What Is RELIGION?

Religion is not easy to define. For many people, religion is an organized form of worship that takes place in a temple, church, synagogue or mosque. For others, religion is personal, practice in a private way. Religion depends upon people’s beliefs that one or more gods exist. A god is a being or spirit more capable and powerful than human beings. There are people who believe in only one god. There are people who don’t believe in any god, and there are people who believe in many gods. With so many different views, it’s no wonder that people have been debating the meaning of the word “religion” for centuries.

One thing we know for certain-religion has been around since the dawn of mankind. In the Stone Age, people prayed to the spirits of nature. They asked for simple things such as rain or a good hunt. Later, people moved from nature worship to idol worship. Idols were statues that represented the gods. Ancient people believed they could influence the gods by offering gifts to their idols. In time, many people rejected idol worship and new religions were formed.

The root of today’s major religions- Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Confucianism, Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Shinto go back thousands of years. Although they differ from each other in many ways, the major religions have some things in common. The major religions all offer answers to the questions such as, “What is the meaning of life?” or “Is there life after death?” All of the major religions teach their believers that life has a purpose. Most religions promise that when death comes, good people will be rewarded and bad people will be punished.

Another thing most major religions have in common is a belief in some kind of higher, divine (godlike) power. Monotheistic religions believe there is only one god. Polytheistic religions believe in more than one god. Religions have rituals to honor, appeal to or serve their god or gods. Rituals include such things as services, prayers, wedding and funerals.

Every major religion has a code of conduct. This is basically a set of rules to live by. These rules tell people how to act towards each other and how to act towards their god or gods. Sometimes, these rules even explain things such as what to eat and whom to marry. These rules often are written in sacred books and stories.

Guiding Questions

for Reading Like a

**Writer**

1. What is the author’s purpose for this piece of writing?
2. Who is the intended audience for this piece of writing?
3. How does the writer reveal the main idea? How does the writer’s choice of ideas affect the reader?
4. How does the writer pull us in and make us want to read more?
5. What kinds of beginnings and endings does the writer use?
6. What techniques does the writer use for sequencing?
7. How does the writer demonstrate bias on the topic? How does the writer reveal emotions?
8. What techniques does the writer use to make the word choice more effective? OR How does the author use word choice to make the writing more memorable or effective?
9. How effective is the language the writer uses? Too formal? Too informal? Perfectly appropriate?

Guiding Questions

for Reading Like a

**Reader**

1. What are the central ideas/ problems /arguments in this reading selection?
2. Which details support the main idea?
3. What is the reading selection supposed to help you do?
4. Why does the selection include illustrations/a list of materials/a graph, etc.? What can be learned from these resources?
5. Why is the information included in this text significant to this topic?
6. What significance does the title have?
7. What makes this reading selection believable/ convincing/ plausible?
8. What characteristics of this reading selection make it a primary/secondary source?
9. What could the author add to this selection to help the reader understand it better? Why do you think it was not initially included?
10. What *might* an unreliable witness or source say about this topic?