Mediterranean Gods and Goddesses: Religions of Egypt, Greece and Rome

A History Lesson Plan for 6th Grade

Table of Contents

Overview
Goal
Objectives
Investigative Question
Tennessee Curriculum Standards
Background Information for Teachers
Images
Procedure
Sources
Image Pages
Worksheet 1
Worksheet 2
Extension Activities
Mediterranean Gods and Goddesses: Religions of Egypt, Greece and Rome

A History Lesson Plan for 6th Grade

Author: Katie Stringer, Middle TN State University

Required Time: 2; 50 minute class periods

Overview: This lesson plan uses primary sources and information from the mythologies and religious texts of ancient civilizations so students will gain an understanding of cultural diffusion and the religions of three ancient Mediterranean cultures: the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans.

Goal: Students will recognize the similarities and differences among the three cultural groups and their religions.

Objectives: Students will:
- Use images from museum websites to interpret ancient religion
- Read excerpts from mythologies of Egypt, Greece, and Rome
- Recognize the similarities and differences among the three groups
- Track cultural changes

Investigative Question: How are the gods and goddesses of ancient cultures related? What are their similarities and differences, and how

Tennessee Curriculum Standards, Grade 6

6.1.02 Recognize the role of major religions
6.1.03 Appreciate the relationship between physical environments and culture.
6.1.05 Understand the role that diverse cultures and historical experiences had on the development of the world.
6.1.spi.8. recognize how migration and cultural diffusion influenced the character of world societies (i.e., spread of religions, empire building, exploration, languages).
6.1.tpi.12. analyze the power of myth and heroes throughout historical times by reading a community's literature.
6.1.tpi.7. Read mythologies and/or oral histories from various cultural groups.
6.5.09 Identify how to use historical information acquired from a variety of sources.
6.5.spi.15. evaluate to what extent civilizations build on the accomplishments of previous civilizations.
6.5.spi.17. recognize the significant mythologies of the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans.
Despite their traditional treatment as three distinct cultures, the ancient history of Egypt, Greece, and Rome is substantially interconnected. This is particularly apparent in the evolution of their respective religious systems across the centuries. Although the politics and religion were at least somewhat entangled in each civilization, the exchange of ideas was inevitable.

Egyptian civilization had fairly limited contact with Greek or Italian counterparts before ca. 2500 B.C. During that time, it developed a pantheon of several gods and goddesses born from an underlying belief that animals, nature, and abstract forces and concepts all possessed divine power. This included a belief in the divinity of political authority, which led to a deification of pharaohs. As Egyptian culture became more structured, trade of both goods and ideas became a more prominent fixture. This change was accompanied by a gradual move from animism to a specific pantheon of gods with various personalities and relationships. Gradually, some of these beliefs crossed the Mediterranean to Europe. For an excellent timeline of these developments, see resources from the University College London: [http://www.digitalegypt.ucl.ac.uk/chronology/index.html](http://www.digitalegypt.ucl.ac.uk/chronology/index.html). For an analysis of the role of animism in the development of Egyptian religion, see Cornelius Petrius Tiele's seminal text *History of the Egyptian Religion*, beginning on page 45, available on Google Books here: [http://books.google.com/books?id=Q8ZZAAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA45&dq=egyptian%20animism&hl=en&ei=IwW1TafHof40gHtrCKQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CC4Q6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=egyptian%20animism&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=Q8ZZAAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA45&dq=egyptian%20animism&hl=en&ei=IwW1TafHof40gHtrCKQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CC4Q6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=egyptian%20animism&f=false)

Probably the most significant transfer of a deity from Egypt to Europe was that of the goddess Isis. Isis was among the most popular and widely worshiped deities in ancient Egypt, as the Greek historian Herodotus observed as early as the 5th Century B.C. When Alexander the Great united Greece and Egypt by conquest in the 4th Century B.C., he inadvertently triggered the spread of Isis worship throughout Europe. The cult of Isis was among the most popular in Greece and later in the Roman Empire, and Isis came to be associated with Greek and Roman goddesses such as Demeter, Athena, and Ceres. Many Greek and Roman leaders, including Trajan and Hadrian, venerated Isis. For a list of temples and artworks featuring Isis throughout Europe, see R.E. Witt, *Isis in the Ancient World*, beginning on page 7, available on Google Books here: [http://books.google.ie/books?id=WpOTnGH6X9wC&pg=PA7&dq=isis+temples+list&source=web&ots=M9i96VmWah&sig=4FfzV78P7y-w9PeysRyusoB6BM&hl=en#PPA44,M1](http://books.google.ie/books?id=WpOTnGH6X9wC&pg=PA7&dq=isis+temples+list&source=web&ots=M9i96VmWah&sig=4FfzV78P7y-w9PeysRyusoB6BM&hl=en#PPA44,M1)

Two other important sources about Isis and her influence throughout the Mediterranean that should be read or reviewed before presenting this program are:

[http://books.google.com/books?id=yqRccJR1c4C&pg=PA45#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=yqRccJR1c4C&pg=PA45#v=onepage&q&f=false) AND


Just as both cultures borrowed from Egypt, Greece and Rome exchanged religious concepts with one-another. When Rome conquered Greece in the 2nd Century B.C., it absorbed many of the Greek gods into its own system, which had itself descended from the religion of Rome's earlier occupiers, the Etruscans. Just as the Greeks had associated Isis with Athena, the Romans associated Athena with their goddess of wisdom, Minerva. Several other gods began to blur together, including Jupiter with Zeus and Juno with Hera. Still other gods migrated directly from the Greek pantheon to the Roman one, including Apollo and Bacchus. The Roman historian Livy described the Roman adoption of Bacchus in the 1st Century B.C., readable in English on Fordham University's website: [http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/romrelig2.html#Livy2](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/romrelig2.html#Livy2)

More information and links are available below in the section labeled “Sources.”
1. Triad of Osiris, Isis, and Horus, From Egypt, 664–30 B.C.
http://www.metmuseum.org/works_of_art/collection_database/all/triad_of_osiris_isis_and_horus/objectview_enlarge.aspx?page=2&sort=6&sortdir=asc&keyword=egypt%20isis&fp=1&dd1=0&dd2=0&vw=1&collID=0&OID=100002767&vT=1&hi=0&ov=0

2. Isis-Aphrodite Statue, From Egypt, Roman Period
http://www.metmuseum.org/works_of_art/collection_database/all/isis_aphrodite_with_egyptian_vulture_cap/objectview.aspx?page=3&sort=6&sortdir=asc&keyword=egyptisis&fp=1&dd1=0&dd2=0&vw=1&collID=0&OID=100030708&vT=1&hi=0&ov=0

3. The Singer of Amun Nany's Funerary Papyrus, From Egypt, ca. 1040–992 B.C
http://www.metmuseum.org/works_of_art/collection_database/all/the_singer_of_amun_nany_s_funerary_papyrus/objectview.aspx?page=1&sort=6&sortdir=asc&keyword=egyptgod&fp=1&dd1=0&dd2=0&vw=1&collID=0&OID=100005235&vT=1&hi=0&ov=0

http://www.metmuseum.org/works_of_art/collection_database/all/bracelet_with_agathodaimon_isis_tyche_aphrodite/objectview_enlarge.aspx?page=1&sort=6&sortdir=asc&keyword=Isis&fp=1&dd1=0&dd2=0&vw=1&collID=0&OID=10004023&vT=1&hi=0&ov=0
5. Terracotta statuette of Isis or a follower of her cult, From Rome, ca. 2nd century A.D.
http://www.metmuseum.org/works_of_art/collection_database/all/terracotta_statuette_of_isis_or_a_follower_of_her_cult/objectview.aspx?page=1&sort=6&sortdir=asc&keyword=Isis&fp=1&dd1=0&dd2=0&vw=1&collID=0&OID=130005981&vT=1&hi=0&ov=0

6. Figure of Isis-Aphrodite, From Egypt, Roman Period
http://www.metmuseum.org/works_of_art/collection_database/all/figure_of_isis_aphrodite/objectview.aspx?page=1&sort=6&sortdir=asc&keyword=Isis&fp=1&dd1=0&dd2=0&vw=1&collID=0&OID=10001325&vT=1&hi=0&ov=0

7. Bronze statuette of the Egyptian mother-goddess Isis, From Roman Period, 50BC-100

8. Pentelic marble relief, Graeco-Roman, 4thC BC

9. Isis-Aphrodite, From Egypt, Roman Period
http://www.metmuseum.org/works_of_art/collection_database/all/isis_aphrodite_clasping_a_garment_rolled_about_her/objectview.aspx?page=1&sort=6&sortdir=asc&keyword=Isis&fp=1&dd1=0&dd2=0&vw=1&collID=0&OID=10002540&vT=1&hi=0&ov=0
Procedure

DAY ONE

**Step 1:** Begin by asking students what they know about Egyptian, Greek and Roman religions, particularly those cultures’ gods and goddesses. Create a K-W-L chart to start on Day 1 and finish on Day 2: make a chart with 3 columns- K being what they know, W what they want to learn, and L what they did learn.

**Step 2:** Transition into a lesson about the Geography of the Mediterranean Sea using the map and timeline provided in the worksheets and images packet. Print and hand out or display on a projector the image of the map and ask students how goods were transported from Egypt, to Greece, to Rome. Ask students if they believe that only goods were exchanged, or if ideas and culture were also transferred from one group to another through trade.

**Step 3:** Describe the origin of the Egyptian gods, from the history of venerating nature, animals, and abstract concepts. Explain the role of animism and how it evolved into the Egyptian religion the Europeans encountered. Use examples such as Anubis, god of the dead, having features of a jackal, a known scavenger.

**Step 4:** Assign the students reading from their textbook about Alexander the Great’s influence on cultural exchange in the Mediterranean, or about the development of religion in Greece and Rome, based on what the book contains. Discuss the idea of “embedded religion” and the role of religious practices in everyday life, particularly in Rome. Ask students how this differs from Egypt. Ask students how this might impact the way each culture thought about religion. [<http://greece.mrdonn.org/alexander.html>](http://greece.mrdonn.org/alexander.html) is a great resource for students about Alexander the Great and cultural exchange. If time allows, track his progress and conquests on the map provided below. Discuss the different areas he explored and discuss the cultures were in each area.

**Step 5:** Explain how each religion borrowed from others. Describe Isis and the Isis-Io myth. Describe how the Romans borrowed gods from the Greeks. Ask students why these myths may have caught on or why Isis may have appealed to the Europeans.

DAY TWO

**Step 6:** Divide students into 9 groups and distribute the photographs of artworks. Have each group do the worksheet for their piece of art.

**Step 7:** Have each group designate a member to present the group’s findings to the class. As each students presents, show the artwork assigned to that group over the projector for the class to see, if possible.

**Step 8:** Have each group do the second worksheet together.

**Step 9:** Lead a class discussion on students' responses to the second worksheet.

**Step 10:** Review and complete the K-W-L chart. If anything was not covered, direct them to further sources, or if time allows, continue the discussion as a group.
Sources for Teachers and Students

*Classical Kids: An Activity Guide to Life in Ancient Greece and Rome* by Laurie Carlson

*Hands-On History: Ancient Civilizations Activities* by Garth Sundem

http://books.google.com/books?id=V1357R8OscQC&pg=PA3#v=onepage&q&f=false

http://books.google.com/books?id=yqRRccJR1c4C&pg=PA45#v=onepage&q&f=false

http://greece.mrdonn.org/greekgods/index.html

http://greece.mrdonn.org/lessonplans/gods.html

http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/mff/mythmachine.htm

http://www.ancientgreece.com/s/Mythology/

http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/romans/religion/

http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/explore_introduction.aspx


http://www.discoveringegypt.com/

http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/romrelig2.html#Livy2

http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/egypt/religion/index.htm

http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/romans/religion/

http://www.metmuseum.org/works_of_art/collection_database/

http://www.mythicjourneys.org/bigmyth/myths/english/2_egyptian_full.htm

http://www.nga.gov/education/classroom/interactive/arcade.htm

*Kids in Ancient Greece* by Lisa A. Wroble

*Roman Myths, Heroes, and Legends* by Dwayne E. Pickels

*The Complete World of Greek Mythology* by Richard Buxton
How did traders and explorers travel to other lands?

Do you think goods were the only things that were exchanged?

Map of the Mediterranean Sea
1. Which culture do you think made the piece of art that you have: Egypt, Greece or Rome?

2. Why do you think that?

3. What is important about this picture?
1. What is similar about pictures 9, 7, 6, and 2?

2. What is different about pictures 9, 7, 6, and 2?

3. Why do you think Egyptians, Greeks and Romans had similar gods and goddesses?

4. How did the images of gods and goddesses change from Egypt to Greece to Rome?

5. Why do you think the images changed?
Extension Activity Ideas

- Have each student research one Greek, Roman, or Egyptian god or goddess and give a presentation to the class about that deity’s mythology, importance, and presence in various cultures.

- Create a family tree showing the relationships of the Greek/Roman gods and goddesses.

- Chart or match Greek gods with their Roman counterparts.

- Challenge students to write their own historical or epic myth about a character they create, or use the website <http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/mff/mythmachine.htm> to incorporate technology to the lesson.

- Investigate the impact Mediterranean cultures and religions had on religions today.

- Explore museum websites (metmuseum.org or britishmuseum.org) to learn more about artifacts from ancient cultures.

- Visit a museum in your area that has an exhibit of Ancient material culture.

- Create a map or use the map provided in this packet to chart the path Isis took across the Mediterranean through cultural exchange.
For my final project I created a lesson plan that teachers can use in the classroom to inspire students to learn about Classical History in a creative way. The Middle Tennessee State University Teaching with Primary Sources website was particularly useful for this process, and my lesson plan is modeled from examples on that site. By using the current Tennessee curriculum I narrowed my audience to sixth grade students and teachers based on social studies standards. When I was nearing completion on this project, I sent the packet to two of my friends who teach in Tennessee schools for their opinions. They were able to send their thoughts on the format, content, and feasibility of the plan for use in an actual classroom.

Cultural exchange, mythologies, religion, historical sources, and ancient or classical history are the main themes of this lesson plan, and the curriculum standards covered by the program relate to these topics. Students gain understanding about Egyptians, Greeks and Romans through reading myths and analyzing art from each civilization. I developed worksheets with open-ended question to promote critical thinking and inquiry to accompany images of gods, goddesses, and religious portrayals found on museum websites.

I chose the images that are included for several reasons. The art pieces represented show the similarities and differences among depictions of deities of Egypt, Greece, and Rome. The depictions of Isis are particularly striking because she is seen in all three cultures though in different ways. The picture of the golden bracelet is particularly important because it is from Egypt geographically, but from the time period when Rome was the dominant power of the Mediterranean. Additionally this piece can be used to explain the cultural exchange and adoption of religion by Romans from the Greeks.
Though this lesson itself is designed to take up only one class period, I provided several ideas for projects or other lessons related to the information delivered in this program. I also included an extensive list of links to webpages that have more ideas and interactive programs for students of this age group, as well as other ages. Many of those sites include interdisciplinary themes and utilize the various ways that people learn.

The background information for teachers that is included in this packet is designed to help teachers understand the information they will present. Even if a sixth grade history teacher has studied Classical or Ancient history in the past, this overview will help refresh their memory and provide more detailed information about Mediterranean religions and cultures. Within the text I included articles and links to Google online books for further reading, as well as direction to look on the “Sources for Teachers and Students” page for more information.

Of course, there is a lot of information I would like to include in this lesson plan, but time constraints, curriculum standards, and learning levels proved to be prohibitive. As with other educational mediums that provide an overview or summary, I hope that this lesson plan will serve to inspire some students to look further into Ancient or Classical history on their own time for their own interests.