

Optional subject: Religious studies

1. General Provisions

1.1. Educational Goals

The subject of religious studies at the basic school level strives to direct the students to:

- 1) respect different convictions based on world views that are not against humanity and recognise prejudiced and labelling attitudes;
- 2) provide examples of how the principles of freedom of religion function, their limits and violations in society;
- 3) know the geographic distribution of larger religions and the corresponding main historical reasons globally and in Estonia and describe the basic traits of the major world religions, including:
 - a) explanation of how religions are manifested in the lives of individuals and society, providing examples from the past and present;
 - b) name the most important stories and personalities of the religions studied, including their source texts;
 - c) describe and analyse connections between culture and religion; and
 - d) compare the main principles of ethical choice-making of the religious and non-religious world views studied;
- 4) awareness of their own values and analyse the role of values in their own activities and those of other people; formulate traits of their own world view and analyse their own world view-based convictions in the context of the religions studied, pointing out similarities and differences;
- 5) justify the importance of adherence to values and moral norms in society and provide relevant examples; and
- 6) discuss the influence of different world views on the lives of individuals and society, providing examples, both positive and problematic.

1.2. Subject Description and Content distribution

The subject of religious studies is based on the principles of freedom of religion and thought and:

- 1) covers different religions and religious movements;
- 2) teaches the students to understand how religion is expressed in culture, in the lives of individuals and in society; and
- 3) discusses existential issues.

The subject of religious studies is based on the recognition of the principle of freedom of religion and thought as stipulated in the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Religious education is one of the preconditions for ensuring freedom of religion in society.

These religious studies do not advertise any particular church, congregation or other religious association.

The optional course of religious studies is not meant to influence the students to accept a particular world view as the norm. The task of the optional course at the basic school level is not to guide the students towards acceptance of any particular religion. The goal is to prepare the students for life in a pluralistic society and in a world where they will come into contact with people of different religions and world views. That is why the stress in these religious studies is on shaping skills and attitudes that form the basis for mutual understanding, respect, openness and readiness for dialogue and cooperation.

The process of learning about different religions and world views must rely on a balanced scientific approach. The students who attend lessons of religious studies will gradually understand the diversity of religions in the past as well as in contemporary world with its positive and negative manifestations. Religion in all societies has always been one of the forces shaping people's lives and culture, and a source of inspiration for writers, artists and musicians. Religious education facilitates understanding of global cultural heritage.

The students' empathy and mutual respect are encouraged by examining various ways of comprehending the world around us. Religious studies must be organised and conducted so as to take into account and respect the convictions that the students are exposed to at home. An important component of religious studies is the support of the students' moral development through the fostering of responsible and ethical life skills. Learning about different religions and world views develops critical thinking, creates opportunities for tackling existential issues and supports each student in shaping their own world view.

The subject of religious studies enriches the outlook of the students as they become familiarised with various ways of comprehending the world we live in.

The teaching materials used in religious studies are connected with the previous knowledge and experience of the students. It is important to become familiarised with the religion related cultural values of the home area, and to create connections with the problems and questions posed by the students. It is recommended to involve the students in the process of compilation of the religious studies work schedule.

1st Stage of Study: customs, stories and values

2nd Stage of Study: values and choices

3rd Stage of Study: one world, different religions

1.3. Learning activities are planned and conducted in the following manner:

- 1) the basis consists of the fundamental values and general competences stipulated in the curriculum, the general goals of the subject, the content of studies and the expected learning outcomes, with support given to integration with other subjects and cross-curriculum dimensions;
- 2) the students' workload (including home assignments) should be moderate and evenly distributed throughout the school year, leaving them sufficient time to rest and pursue their hobbies;
- 3) the students can study individually or with others (independent and pair or group work) as this supports their development as active and independent learners;
- 4) differentiated learning tasks are given and their content and levels of difficulty support an individual approach and enhance motivation to learn;
- 5) modern teaching materials and means are used which are based on modern information and communication technologies;

- 6) the learning environment is expanded: the students attend shrines of different religions, museums, exhibitions and the computer classroom; and
- 7) different methods of teaching are used, including active learning: role play, discussions, debates, problem-solving, project studies, learning portfolio and research paper compilation.

1.4. Basis for Assessment

The learning outcomes of religious studies are assessed in accordance with the general part of the national curriculum for basic schools and school curriculum. Assessed are the students' knowledge, their skills in implementing this knowledge and their acquisition of general competences on the basis of oral answers (presentations), written and/or practical work and practical activities, taking into account how the knowledge and skills of the students comply with the learning outcomes stipulated in the subject syllabus. Neither the attitudes nor the values of the students are assessed. Feedback is provided to each student regarding their attitudes and values. Attitudes and values can be analysed via role play, case studies and group work. In this case not only the outcome is assessed, but also the reasoning. The students must actively participate in the assessment process and their explanations, justifications and self-analysis play an important part. Assessment must take into account solution variations and the individuality of each student. Assessment also serves as a means of supporting student development. Assessment methods are selected with consideration given to the age of the students, their individual abilities and readiness to cope with a particular activity. The learning outcomes are assessed using oral appraisal and numerical grades. The forms of learning outcome assessment must be versatile and suitable for such assessment. The students must know what is being assessed and when, what means are being used for assessment and what the assessment criteria are.

1.5. Physical Learning Environment

The school will organise:

- 1) the majority of learning in a classroom where the furniture can be rearranged for group work and round-table conversations;
- 2) work that requires computer use and Internet access in such a classroom that has at least one computer for every two pupils.

The school will provide:

- 3) resources for the presentation of information in support of syllabus goals (including CDs and DVDs, pictures, videos and films, additional popular science literature and fiction on the subject);
- 4) at least one educational excursion per stage of study.

2. Syllabus

2.1. 1st Stage of Study of Religious studies

Learning and Educational Objectives

The students who graduate from the 3rd grade:

- 1) provide examples of items, texts, actions, events and places connected with religion and stories derived from different religious traditions;
- 2) name the most important festive dates in the folk calendar, explain their religious meaning and describe the most widespread celebratory traditions, know the traditions of their families and can introduce these traditions to others;

- 3) describe, using examples, how human beliefs, opinions and wishes can differ;
- 4) explain in their own words the meaning of honesty, justice, sense of duty, responsibility, keeping one's word, trust, gratitude, asking for forgiveness and forgiving, and provide examples from their own life or studied stories;
- 5) know the 'golden rule' and explain the importance of adhering to it, notice the needs of their fellow students, try to behave taking into account their fellow students and can assess their own actions;
- 6) provide examples of their individuality, recognise their principal feelings and express them both verbally and creatively; and
- 7) understand the importance of admitting to being wrong, can ask for forgiveness and understand that forgiving others is important.

Learning Outcomes and Learning Content, Learning Activities

1) Customs, stories and values

Festive dates and traditions

Learning Outcomes

The students:

- 1) name the most important festive dates in the folk calendar and explain their religious meaning;
- 2) describe the corresponding most widespread celebratory traditions; and
- 3) know the traditions of their families and can introduce these traditions to others.

Learning Content

Family traditions, celebrating festive dates in the family circle.

All Souls' Day

Christmas

Easter

Whitsun

Midsummer Day

Selected stories from different religious traditions

Learning Outcomes

The students:

- 1) provide examples items, texts, actions, events and places connected with religion;
- 2) provide examples of stories derived from different religious traditions;
- 3) formulate the moral message of the studied stories; and
- 4) describe, using examples, how human beliefs, opinions and wishes can differ.

Learning Content

Oral and written lore. Examples of different creation myths.

Hinduism. The blind men groping the elephant (how we understand things differently).

Judaism. The code of Joseph (envy, diligence and forgiveness).

Buddhism. Siddharta Gautama sees an old man, a corpse and a hermit (suffering and succour and richness and poverty).

Christianity. The parable of the Good Samaritan (love for one's neighbours and the 'golden rule').

Islam. Muhammad and speaking the truth (truth and lies and keeping one's word).

Values education

Learning Outcomes

The students:

- 1) describe, using examples, how human beliefs, opinions and wishes can differ;
- 2) explain in their own words the meaning of honesty, justice, sense of duty, responsibility, keeping one's word, trust, gratitude, asking for forgiveness and forgiving, and provide examples from their own life or studied stories;
- 3) know the 'golden rule' and explain the importance of adhering to it, notice the needs of their fellow students, try to behave taking into account their fellow students and can assess their own actions;
- 4) provide examples of their individuality, recognise their principal feelings and express them both verbally and creatively; and
- 5) understand the importance of admitting to being wrong, can ask for forgiveness and understand that forgiving others is important.

Learning Content

The world around us. Sanctity of life and environmental protection and ancestors' perception of nature.

Uniqueness of every human being. Courage to remain true to yourself. Self-esteem.

Different people around me. Mutual understanding and respect. Love for one's neighbours.

Asking for forgiveness and forgiving.

Purpose and importance of rules and laws. Conscience. How faith influences a person's life.

Sense of duty. Responsibility. Giving and keeping promises. Keeping one's word. Truth and lies.

Richness and poverty. Gratitude and grumbling.

Joy and worry. Trust and hope. Fear and safety.

Learning Activities

Topic selection at the 1st Stage of Study focuses on the child's personality: supporting the development of self-image and creating a feeling of safety and moral upbringing. As the range of topics expands, such stories are studied that facilitate the shaping of social competence. The doctrines of religions are not studied at this school stage. Support must be provided to ensure development of the child's self-cognition with understanding of emotions and skills in controlling them. To comprehend cultural continuity and traditions, all year round the students learn about the primary festive dates in the folk calendar, their religious background and celebratory customs.

During the lessons the teacher makes sure that the students learn how to express themselves, are not afraid to ask questions, learn how to substantiate answers, draw conclusions and respect different viewpoints.

The learning activities are as diverse and interactive as possible.

The teaching methods used are story-telling and conversations, which helps connect the material to the students' experience, and problem-solving tasks that suit the age of the students. The skills of reading, writing and text comprehension are developed. Attention is also given to shaping the skills of listening, observation and concentration. The lessons also include manual activities, movement games, singing and listening to music.

Methods that foster creativity (for example role play, creative writing, and artistic self-expression) are also important. Educational outings are organised to integrate material from local studies.

2.2. 2nd Stage of Study of Religious studies Values and choices Learning and Educational Objectives

The students who graduate from the 6th grade can:

- 1) provide examples of the role of values and moral norms in the lives of individuals and society and explain, using examples, how a religion or secular world view can affect a person's values, choices and decisions;
- 2) know the 'golden rule' and the most important ethical principles as stipulated in the major world religions (respect life, other people and property and do not give false evidence) and provide examples of how these principles work;
- 3) name the studied virtues and can elucidate them, providing examples of how virtues are manifested in human behaviour;
- 4) name the values that they consider personally important and describe, based on what they have learned, how these values direct their behaviour and influence their choices; and
- 5) treat convictions based on different world views with respect, recognise instances of discrimination caused by world view differences in daily life, offer constructive options to resolve simpler value conflicts.

Learning Outcomes and Course Content, Learning Activities

1) Values and choices

Basic ethics (in religions and own life)

Learning Outcomes

The students:

- 1) provide examples of the role of values and moral norms in the lives of individuals and society;
- 2) explain, using examples, how a religion or secular world view can affect a person's values, choices and decisions;
- 3) know the 'golden rule' and the most important ethical principles as stipulated in the major world religions (respect life, other people and property in daily life do not give false evidence) and provide examples of how these principles work;
- 4) name the studied virtues (justice, courage, self-discipline (temperance), wisdom (of life), faith, hope and love) and can elucidate them, providing examples of how virtues are manifested in human behaviour; and
- 5) treat convictions based on different world views with respect and recognise instances of discrimination caused by world view differences in daily life.

Learning Content

Meaning of human life. Destiny, freedom and responsibility.

Different rules and laws. Written and unwritten laws.

Different answers to questions about the meaning of happiness and what is right and good. The 'golden rule'. Main principles of ethical choice-making in world religions: respect life, other people and property and do not give false evidence.

Cardinal virtues: justice, courage, courage, self-discipline (temperance), wisdom (of life), faith, hope and love.

Human rights.

Values, me and other people (in religions and own life)

Learning Outcomes

The students:

- 1) name the values that they consider personally important and describe, based on what they have learned, how these values direct their behaviour and influence their choices;
- 2) treat convictions based on different world views with respect; and
- 3) offer constructive options to resolve simpler value conflicts.

Learning Content

Authorities and hierarchy of values. Paragons, idols and God.

Similarities and differences in the convictions of different people, human dignity.

The difficulty in remaining true to oneself. Alone and together.

Tolerance and respect: attitudes towards people with other views and other beliefs.

Prejudice and discrimination.

Central issues of ethics (in religions and own life)

Learning Outcomes

The students:

- 1) provide examples of the role of values and moral norms in the lives of individuals and society, and explain, using examples, how a religion or secular world view can affect a person's values, choices and decisions;
- 2) name the values that they consider personally important and describe, based on what they have learned, how these values direct their behaviour and influence their choices;
- 3) treat convictions based on different world views with respect; and
- 4) understand the importance of forgiveness and know how to ask for forgiveness.

Course Content

Attitude towards nature. Religion and science.

Love, friendship and loyalty. Asking for forgiveness and forgiving, and reconciliation.

Right and justice. Paying attention to and caring for those who are weaker than us. Solidarity. Richness and poverty.

Envy and charity.

The power of a word: pledges, keeping one's word, giving assessments, honesty and hypocrisy.

Learning Activities

The central idea is that of implementing the principles of active and problem-based learning. To the learning activities already used at 1st Stage of Study are added discussions, more attention to developing the skills of question-posing, assessment-giving and substantiation. Application of narrative methods facilitates values education. Problem-solving tasks, roleplay and analysis of moral dilemmas serve to develop the skills of problem-noticing, listening, cooperation and consideration for others. Teachers who strive to support the moral development of the students must exhibit sensitivity, attention and discretion.

In topics about ethics the students become familiarised with classic virtues: their content is revealed in a clear manner so that the students understand them and are inspired to develop themselves accordingly. Such teaching cannot be reduced to formal moralising.

When selecting educational materials for the ethics course, the teacher should ensure that they contain:

- 1) stories derived from different religious traditions;

- 2) stories about certain people whose life and work conformed with important ethical principles and these people can thus be presented as role models for the younger generation; and
- 3) examples of current movements and organisations that operate in accordance with humanist ethical principles and pay attention to and help weaker members of society.

It would be beneficial if the students, during this course, could also participate in planning and organisation of a social project.

2.3. 3rd Stage of Study of Religious studies Learning and Educational Objectives

The students graduating from basic school can:

- 1) classify religions and name the prevalent religions in different parts of the world, know the major religions that are widespread in Estonia and identify larger denominations and religious groups;
- 2) explain the main viewpoints as formulated in the teachings and ethical principles of the religions studied, and know the following about these religions: origins, prominent figures, religious rituals and cultural output;
- 3) point out similarities and differences between religions and analyse (using examples) both positive and illustrative problems and the influence of different world views on the lives of individuals and society;
- 4) can analyse the reasons behind religious conflicts, recognise prejudiced and labelling attitudes and offer opportunities for dialogue and cooperation between people with different religious views; and
- 5) describe traits of their personal world view and analyse personal world view convictions in the context of the world views studied.

Learning Outcomes and Course Content, Learning Activities

1) One world, different religions

Introductory issues

Learning Outcomes

The students can:

- 1) classify religions and name the religions that are prevalent in different parts of the world;
- 2) name the largest religions in Estonia and identify the largest denominations and religious groups;
- 3) analyse the causes of religious conflicts;
- 4) recognise prejudiced and labelling attitudes; and
- 5) offer opportunities for dialogue and cooperation between people with different religious views.

Learning Content

What do people believe in and how is faith manifested in people's lives?

What is religion? Diversity of beliefs and world views. Overview of global distribution of religions (geographical and statistical information). Why should we know about religions?

Different possibilities for explaining our world. Religion and science. Faith and superstition.

Relations between religions.

Familiarity with various religions

Learning Outcomes

The students:

- 1) explain the main viewpoints as formulated in the teachings and ethical principles of the religions studied and know the following about these religions: origins, prominent figures, religious rituals and cultural output;
- 2) point out similarities and differences between various religions and analyse (using examples) both positive and illustrative problems and the influence of different world views on the lives of individuals and society; and
- 3) describe traits of their personal world view and analyse personal world view convictions in the context of the world views studied.

Learning Content

Symbols.

Founders (and other central figures).

Holy texts and books.

World creation stories. Relationship between humans and nature.

Approaches to humanity.

Primary festive dates and rituals. Holy places.

Ethics.

Learning Activities

At least five religions are selected from the major world religions for detailed study. Special attention is given to familiarisation with Estonian folk beliefs. Different religions are introduced via the aspects formulated in the course content and the teacher focuses on the main facets of each such religion.

During the 3rd Stage of Study several new opportunities are added to the previously described learning activities suited to older students, such as: selective familiarisation with religious basic texts and analysis of distinctive features of religious texts, which facilitate comprehension of the peculiarities of the religious language and development of understanding of metaphorical language. Familiarisation with different religions and world views allows the students to acquire the skill of comparing them and seeing connections between religion and culture. It is important to shape an open and respectful attitude towards different cultures. Project study opportunities, compilation of short abstracts, procurement of information from reference sources and the Internet and critical assessment of the materials found develop the skill of independent thinking. Attention should also be given to development of debating skills. It is important for the students to learn how to substantiate their viewpoints. Religions are studied at this stage with greater attention given to the approach that describes distinctive features: manifestations of customs, traditions and religion in our daily lives. It is important to introduce religions with their inherent diversity.