

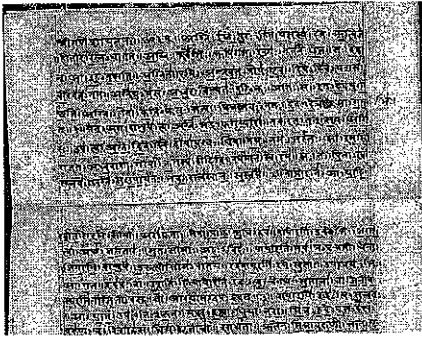
What are the major beliefs and practices of Hinduism?

The Sacred Books of Hinduism



Watch an excerpt from *Hinduism Today's* "Introduction to Hinduism" (5:31-8:40) and read the descriptions of Hindu sacred texts below, then answer the questions that follow.

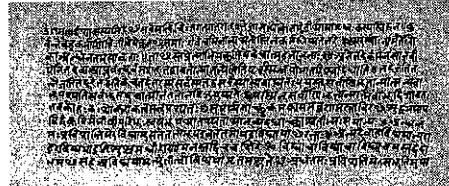
Rig Veda



Rig Veda in Sanskrit on paper, India, early 19th c.

image is courtesy of Wikimedia and is in the public domain

The Upanishads



Cover of a modern publication of the Upanishads.

MS Indic 37, 15a upanishad, Wellcome L0027380.jpg by Wellcome Images is published under the [CC BY 4.0 International](#) license

Mahabharata and Bhagavad Gita



Illustration of Krishna and Arjun on the chariot, Mahabharata, 18th-19th century, India.

image is courtesy of Wikimedia and is in the public domain

The Vedas are the most sacred texts in Hinduism. The **Rig Veda** is the oldest of the Vedas. It was written in Sanskrit at least 6,000 years ago. Vedic hymns (religious songs written in a Veda) praise god, gods, and goddesses and describe a powerful and spiritual people, their clans, kings and emperors, fights, battles, and way of life.

Originally, these thousands of hymns were not written down but memorized. Even today there are priests who can chant from memory as many as 10,500 verses which takes 50 hours.

The **Upanishads** are sections of the Vedas that deal with philosophy, medication, and the nature of God; they form the core spiritual thought of Vedantic Hinduism. They are a compilation of dialogues, monologues and anecdotes composed by multiple authors, which contain the foundations for most of the later philosophies and religions of India. According to tradition, there are over two hundred *Upanishads*.

The **Mahabharata** is the world's longest epic. It is about a massive war in ancient India between cousins fighting for the throne of a great kingdom. A central episode called **Bhagavata Gita** is a dialogue between commander Arjuna and Lord Krishna on the day of the battle. The Mahabharata remains one of the most widespread scriptures in the world with its dominant message of justice. Hindu sacred music, dance, drama, and the arts draw heavily on these two literary epics.

1. When was the Rig Veda written?
2. Before the Rig Veda was written down, how were the stories in it passed from generation to generation?
3. As a source, why might a historian question the reliability of the Rig Veda as a historical document?
4. The Rig Veda, Mahabharata, Bhagavata Gita and sacred texts from many other belief systems tell stories about gods and their interactions with each other and humans. What do you think the purpose of these types of stories are?

Core Beliefs and Practices of Hinduism

➡ Directions: Read the notes below and answer the questions that follow.

1. Hindu Concept of God(s)

- Hinduism is considered a polytheistic religion, but it is more complex than that.
- It is estimated that Hinduism includes more than 33,000 deities (gods).
- Each god has its own story, personality, and responsibilities.

For example:

Vishnu The Preserver or Protector	Shiva The Destroyer	Ganesha The God of Good Fortune
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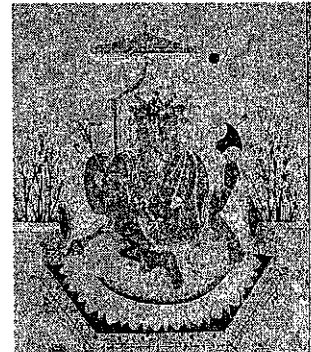
Closeup of Vishnu, seated in the lotus position on a lotus.

[Image](#) is courtesy of Wikimedia and is in the public domain



Shiva as the Lord of Dance

[Image](#) is courtesy of Wikimedia and is in the public domain



Four-armed Ganesha.

[Image](#) is courtesy of Wikimedia and is in the public domain

- Though there are many gods, they are seen by many Hindus as different forms of the same god, called the “ultimate reality,” or *Brahman*. Because of this, some people consider Hinduism to be a monotheistic religion



Statue of the God Vishnu showing his “universal form” in the Bhagavad Gita, demonstrating that Hinduism can be viewed as both polytheistic and monotheistic.

[Avatars of Vishnu.jpg](#) by Steve Jurvetson is published under the [CC BY 2.0 Generic](#) license

Why do some consider Hinduism a polytheistic belief system?

Why do some consider Hinduism a monotheistic belief system?

2. Reincarnation, Caste, Dharma, and Karma

Reincarnation

Reincarnation is the idea that the individual soul (*atman*) is **reborn in a different form after death** and continues to be reborn until the soul achieves “union with Brahman,” also known as *moksha*.



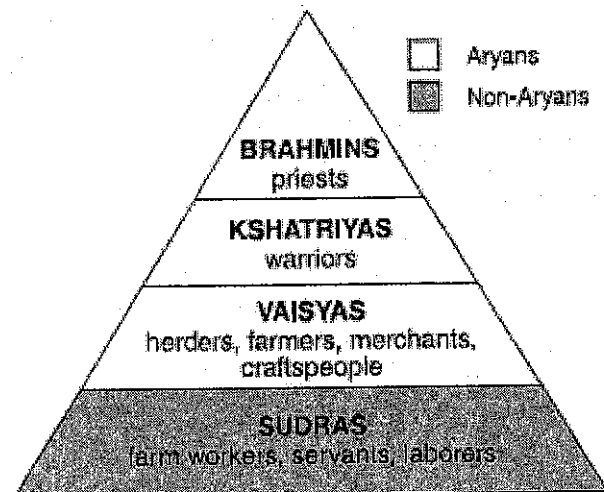
An illustration of the passage of one soul from one cycle of death and rebirth to another.

[Reincarnation AS.jpg](#) is copyrighted to Himalayan Academy Publications, Kapaa, Kauai, Hawaii. Licensed for Wikipedia under Creative Commons and requires attribution when reproduced. This image is published under the [CC BY-SA 2.5 Generic](#) license

Caste

A **caste** is a **social class** in Hinduism that is determined by one's actions in their previous life that one can only move out of through the process of reincarnation.

The four major castes in Hinduism are in the chart below. Not listed is a group called the *Dalits*, or “Untouchables.” Who are considered the lowest in society and required to do “unclean work.”



Source: *Guide to the Essentials of World History*, Prentice Hall, 1999 (adapted) from the New York State Global History and Geography Regents Exam.

Dharma

Dharma is one's **duty** according to their caste. Each caste has jobs they are supposed to perform and rules they are supposed to follow. One is not supposed to do the duty of another's caste.

Karma

Karma is the **sum of one's good and bad actions during life**. If one follows their **dharma** (duty), then they will have good **karma**. If one does not follow their dharma, they will have bad karma.

➡ Directions: Using the notes on the previous page and the word bank provided, fill in the blanks in the paragraph below.

Untouchables	Brahmins	Vaisyas	Kshatriyas
merchants	caste(s)	Sudras	priests
unclean	dharma	karma	lower

For most of Indian history, Hindu society has been divided into _____. The four major social classes in Hindu society were _____, _____, _____, and _____. The Brahmins are at the top of the caste system. Their job is to be _____. _____ were warriors. Vaisyas were herders, farmers, _____, and craftspeople. _____ were farm workers, servants, and laborers. The lowest group in Hindu society is not an official part of the caste system. They are called _____, also known as _____ and are responsible for "_____ work."

Each person in Hindu society is supposed to follow their _____ as determined by their caste. This ensures that all jobs are done in the society. If a person follows the _____ of their caste, then they will have good _____. If they do not complete their duties, then they will have _____ karma. Karma is important because Hindus believe that when they die, they go through the process of _____. If someone has good karma when they die, they will be reborn into a higher _____. If they do not follow their dharma, and as a result, have bad karma, then they will be reborn into a _____ caste. They might even be born as an animal.

Hindus believe that the goal of life is to escape the cycle of death and rebirth. They can do this by achieving "union with Brahman," also known as _____. To reach that goal, a person needs to climb the caste ladder until they are Brahmins, then they have to fulfill the Brahmin's dharma so they have good _____ at the end of their life.

Make a Plan

Use the information provided below to prepare for teaching this supporting question. Modify the learning plan to align with your objectives, your students' needs, your classroom, and your style. **Some supporting questions may take more than a day to teach.**

Teacher Content Support

Background

- Crash Course World History Videos: [Buddha and Ashoka](#)
- PBS: [The Story of India](#)
- BBC: [The Story of India](#)

Lesson Vocabulary

- Edict

Student Activity

1. Introduction: Activate Prior Knowledge – students use prior knowledge about Buddhism

2. Contextualize

Students examine the map, timeline and watch video, then respond to the questions.

3. Sourcing and Introduction Ashoka's Rock and Pillar Edicts

Students read the sourcing information about Ashoka's Rock and Pillar Edicts, then respond to sourcing questions and prediction prompt.

4. Close Read: Ashoka's Rock and Pillar Edicts
Students read and respond to close reading questions

Instructional Suggestions

Think-Pair-Share

Share directly with class

Teacher listens for possible misconceptions and uses questioning to help orient students

Share directly with class

Teacher listens for possible misconceptions and uses questioning to help orient students

Model- Demonstrate how to respond to the prompts by responding to the first one as a class

Then, students work independently. Teacher circulates as students work to identify questions that students are struggling with.

Teacher uses this observation to review the prompts students struggled with most

This activity can be done in a number of ways.

- Students can complete the document individually, in pairs, or in small groups.
- This can be turned into a Text Graffiti activity.
- Document can be put up on the walls and analyzed through a gallery walk.
- Students can comment and highlight the documents digitally individually or in groups.
- The document can also be divided up for a jigsaw activity.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

5. How did the Mauryan Empire use their beliefs systems and philosophical ideas to gain, consolidate, and maintain power?

- How did the Mauryan Empire use their beliefs systems and philosophical ideas to gain, consolidate, and maintain power?
- What other sources might help us to better understand what life was like for people living in the Maurya Empire while Ashoka was the king?
- Would you want to live in the Mauryan Empire under Ashoka's Rock and Pillar Edicts? Explain.

Students respond to the prompt (either Core Task, WIT Task, GRASP Task, multiple-choice, or a combination of them).

Independent Practice; collect and provide feedback to students

After reviewing the lesson, complete the misunderstandings and teacher interventions chart

below:

Possible Misunderstanding	Teacher Intervention
Content Example: Students may wonder, "If the conditions were so bad, why didn't enslaved people fight back?"	Refer students back to the example seen in the film <i>Amistad</i> or present to students with Henry Louis Gates' discussion of the five greatest slave rebellion in the United States. Also, remind students that they will learn about the great example of the Haitian Revolution in 10th grade which was the only slave rebellion that led to the establish of the first Black republic in the Western Hemisphere.
Skill Example: Students may stumble on the vocabulary in paired document #1	Preview vocabulary before students read the document. Ask students to scan the document to find these vocabulary words, have students circle the words and write in the student friendly definition before closely reading the document.

Differentiation (Use the Accommodations Document for Ideas!)		
Accommodations for SWD/SPED Students	Accommodations for Accelerated Students	Accommodations for ELL/ENL Students
Ex.		