

## TEACHING ABOUT RELIGION – RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

The historical and contemporary significance of religious holidays may be included in the education program provided that the instruction is presented in an unbiased and objective manner. The selection of holidays to be studied will take into account major celebrations of several world religions, not just those of a single religion. Holiday-related activities will be educationally sound and sensitive to religious differences and will be selected carefully to avoid the excessive or unproductive use of school time. Teachers will be especially careful in planning activities that are to take place immediately preceding or on a religious holiday.

Music, art, literature and drama having religious themes (including traditional carols, seasonal songs and classical music) will be permitted if presented in an objective manner without sectarian indoctrination. The emphasis on religious themes is only as extensive as necessary for a balanced and comprehensive study or presentation. Religious content included in student performances is selected on the basis of its independent educational merit and will seek to give exposure to a variety of religious customs, beliefs and forms of expression. Holiday programs, parties or performances will not become religious celebrations or be used as a forum for religious worship, such as the devotional reading of sacred writings or the recitations of prayers.

The use of religious symbols (e.g. a cross, menorah, crescent, Star of David, lotus blossom, nativity scene or other symbol that is part of a religious ceremony) are permitted as a teaching aid, but only when such symbols are used temporarily and objectively to give information about a heritage associated with a particular religion. The Christmas tree, Santa Claus, Easter eggs, Easter bunnies and Halloween decorations are secular, seasonal symbols and as such can be displayed in a seasonal context.

Expressions of belief or nonbelief initiated by individual students is permitted in composition, art forms, music, speech and debate. However, teachers may not require projects or activities which indoctrinate or force students to contradict their personal religious beliefs or nonbeliefs.

Legal Ref: Lee v. Weisman, 112 S.Ct. 2649 (1992).  
Lemon v. Kurtzman, 403 U.S. 602 (1971).  
Graham v. Central Community School District of Decatur County, 608 F.Supp. 531 (S.D. Iowa 1985).  
 Iowa Code §§ 279.8; 280.6.

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