

Religion Synthesis Unit Responses 2014

“The most eye opening place we went to during the Synthesis Unit, for me, was the First Church of Christian Science. Every place we went I kept an open mind, welcoming the different perspectives and religions. This was hardest for me was learning about Christian Science because their views on healing are so different from mine. I would never have understood how many people in Santa Barbara actually believe this without the school taking me. Even though I don’t agree, I am glad I understand how and why they believe what they do and have seen their viewpoint on life. It was important for me to learn this because our fellow Anacapa student, Rufus, attends the First Church of Scientology. Over all, the best experiences for me during the Synthesis Unit were the ones that were hard for me to understand and agree with (this was definitely one of them). I learned so much in the unit this year. Thank you. “

- 10th Grade

“I enjoyed Kelsang Wan Po’s talk on Buddhism. I found it really interesting how he talked about your personal inner world and your outer world. It made a lot of sense how our outer world depends on how we look and treat our inner world. Problems were described as unpleasant feelings and anger as a distorted view that focuses on any object. I thought this was a very interesting way to look at different emotions.”

- 9th Grade

“I enjoyed going to the Trinity Church because it was very beautiful and we got to hear a wonderful organ. I, also, enjoyed going to the Sikh Temple because the people were very nice and they prepared a great meal for us. I thought it was amazing that we got the opportunity to experience Friday prayers in a Muslim mosque.”

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“Modern Buddhism was very interesting on what they believe and study. They study the world and nature inside of them. Basically Buddhism is an inner science. A Buddhist’s inner world is their own world and it influences their outer world. An example of this is if a person is angry on the inside, they will show it on the outside. This made a lot of sense and it helped me to be more of a good person in my outside world.”

- 7th Grade

“What interested me the most was Yami Niazi’s speech about Islamic society because it seems very interesting and a lot of people seemed to like him. The most memorable moment was the Hindu Temple we went to in Calabasas because I liked it a lot.”

- 9th Grade

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“I found it very nice and caring when the Sikhs gave us food even though we didn’t ask for it. They were so nice and Gurinder Singh Mann was very hospitable and knew what he was talking about. Everyone at the Temple was very friendly, as well, and treated us as if we had known them our whole lives. I am very thankful for being able to attend the Sikh Gurdwara and all the Temples and Churches we visited.”

- 8th Grade

“My favorite memory was when we went to the Mosque and were able to pray with Muslims and learn about their religion. I loved learning about the journey to Mecca which is called the Hajj. I did not know about the journey to Mecca before we studied the religion unit. I think that was a very unique aspect to their religion!”

- 9th Grade

“Personally, I think my favorite speaker was Yama Niazi. He taught us about Islam and that was pretty cool. He was funny. I learned the most from him. I hope he sees this because he needs to know how awesome he is.”

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“I learned a lot about Islamic society from Yama Niazi. Before, I knew nothing about Islam and anytime anyone would mention it, I would smile and pretend I knew because it was awkward, but now I feel more educated. I found it interesting that for one month in the year, they fast and that they pray five times a day.”

- 9th Grade

“One of the most interesting parts of the Synthesis Unit was learning about the Hajj. It was fascinating how traditions are still very much intact. The fact that around three million Muslims make the trip to Mecca everywhere is absolutely brilliant.”

- 11th Grade

“Last Tuesday, we went to Mahakankala Buddhist Center. He talked about Modern Buddhism which is very different from what I have known. They believe in an inner world. During his presentation, there was an ambulance that went by on the street and he immediately stopped talking and started praying for that person until the ambulance went away. That was unusual to me.”

- 11th Grade

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“My blockbuster moment was when Father Larry came to speak at our school. Normally, I am annoyed by members of the Christian church because, to me, they often seem to think Christians are “higher” or “better” than other people which is not true. Being a member of a church doesn’t make you a good person or visa-versa. I didn’t get this vibe from Father Larry. I felt he was a genuine person who basically wanted the world to have a giant group hug and for everyone to love each other. This made me more open to people, and hopefully I won’t be as judgmental in the future. “

- 12th Grade

“When learning about religion in this year’s Synthesis Unit, there are several religions I observed to be comparing themselves to another faith, usually Christianity, to better explain their own. Those who spoke to us about Islam were telling us that their women were allowed to get an education, drive a car and choose their own husband, but only the American Muslims could do such things. Why do religions feel they have to conform to society’s expectations to be considered a “good” religion? This is my big question.”

- 12th Grade

“What I found interesting was the Muslim Mosque. I found it interesting because they would separate the men and the women so they could concentrate. I also like the rug because it was really soft. It was soft because they have to take their shoes off and, when they pray , they put their face on the rug. It was interesting seeing how they pray and how they go through the Mosque. I thought Friday Prayers was going to be longer than it was.”

- 8th Grade

“I learned a lot of things about different religions. For example, the first day, Yama Niazi came to talk about the Islamic religion and some of their beliefs like the Imam which are the articles of faith, the core of the Islamic religion. I think that one of the most memorable moments was when Lesley Wickman came to talk to us because she explained a lot about her religion (science and faith) and about her work with NASA.”

- 7th Grade

“I found it very cool that the Sikhs showed their hospitality by giving us food. I, also, found it nice how they had no food with meat in it for the vegetarians.”

- 8th Grade

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“The most rewarding talk for me was Ed Bastian’s talk on creating your own faith. It was nice how he brought to light individuality and uniqueness with that. I don’t feel like we think about that enough in certain situations.”

- 11th Grade

“The Sikh Temple was my favorite experience. Their culture was very interesting, the people were very kind, and the food was delicious.”

- 11th Grade

“What stood out the most of all the speakers was when Gurinder Singh Mann who talked to us twice and fed us a great meal when we went to the Sikh Gurdwara Temple. Very few people nowadays would be so kind as to give a school group on a field trip a free meal. I am certain that I will remember this act of kindness for a long time.”

- 8th Grade

“My blockbuster moment was when the Buddhist monk used Siri to make him happy. Siri said she could not.”

- 8th Grade

“My favorite part was when the Buddhist talked because it felt like the perfect religion for me because it centered on the person and not god. It also clicked in my mind and it fit.”

- 8th Grade

“I loved the small Buddhist Temple in town. It felt the most sincere with Kelsang Wan Po at Mahakankala Buddhist Center. I really thought that it was cool when he said “the inner science of Buddhism cures bad feelings which Buddha did through his teachings.” He said that there are three kinds of problems: anger, attachment, and ignorance.”

- 8th Grade

“My favorite part of the unit was the Modern Buddhist Temple. It is totally different from Buddhism in China or India. It is more concentrated on critical thinking, inner peace, and life philosophy. It was the most interesting part and I liked it a lot.”

- 10th Grade

“I really enjoyed Father Larry, learning about what religion is, how he explained everything, and how he did a mass for us.”

- 10th Grade

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“I really enjoyed the Buddhist Temple: learning about your inner world and how to control yourself and hearing that love is the greatest protector. I, also, really enjoyed the King Fahad Mosque: learning about Islam in a way that depicts what they really believe in.”

- 10th Grade

“I was impressed by every speaker. None of them bored me. A good speaker was Kelsang Wan Po because he was super chill. He related his beliefs to the modern world. I, also, enjoyed every speaker on Islam, especially Kathleen Moore. My favorite outing was to the Mosque because everyone was so open and eager to share what their religion was really about. And all the women were super cool.”

- 11th Grade

“I think the most impressive one was the experience at Unity Church because their theory was close to science. I like this one. Unlike the combination between science and religions, Unity Church considered that there was a center for all religions. Whenever a church was closer to the center, it gives happiness to people. I agree with this theory, so I feel I like it. “

- 12th Grade

“The Unity Church speaker, Larry Schellink, was a very good speaker and it was a refreshing way to end the day.”

- 11th Grade

“I think the most memorable moment in the Synthesis Unit was at the Buddhist Center because it made sense. Aside from the healing and the confusing religions, what he said related to me in regards to the inner and outer world. If you feel happy on the inside, you’ll be positive on the outside. Also, there wasn’t one central god which I liked. He spoke in a good tone instead of being loud and irritating.”

- 9th Grade

“My favorite part of the unit was when we had some bomb Indian food at the Sikh Temple. The people there are so generous with the amount of food that was made available and it was all free!”

- 8th Grade

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“The Sikh Gurdwara was my favorite stop during the entire unit. When we entered, there was a man singing to us and then they fed us great food. After we ate, they gave us a concert by two bearded men who spoke little English. After that, they showed us their Book which had some cool hand writing and designs. I give this stop a 10.”

- 11th Grade

“During the Synthesis Unit, one of my favorite speakers was Kelsang Wan Po from the Mahakanala Buddhist Center. I really liked how he was able to relate with us and use modern day analogies while still being deep and spiritual. I, also, really liked his answer to why they are vegetarians: “I think animals are happier when they are alive.” I really liked his calm attitude and he gave us fruit and water which was very nice.”

- 9th Grade

“I think the most interesting and impressive thing about the different places of worship was the architecture: from high wood ceilings to walls made of organs, from icons to stained glass windows, from electric guitars and drums sets to orange tarps and Christmas lights. Each place was amazing and different in its own way.”

- 9th Grade

“Something that really stood out for me this Synthesis Unit was when Kelsang Wan Po told us the definition of anger in the world of Buddhism and what the meditation was originally used for.”

- 10th Grade

“I furthered my thinking mostly with the First Church of Christ, Scientist. By going inside, I was able to learn so much about the religion. The Church was beautiful and I was impressed. After going on a tour of the church, we learned about Christian Science. I learned many things that I would have never learned without the Unit.”

- 10th Grade

“I really like learning about Buddhism and the different kinds of Buddhism. We learned about Modern Buddhism. Kelsang Wan Po had so many figures and bowls of water. It felt welcoming at his Buddhist Center.”

- 7th Grade

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“My favorite thing was watching the prayer service at the King Fahad Mosque. I was amazed at how many people showed up every week for prayer. The prayer itself was very organized and synchronized.”

- 7th Grade

“I liked going to the Sikh’s Gurdwara. I thought it was a really good experience seeing the man praying as well as seeing the Book. It was very nice for them to give us food and we got to experience what type of food they eat in Punjab.”

- 7th Grade

“The most interesting thing that the unit had to offer me was the many differences among the religions. It made learning about them more interesting.”

- 8th Grade

“I especially like Kelsang Wan Po because the Buddhist religion is so interesting (meditation, etc) and Gurinder Singh Mann because he was so welcoming and generous at the Gurdwara. I liked this unit because religions are diverse and interesting. Now, I know more than I used to.”

- 7th Grade

“I learned about religions I have never heard of: Unity, Sikhs, and Christian Science. The best experience was with the Sikhs because they were nice enough to give us their communion and food.”

- 8th Grade

“I found Buddhism very interesting because a lot of religions are focused on not going to hell while Buddhism is focused on finding “inner peace” to be ‘saved’.”

- 11th Grade

“The most impressive thing to me was Modern Buddhism because it was so different from my Vietnamese Buddhism. It is more modern and easier than mine and helps me open my mind. Both Buddhisms keep the traditions and some rules they can’t change. I realized that Buddha is the most important thing in our minds. Some rules we can change, but our beliefs never change.”

- 11th Grade

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“I really enjoyed learning about Islam through different speakers in the unit. In particular, I thought Yama Niazi’s presentation was very interesting because I didn’t know much about the Islamic religion before. I got to learn about the prophets, the books of god, and Islamic traditions. I am very happy we had the opportunity to learn about different religions from many speakers.”

- 11th Grade

“All of the presentations and visits were extremely interesting to me. I especially enjoyed visiting the King Fahad Mosque. I valued the intellectual element of the Friday prayer service. Imam Hasan Radj talked about current events and related it to Islam. I found his comments of Mohammad’s life very insightful.”

- 10th Grade

“My favorite speaker was Yama Niazi because he gave a great speech and answered all of our questions perfectly. My favorite place we visited was the Sikh Gurdwara because they answered all of our questions and had music playing for us.”

- 8th Grade

“I enjoyed both Gurinder Singh Mann and Imam Yama Niazi. They were both very knowledgeable and I learned a lot from them. I really enjoyed going to Sikh Gurdwara. It was a great experience.”

- 12th Grade

“The thing that impressed me the most was that there are so many different forms of one religion such as Christianity with thousands of sects and that the Sisters of the Poor Clares spend their lives in prayer for the world.”

- 10th Grade

“I really enjoyed hearing Imam Yama Niazi’s presentation on the first day. He was very enthusiastic and answered everyone’s questions. He spoke clearly and gave very useful information about Islam, so I learned a lot from him. I, also, liked visiting the Monastery of the Poor Clares because Father Larry seemed so passionate and appreciative of our presence. “

- 12th Grade

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“I really enjoyed going to the Sikh Gurdwara. I thought their hospitality really taught me about what their religion is about. Lots of religions say that they care for their people, but the Sikhs showed us they cared for us through their actions. It was really cool how they fed us because we were all really hungry. The concert they gave us was really cool because they were playing traditional Indian music on the harmonium and tablas. It was, also, really cool hearing about the religion from Gurinder Singh Mann and getting to see the book they had. It was also really cool getting to eat their communion food. I ,also, really like how they gave use hugs at the end.”

- 11th Grade

“The people at the Sikh Gurdwara definitely interested me the most. It was interesting to learn about their religion, which I had known very little of prior. Their idea about helping the community in every way they can, by bringing the community together, offering them food, as well as hearing about how different others lives could be was very inspiring.”

- 11th Grade

“Throughout the Synthesis Unit, I was able to view different religions and realized how similar everyone’s is. Details and people change depending on religion, but the messages remain the same no matter who you are. Going through all of it so fast made me realize how much love and unity exists in the world, no matter what God or prophets you believe in. Forgiveness was also an important thing emphasized in these religions, and I believe that if we are able to forgive everyone, not only those in our same religion, the spirit of unity and compassion can grow and we can all live happily together.”

- 10th Grade

“I really enjoyed the Sikh Gurdwara and the meal they prepared for us. I enjoyed the King Fahad Mosque with the prayer service. I, also, enjoyed having our questions answered by the Imam.”

- 8th Grade

“I was really touched by the Sikhs and their Gurdwara. I was so grateful that they made us food and soda to drink. Afterwards, they performed a traditional Sikh song and answered our questions. I loved that they took the time to make us food and answer our questions.”

- 11th Grade

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“In my opinion, the most powerful part of the unit was the way we had a variety of beliefs and gods as well as points of view. It felt almost as if we were traveling around the world getting to know the people and their religion along the way. Occasionally, it even felt as if we were traveling through time. It was an incredible week filled with lots of learning, experiences, and fun.”

- 7th Grade

“I liked the Buddhist Temple because the monk was really good at explaining it.”

“I liked the training of the mind for the 21st century in Modern Buddhism. I was really interested in going deeper into the inner world and discuss relevant questions.”