

# Sacred Sites, Evolving Spaces

*Using ancient religious structures as guideposts for charting historical developments and current realities*



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**Content Area Relevance:** World History, Global Issues, Human Geography, World Religions

**Grade Level:** Grades 9-12; suggestions for modifications provided throughout lesson.

**Duration:** 2 60 minute class periods

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## Driving Question

- To what extent do ancient religious structures provide tangible evidence of broad, historical developments and valuable insight into contemporary social, political, and cultural trends?

## Supporting Questions

- What are the common architectural features and symbols associated with the three Abrahamic religions?
- How can scholars use sacred sites to examine and assess the existence of interfaith harmony and collaboration in the past and present?
- To what extent do religious structures reflect the collision of cultures and historic contests for power?
- How have past and present leaders used monumental architecture to establish/reinforce their power?
- If religious structures with a shared history often inflame religious tensions, how can these structures be reimagined such that they encourage an inter-faith dialogue and a nuanced understanding of history?

## Enduring Understanding

- Monumental structures (churches, mosques, and synagogues) are not simply markers of historical developments; they are also barometers of ongoing change. Just as a structure's architectural elements reflect historic changes in function and ownership, current debates regarding the preservation and use of these same monuments reflect broader political trends, demographic shifts, and attempts at cross-cultural collaboration.

## Overview

This two day lesson invites students to examine three monumental structures of religious significance (the Hagia Sophia, the Mosque–Cathedral of Córdoba, and the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron) to assess how sacred sites with ancient origins can enrich our understanding of the past and the present. Students will begin with a brief introduction to the architectural elements and symbols closely associated with each one of the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). They will then use this information to analyze a set of 20 images made available through Quizizz. The teacher will use the survey results from the Quizizz activity to guide students through a discussion of the images and the revelation that oftentimes one building possesses symbols and architectural elements representing multiple faiths. Students will then leverage their understanding of history and geography to attempt to account for this confluence of religious representation. They will test their theory with a video clip detailing the history of the Mosque–Cathedral of Córdoba. Finally, they will read the assigned article(s), examining how ancient monumental structures serve as both testaments to historical developments and barometers of ongoing changes (e.g. political trends, demographic shifts, and cultural conflicts). Their insights will be shared in a Harkness-style discussion.

## Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to identify four or more common architectural elements/symbols associated with each one of the three Abrahamic religions.
- Students will be able to describe at least two broad historical developments (e.g. the spread of Islam, the Crusades, the Reconquista, etc) that relate to world religions and explain how/why these developments resulted in changes to religious structures' form and function.
- Students will be able synthesize information from assigned news articles, connecting historical developments with ongoing tensions/debates, while participating actively in a Harkness discussion.

## Content Expectations

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.3 Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9 Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

## Key Concepts

- *Secularization*
- *Religious pluralism*
- *Nationalism*
- *Zionism*
- *Islamophobia*

## Lesson Handouts/Materials

- [Google Slide Presentation](#) for teacher use
- "[Christianity, Islam, and Judaism: A Reference Guide for Religious Spaces](#)": Student reference guide outlining the symbols and architectural elements of the three Abrahamic faiths
- [News articles](#) examining the historical developments and ongoing debates that relate to the Hagia Sophia, the Mosque–Cathedral of Córdoba, and the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron

## Teacher Preparation and Instructional Resources

This lesson will be most effective if students already have some familiarity with [Judaism, Christianity, and Islam](#). Teachers should consider using this lesson as part of a broader unit that examines the Abrahamic religions, the ancient Roman Empire, the Crusades, the Byzantine Empire, Zionism, or the establishment of the state of Israel. This lesson does not require an extensive knowledge of any/all of these historic developments, but a cursory knowledge of one or more of these topics would enrich students' insights. Students will need access to the internet in order to complete the opening

activity. For ease of use, teachers should have some experience with Google Slides and Quizizz. The entire lesson can be easily converted to an online format if needed. The articles included in the independent practice/assignment will require at least a 9th grade reading level, but modifications to the texts can be made within Google docs to make the texts more accessible to students with lower reading levels. The final assessment includes a [Harkness style discussion](#). Teachers should familiarize themselves with this method or adapt the assessment portion of the lesson to meet their needs. Suggestions for modifications are provided throughout the lesson.

**In preparation for the lesson, teachers will need to...**

- Print copies of "[Christianity, Islam, and Judaism: A Reference Guide for Religious Spaces](#)" or make this resource available to students electronically
- Ensure that students have an electronic device and internet access (for BBC resource and the Quizizz activity)
- Access and project the [Google Slide Presentation](#) for students to view as a class
- Print copies of the [news articles](#) or make these resources available to students electronically
- Print copies of the [Harkness Style Discussion](#)/description and rubric (if students are unfamiliar with the Harkness method)

**Opening**

1. Engage students' understanding of the three Abrahamic religions by asking them to brainstorm the different symbols and items they would expect to find in a church, a mosque, and a synagogue. Record their answers on the board in three columns, one column for each religion. You can phrase the question as, "If you entered a church, what would you expect to see? What are the visual clues that you're in a church? A synagogue? A mosque?"

**Inside the Synagogue: An Interactive Diagram** (created by BBC)

Access the BBC [clickable diagram](#) online to (1) identify the common features of the synagogue AND (2) briefly describe their function/purpose. Record the information next to the appropriate number in the table below the image. One feature has been done for you as an example.

1. Prayer Room	For prayer to occur, there must be at least 10 people present.	5.	
2.		6.	
3.		7.	
4.		8.	

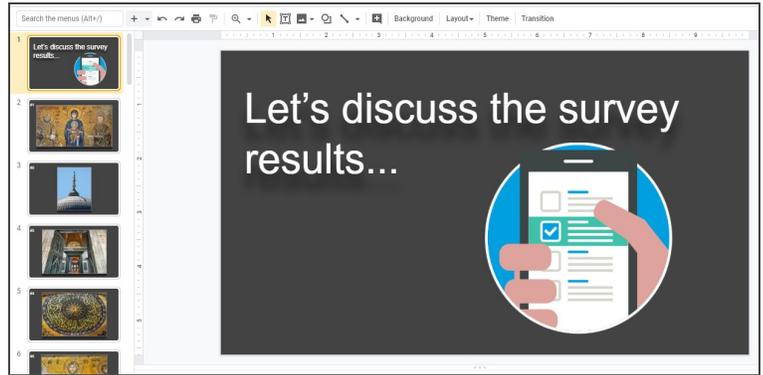
2. Distribute "[Christianity, Islam, and Judaism: A Reference Guide for Religious Spaces](#)" to students. Briefly discuss the details included in the chart on the first page. After discussing this brief overview of symbols, etc., instruct students to use the BBC online resource to complete the handout's three tables. Each table highlights the distinguishing features of a [church](#), [mosque](#), and [synagogue](#). Tell the students that in 10-15 minutes (more time if needed) they will use their completed chart and tables to respond to an online survey (available through Quizizz).

3. As students complete their notesheet, give them the link to the [online survey](#) made available through **Quizizz**.

The 20 question survey will challenge them to identify the location (church, mosque, synagogue) in which a photo was most likely taken. **NOTE: The images appear small within the Quizizz survey, but students can enlarge any image by simply clicking on the image as it appears in each question..**

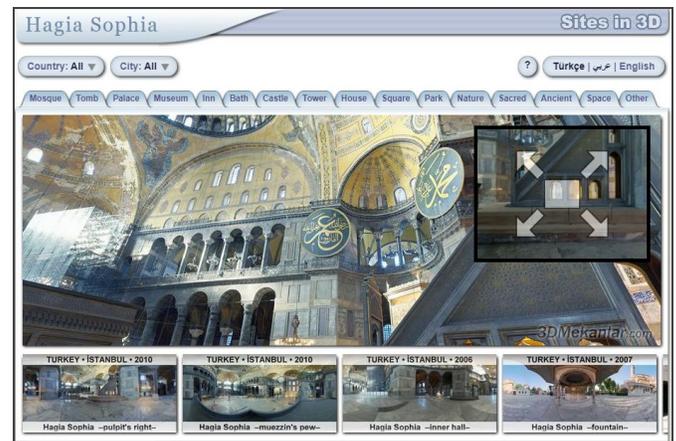
## Guided Inquiry

1. Once the class has completed the survey online, reveal the results. Keep this tally open in one tab on your screen for ease of reference. In a second tab, access the [Google Slide Presentation](#). As you project each image, identify the most popular answer from the survey (church, mosque, or synagogue) and challenge the students to justify their choice using evidence from the image. For the sake of time, you will want to limit the discussion of each slide or, if desired, shorten the presentation by deleting some of the images included in Slides #2-21.



2. Transition: Appearances can be deceiving. Using slides #23, 25, 26, reveal that the symbols and architectural features from 2-3 distinct religions can actually be found in **one** sacred structure (e.g. The Hagia Sophia, the Mosque–Cathedral of Córdoba, and the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron).<sup>1</sup> If you have time, allow the students to explore the [3D virtual tour of the Hagia Sophia](#) using the link provided on Slide #24.

3. Now that students can (a) identify the symbols and architectural elements of the three Abrahamic religions and (b) recognize that the symbols and elements of different religions can be found in ONE building, challenge the students to use their knowledge of history and geography to explain why a cathedral might have a mihrab or why a mosque might have mosaics of Jesus and the Virgin Mary. Facilitate a discussion of their theories and insights.



4. After the initial brainstorming of possibilities, project Slides #28-29 on “Geography” and “History”. Invite students to share any added information these slides can offer. (*Students will hopefully recognize that the founding of Judaism, the expansion of Christianity during the Roman Empire and thereafter, the spread of Islam, the resulting Crusades and Reconquest, and the establishment of Israel have likely resulted in structural/functional changes to sacred sites in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Iberian Peninsula.*)
5. Invite students to test their theory: show the [video clip detailing the history of the the Mosque–Cathedral](#) of Córdoba (Slide #31). After showing the clip, allow students time/opportunity to revisit their theory and evaluate its accuracy in light of the video’s content.
6. Synthesis: **“These buildings are located on lands that have changed hands many times over the centuries, and those hands have left their mark on the architecture and ornamentation of the ancient monumental structures.”** Challenge students to identify the historical events/developments that have resulted in changes to the structures’ architecture and ornamentation. Their list should include all or some of the following:
  - the founding of the three Abrahamic religions
  - the spread of Christianity during and following the Ancient Roman Empire
  - the spread of Islam throughout the Middle East, North Africa, Southern Europe and Southeast Asia
  - the long-term political and cultural consequences of the Crusades
  - the establishment of Israel in the 20th century

<sup>1</sup> Note that although the Tomb of the Patriarchs is considered one of the holiest sites among Jews and a cherished location for prayer, it is not a synagogue.

# Independent Practice and Assessment

Ancient monumental structures like churches, mosques, and synagogues are not simply markers of *historical* developments; they are also barometers of **ongoing** changes. Just as the structures' architectural elements reflect historic changes in function and ownership, current debates regarding the preservation and use of these sites help us track political trends, chart demographic shifts, and assess the extent of interfaith harmony and collaboration in the world today.

1. Briefly introduce the [three articles](#) spotlighting the **Hagia Sophia**, the **Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba**, and the **Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs** in Hebron. Note that these articles provide an overview of each site's history and its relevance to ongoing debates.

2. Assignment (*Consider the age and abilities of the students; Modify the assignment as needed.*)

- **Suggestion for AP courses:** Assign all three articles, challenging students to identify similarities and differences in the history and current controversies associated with each one of the three sacred sites.

- **Options for introductory level courses (grades 9-10):**

- Assign ONE article to the entire class
- Assign the **Hagia Sophia** article to half the class and the **Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba** article to the other half of the class. Each group will present their findings to the class the next day.
- Teachers should consider pairing the article(s) with questions or a graphic organizer to help focus students' reading. This is especially helpful for students who struggle with reading comprehension.

**If desired, teachers can also pair the articles with video clips that supplement much of the historical information outlined in the articles.**

- The [Hagia Sophia](#) (by TED Ed) and [Hagia Sophia: Former Istanbul museum welcomes Muslim worshippers](#) (by BBC)
- The [Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron](#)

3. Advise students to prepare for a Harkness discussion ([description for students](#)) the following day. The discussion will challenge them to identify/explain common themes from the articles, evidence of historical changes, and revelations regarding ongoing religious/political debates. Teachers will evaluate students' depth of understanding by using the [Harkness tracking sheet](#). Teachers should consider alternative methods of assessment (the submission of completed question sheets or graphic organizers) if students require more academic support.

## The Reconquista of the Mosque of Córdoba

By [Eric Calderwood](#) | April 10, 2015, 12:32 PM  
Published for *Foreign Policy*; [article](#) available online

Spain's most famous mosque is at the center of a dispute between activists seeking to preserve its Muslim heritage, and the Catholic Church, which has claimed it as its own. The result could determine the future of Islam in Europe.

Nuns visit the Mosque-Cathedral of Cordoba on October 14, 2014. Historical treasure and UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba is the subject of a dispute over its ownership. AFP PHOTO/ GERARD JULIEN (Photo credit should read GERARD JULIEN/AFP/Getty Images)

CÓRDOBA, Spain — For a few weeks last fall, the Mosque of Córdoba, Europe's most important Islamic heritage site, disappeared from the map. Or, at least, from Google Maps. If a tourist had Googled directions to the mosque in mid-November, he or she would have only found a reference to the Cathedral of Córdoba — the Catholic house of worship that lies within the mosque's ancient walls.



The disappearance of Spain's most famous mosque (and also one of its main tourist attractions) spawned a public outcry.

Spaniards flooded Google Maps' editor with indignant emails, and a group of citizen activists in Córdoba launched an online [petition](#) demanding that Google Maps restore the word "mosque" to the monument's name. The petition accused the bishop of Córdoba of a "symbolic appropriation" of the monument, and it warned that the change to the monument's name "erases, in the stroke of a pen, a fundamental part of its history." The petition received over 55,000 signatures in less than three days. On Nov. 25, Google [reinstated](#) the mosque, under the official name that has been in use since the early 1980s: the "Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba."

## Student Guide to Harkness Discussion

Our most important class routine will be a type of round-table discussion between students known as a Harkness discussion. These discussions are collaboratively led by students and the students respond to one another as they explore the topic of the day, as guided by their own questions. Your role as a student in the Harkness discussion is to move the discussion forward by contributing comments that ADD, LINK, and CHALLENGE.

ADDING	CHALLENGING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ RESPOND to a question</li> <li>→ ASK your own question</li> <li>→ SUPPORT a comment made by another student</li> <li>→ SUMMARIZE an idea, text excerpt, or argument.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ CHALLENGE (politely) a comment or argument made by another student. Explain the reasoning for your disagreement.</li> <li>→ MODIFY a comment made by another student. Perhaps you generally agree but believe a comment was slightly off or missing some important nuance. Support your clarification.</li> <li>→ IDENTIFY A PROBLEM relevant to the topic or with our ability to discuss it or understand it properly.</li> </ul>
LINKING	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ CITE evidence.</li> <li>→ CONNECT ideas from the reading</li> <li>→ CONNECT multiple comments.</li> </ul>	

### Etiquette:

1. Respect everyone in the room, and expect the same in return. You can disagree while still being friendly. DO NOT EVER attack, insult, or ridicule another student, even jokingly.
2. Listen carefully to others, and think about their comments before reacting.
3. Avoid the urge to dominate. Follow the "three before me" rule. Make your comments concise.
4. Don't cut people off and don't raise your hand to speak first. Find an opening to jump in.
5. Acknowledge someone when you think they make a valuable point.
6. Avoid disruptive or uninvited comments, or anything that might derail the discussion or change the topic prematurely.
7. Avoid the urge to withdraw. Help those at the table who are prepared but are struggling to jump in! Participating in a discussion is scary for some people, so make it easy for them. If you haven't heard from someone, try drawing them into the conversation in a welcoming and questioning way such as by asking their opinion. If someone agrees, don't laugh or make them feel bad but perhaps help clarify their comment or help build upon it in some way. Help everyone feel safe, welcome, willing to take risks, and free to make mistakes.
8. Don't repeat a point or argument already made by another student. Always move the discussion forward!
9. Talk to one another. Don't look at the teacher constantly for affirmation of your points.

### Grading the Discussion:

**Leader (100%):** In addition to the Analyst level below, also advances the group and the group's understanding: thoughtful questions, bringing others into the discussion, helpful follow-up questions, steering/focusing the conversation.  
**Analyst (80%):** Reasoned responses; cites evidence; builds upon other's comments (adding, linking, & challenging).  
**Information Gatherer (60%):** Participation is mostly personal reactions, opinions, and fact gathering.  
**Speaker (20%):** Prepared and fully attentive, but doesn't contribute.  
**Distractions (0%):** Sometimes engaged in the discussion and sometimes distracted such as by devices.  
**Present (50%):** In the room and conscious while the discussion is occurring.  
**Absent (0%):** See me about makeup possibilities. Everyone's two lowest discussion scores will be dropped at the end of the quarter.

### Bring thought-provoking questions

Asking questions is one of the most powerful things you can do as a human being. Part of being prepared for a discussion means bringing questions that you have about the reading/topic.

- **Questioning to Understand:** Before the discussion you should already have worked to understanding the basics, but if you're stuck on something, then focus your questions toward those things first. These are questions at the bottom of the pyramid to the right. They aren't ideal for discussion but actually quite necessary and healthy to all.



## Suggestions for Lesson Extensions and Supplemental Resources

Teachers can extend this lesson to include other religious structures that demonstrate the confluence of and conflicts between the three Abrahamic religions

- [Ezekiel's Tomb](#): a Jewish shrine inside a mosque in Iraq
- [Synagogue of Santa Maria la Blanca](#): a Jewish synagogue designed by Moorish architects and built under the Christian Kingdom of Castille in 1180 CE.



### Other options:

- Challenge students to consider how religious structures in their local community/region have changed over time. To what extent do these changes reflect broader social/cultural developments? For example, some religious structures have been repurposed to serve as [corporate offices](#), [residential buildings](#), or [recreational facilities](#).
- Explore other examples of religious pluralism throughout the world, inviting students to consider how we encourage inter-faith harmony and thereby reverse the rising trend of antisemitism and Islamophobia.
  - Berlin [House of One](#)
  - The [Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi](#)
- Examine monumental structures designed/constructed by followers of non-Abrahamic religions. To what extent do these historic buildings show evidence of different faiths and cultural influences?
- Investigate how [political leaders](#) today are using monumental structures as mechanisms for boosting their popularity and advancing a nationalist agenda.
- For more information about this lesson's focus, read Barkan, Elazar and Karen Barkey, editors. [Choreographies of Shared Sacred Sites: Religion, Politics, and Conflict Resolution](#). Columbia University Press, 2016.

