciting the prayer for the dead at a funeral
- the simple marriage rite.

Rather than a weekly worship service, most Bahá’í communities hold a monthly program called "feast" that includes worship, community consultation and social activities.

Bahá’ís also hold special worship events on holy days and festivals.

When Bahá’ís come together in communal worship, there are no congregational prayers. One person will recite prayers on behalf of everyone present. There will be spiritual readings from Bahá’í sources but readings may also include spiritual texts from other religions.

The services really are an expression of that central belief of the Baha’i faith, that religious truth is one and that divine revelation is a continual and a progressive process. So in the Baha’i services at the House of Worship we read from the official scriptures of all the world's great faiths; Hindu teachings, the Buddhist teachings, from the Old and New Testaments and from the Koran, and then of course from the Baha’i writings themselves. So in that way we express that teaching by honouring all the faiths.


The 19-day Feast

The 19-day feast (d.iyafat-i-navazdah-ruzih) is the monthly Bahá’í community meeting when adherents gather to pray, discuss, consult on social issues and administrative matters, and plan social activities. The feast is held every 19 days in each Baha’i community, usually on the first day of each Bahá’í month.
The feast is the most important occasion for communication between Bahá'í administrative institutions and members of the Faith.

**Prayers**

Daily private prayer is a religious obligation for all Bahá'ís from the age of 15. Each day, one of three obligatory prayers should be said:

- a short prayer recited once every 24 hours between noon and sunset
- a medium prayer recited three times a day, in the morning, at noon and in the evening
- a long prayer recited once in every 24 hours at any time.

Prayers by the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and Abdu'l-Bahá are used by Bahá'ís at their meetings.

As they are regarded as the words of God, no change can be made to the words. It is acceptable for Bahá'ís to make up their own prayers for use in their private prayer.

Prayer is not seen as an end in itself nor as sufficient on its own for a Bahá'í to grow spiritually,

> Prayer and meditation are very important factors in deepening the spiritual life of the individual, but with them must go also action and example, as these are the tangible results of the former. Both are essential (Bahá'í writings).

**Work**

Performing useful work is not only required but considered a form of worship.

**Fasting**

Adult Bahá'ís in good health fast each year from March 2 through March 20 abstaining from both food and drink from sunrise to sunset,

The sick, elderly and very young are exempt from fasting, as are pregnant or nursing mothers, travellers and those doing heavy physical work.

**Meditation**

Meditating for a period each day is seen as one way of making spiritual progress in the Bahá'í faith.

> Meditate profoundly, that the secret of things unseen may be revealed unto you, that you may inhale the sweetness of a spiritual and imperishable fragrance... (Bahá'u'lláh)
Places of worship

Most Bahá’í meetings occur in individuals' homes, local Bahá’í centres or rented facilities.

There are currently seven Bahá’í Houses of Worship, one per continent, with an eighth under construction in Chile.

Each temple has its own distinctive design, but conforms to the requirement of Bahá’í law that all Bahá’í Houses of Worship must have nine sides and doors and a central dome.

For Baha'is, the number nine symbolises completeness and fulfilment, concepts which they believe are embodied in their religion. The nine doors signify the openness of the Faith to comers of all religions.

The House of Worship at Ingleside in Sydney was officially dedicated in 1961 (House of Worship (http://www.bahai.org.au/scripts/WebObjects.exe/BNO.woa/wa/pages?page=who_we_are/house_of_worship.html)).

Further information on Houses of Worship around the world can be found at Wikipedia: Bahá’í House of Worship (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bah%C3%A1%C2%AD_House_of_Worship)
Festivals

The Bahá'í Calendar

The Bahá'í calendar is based on the calendar established by the Báb. The year consists of 19 months of 19 days, with four or five intercalary days, to make a full solar year.

Each month is named after one of the attributes of God, i.e. Splendour, Glory, Beauty, Grandeur, etc.

The Bahá’í week is seven days, with each day of the week also named after an attribute of God e.g. Istiqlál (Independence), Kamál (Perfection) and ‘Idál (Justice).

Bahá’ís observe 11 Holy Days throughout the year. These days commemorate important anniversaries in the history of the faith.

Bahá’í days begin and end at sunset.

Holy Days

During the year, nine days are designated Holy Days on which Bahá’í should suspend work.

21 March  Naw Rúz, the Bahá’í New Year. Naw Rúz is celebrated as a day of festivity, gift giving or celebration with community, family and friends. The festival comes at the end of the 19-day fast.

21 April  First Day of Ridvan. The 12-day Festival of Ridvan commemorates Baha’u’llah's public declaration of His mission in the Garden of Ridvan in Baghdad in 1863. The first, ninth and twelfth days are regarded as particularly holy.

29 April  Ninth Day of Ridvan.

2 May  Twelfth Day of Ridvan.

23 May  Declaration of the Báb. The Báb was the forerunner of Baha'u'llah. This day marks the anniversary of the Báb's declaration of His mission in 1844.

29 May  Ascension of Baha'u'llah. This day marks the passing of Baha'u'llah in 1892.

9 July  Martyrdom of the Bab. The Bab was executed by firing squad in Tabriz on this day in 1850.

20 October  Birth of the Báb.

12 November  Birth of Baha'u'llah.
Other special days

26 Feb to 1 March Ayyam-i-Ha, the Intercalary Days, reserved for charity, gift-giving and festivities.

2–20 March Fasting month, during which Bahá’ís over the age of 15 years do not eat or drink from sunrise to sunset.

26 November Day of the Covenant. This day celebrates Baha'u'llah's appointment of His son, Abdu'l-Baha, as the Centre of the Covenant, to whom His followers should turn after His passing. Suspension of work is not obligatory on this holy day.

28 November Ascension of Abdu'l-Baha. This day marks the passing of Abdu'l-Baha, the son of Baha'u'llah, in 1921. Suspension of work is not obligatory on this holy day.

For more information about festivals, see the Australian Bahá'í website (http://www.bahai.org.au).
Customs

Rites of passage

There is no formal naming ceremony in the Bahá’í faith.

Children of Bahá’í parents are encouraged to conduct a personal, independent investigation before making a commitment to enter the Bahá’í faith. At the age of 15, they can choose to enter the faith or not.

Marriage is conditional on the consent of both parties and their parents. The only essential of the marriage ceremony is that both partners say "We will all, verily, abide by the will of God" in front of witnesses.

When a Bahá’í dies, the body should be buried within one hour’s journey from the place of death, and as soon as possible after death. Embalming and cremation are prohibited unless required by law.

Relationships between men and women

The principle of equality of the sexes is an essential tenet of the faith. Women participate fully in decision making within the family and within the Local and National Spiritual Assemblies.

Roles are not seen as identical however. Mothers for example are considered to have a special role as the first educators of their children.

The Bahá’í faith prescribes monogamy and promotes chastity outside marriage. Divorce is discouraged. Bahá’í law requires a year of trial separation before divorce.

Other laws and customs

Gambling and use of alcohol and narcotics is prohibited.

The number nine has significant importance in the Bahá’í Faith. The Arabic word baha’s numerical value is nine. Nine, as the highest single-digit number, is a symbol of completeness.

Bahá’í are forbidden to join political parties and are expected to respect the authority of established governments and its laws except when there is a direct conflict with Bahá’í law.

Bahá’ís cannot accept political appointments or run for elected office.
Settlement and history in Australia

The Bahá'í Faith was brought to Australia by Clara and Hyde Dunn, an English-Irish couple who arrived in Sydney from America on 10 April 1920.

Hyde Dunn gave talks about the Bahá’í Faith as he worked his way around the Australian continent as a travelling salesman. Gradually a small Bahá’í community grew up in different centres around the country. The first Australians to become Bahá’ís, late in 1922, were Oswald Whitaker, a Sydney optometrist, and Effie Baker, a Melbourne photographer.

By 1934, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Australia and New Zealand was established, a national governing council elected by representatives of the Bahá’ís scattered across Australia and New Zealand.

In 1957, with the election of a separate National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of New Zealand, the former body became the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Australia.

Plans were announced in 1957 to build a Bahá’í House of Worship in Sydney. Officially dedicated in 1961, the Bahá’í Temple occupies a prominent position in Mona Vale on Sydney’s northern beaches. It has been described by architectural historian Jennifer Taylor as one of four major religious edifices constructed in Sydney during the 20th century. It remains one of only seven Bahá’í Houses of Worship in the world.

The gradual growth of the Bahá’í community in Australia accelerated with the resurgence of persecution of Bahá’ís in Iran that followed the 1979 revolution in the country of the religion’s birth.

The Australian government was active in its defence of the human rights of the Bahá’ís in Iran, and in March 1982 established a special humanitarian assistance program under which Iranian Bahá’í refugees were eligible to migrate to Australia. Over the succeeding years several thousand Iranian Bahá’ís came to Australia, enriching the size and diversity of the Australian Bahá’í community.

The Bahá’í community has had a long involvement in peace activities at the national and local level. Since 1994, the community’s efforts to promote peace have focused on four main areas of activity: human rights, the advancement of women, global prosperity and moral development.

The Australian Bahá’í community today comprises people from diverse backgrounds and walks of life, reflecting the diversity of modern Australia.

(Adapted from The Bahai Faith in Australia (http://www.bahai.org.au))
Population: Bahá’ís in Australia

Approximately 11,000 Australians identified themselves as Bahá’í in the 2001 census which represented an increase of about 2000 or 23 percent in the five years since the previous census.

Major birthplaces for Australian Bahá’ís

Almost half (45 percent) of Australia’s Bahá’ís come from Iran.

Australia-born is the next largest group, with significant populations from England, New Zealand and the United States.

Figure 11.1 Major birthplaces for Australian Bahá’í

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>% of Religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>4982</td>
<td>45.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>3700</td>
<td>33.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1184</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>11,042</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Population: Bahá’ís in Victoria

Victoria’s total Bahá’í population in 2001 was 1,837. More than half of Victoria’s Bahá’í population is from Iran. Although Iran is a predominantly Muslim country, 30 percent (957) of Victoria’s Iran-born population was Bahai, and 38 percent (1,211 persons) was Muslim.
Community organisations

National

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Australia administers the affairs of the Bahá’í community. Members are elected annually at a national convention attended by elected delegates from different states.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Australia national office is in the grounds of the Bahá’í House of Worship in Sydney, contact details are:
- Postal address: 173 Mona Vale Road, Ingleside, NSW 2101, Australia.
- Telephone: (02) 9998 9222;
- Fax: (02) 9998 9223; and by
- Email: secretariat@bnc.bahai.org.au.

For further information on activities of the Bahá’í community in Australia visit the Australian Bahá’í website (http://www.bahai.org.au).

State

In November 2001, Regional Bahá’í Councils were established to represent the Bahá’í community at the state and territory level in Australia.

Each Council has nine members with the exception of the Northern Territory which has five members. New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory share one Council.

For further information on the Bahá’í community in Victoria, contact their website through the national site at Australian Bahá’í (http://www.bahai.org.au).

Local

There are approximately 200 Local Spiritual Assemblies in Australia.

A Local Spiritual Assembly is elected in each local government area where there are nine or more adult Bahá’ís

The responsibilities of the Local Spiritual Assembly include:

- organising local Bahá’í community activities
- pastoral support and spiritual guidance for members of the community
- overseeing Bahá’í education classes for children
- representing the Bahá’í community
- working with other community groups on common concerns.

The Bahá’í community has been very active in bringing faith communities together. In Melbourne, the Cities of Dandenong and Moreland have led the way in moves to form inter-faith councils for their municipalities, and now there are similar organizations in the Cities of Geelong, Hume and Kingston (Cahill, p. 86).
Considerations for schools

As prayer times for Bahá’í obligatory daily prayers can be interpreted broadly; no special arrangements are usually required.

Particular consideration should be given to students during the fasting period 2–20 March. Schools should take these students’ needs into account when planning activities. Avoid celebrations involving food at these times when possible.

There are no particular dietary restrictions for Bahá’ís although some may be vegetarians.

Bahá’í holy days and celebrations, like those of other religions, should be acknowledged and respected.

In the classroom

Have students identify places of significance in the history of the Bahá’í faith on a map and show with dates the spread of the faith.

Identify countries of significant Bahá’í populations on a world map.

Investigate the observance of various Bahá’í celebrations throughout the year. Investigate parallels with other cultures and religions.

What is similar in Bahá’í beliefs and rituals to practices of other religions?

What is similar in the rhythm of the Bahá’í year to students’ own practices, or others they know of? In other words, what happens in their traditions every day, every week, every month or every year?

Compare the design, decoration and function of Bahá’í Houses of Worship with other kinds of temples, for example a:

- synagogue
- mosque
- cathedral
- church.

Investigate the symbols of the Bahá’í faith such as the number 9, the nine-pointed star and the ring stone symbol.

Research the role of women in the Bahá’í faith including historical figures such as Tahirih.

Compare the role that communal eating has in different religions in particular the Sikh and Bahá’í Faiths. What is the origin of the custom in each case?

Invite speakers from a Bahá’í Spiritual Assembly to talk about their faith, their community organisation and activities. Have students prepare questions and discuss their appropriateness.

Discuss the issue of minority groups in a community and have students identify an experience in which they were a minority. A number of The Really Big Beliefs Project: Classroom Activities would be relevant to a discussion of this topic (http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/bigbeliefsbook/activities.html).
Investigate the ‘Peace Pack’ (http://www.perth.wa.bahai.org.au/peacepack/) developed by the Bahá’í community as a source of ideas for values education.

‘Unity in our diversity’ - use the Bahá’í principle as a starting point for discussion of what the principle means in the classroom, the school and the community. Develop a theme incorporating art, activities and drama.

Have students research and discuss Bahá’í attitudes to world governance, and support for a common auxiliary language. Use as preparation for a class debate.

Have students read some of the children’s and young adult literature recommended in the bibliography that is written by, or about, other cultural groups.

Have students explore their own cultural assumptions by writing from the viewpoint of different characters in different cultural contexts.

Have students:

- identify major world religions
- describe major characteristics of world religions
- describe factors that influence the spread or decline of religions in a region.

Visit Lotuses and Lights: Statistics on Buddhism in Australia, Student Worksheet (http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/thailand/lotus1.htm)

Debate the role of women in different religions.
Useful websites

The BBC website is a useful source for information on Bahá’í belief and practice with external links, see: BBC Religion & Ethics: Bahá’í (http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/bahai/).

The official website of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Australia provides general information on the faith and information relating to Bahá’í activities in Australia. It contains a list of Bahá’í holy days, see: Australian Bahá’í (http://www.bahai.org.au).


The international website of the Bahá’í Faith (http://www.bahai.org/).

The official website of the Bahá’í faith in the United States (http://www.bahai.us/).

Bibliography


British Broadcasting Commission, Religion & Ethics: Bahá’í (http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/bahai/).

  • "Religion, Cultural Diversity and Safeguarding Australia"
  • "Australian Muslims: their Beliefs, Practices and Institutions"
  • "Constructing a Local Multifaith Network"


National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Australia, Bahá’í Faith Australia (www.bahai.org.au/).

