

PART
II
THE CURRICULUM

3
ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

THE *PRESENCE*, NOT THE ABSENCE, OF RELIGION OFTEN TRIGGERS controversy on the elementary school level. Frequently the fight centers on the perennial “December dilemma”—the crèche in the school lobby, the Christmas play, the visits by Santa in the classroom, and other holiday activities.

As lamentable as they are, Christmas conflicts could provide schools with a valuable opportunity to rethink how they treat religion in the curriculum throughout the year. That rarely happens. Faced with a crisis, most schools take the path of least resistance. Christmas becomes “winter holidays.” Teachers continue holiday activities in December but carefully avoid mentioning Jesus. Such tortured efforts to keep Christmas without Christ lead to some very odd overreactions by teachers. One Nashville teacher told us with pride in her voice that she had managed to celebrate Christmas in her classroom for 23 years—and she hadn’t mentioned Jesus once! This would be funny if it weren’t so painfully revealing about the confusion surrounding religion in many elementary school classrooms.

Fortunately some school districts now recognize that it is wrong to either promote or ignore religion in the elementary schools. They have found another approach—one that is both just and constitutional. In Williamsville, New York, for example, the district turned a conflict about holidays into an opportunity to involve the community in developing a policy on the place of religion in the curriculum. As a result, the elementary school teachers have learned how to take religion seriously without violating the First Amendment. Walk into a Williamsville elementary school just before Christmas and you will probably find students learning about what Christians actually *believe* about Christmas. At other times during the year, you will hear teachers and students discussing other religious traditions in ways that are accurate and fair.

In elementary schools these discussions of religion focus on the generally agreed upon meanings of the holidays, customs, basic beliefs, and histories of the major religions. Only as children become more mature should teachers ask them to think more critically about differences among religions and within religions—and, of course, the tensions between religious and secular ways of understanding the world.

But as Williamsville discovered, even the most basic teaching about religion in elementary schools is hard work. When young, impressionable children are involved, it is easy to understand why parents—and courts for that matter—have a heightened concern about religious issues. Nevertheless, the results in Williamsville and elsewhere have been worth the effort. Community support for the schools is stronger, parents have more trust in teachers to handle religious issues, and students are getting a better education. In this chapter we will argue that all school districts should do what Williamsville is doing. We begin with a discussion of why religion belongs in the elementary grades and then suggest how school districts might include study of religion without stirring a fight.

The Case for Religion _in the Elementary Curriculum

When a crisis hits, communities like Williamsville discover that objections to the inclusion of religion are loudest if elementary schools are involved. This is particularly true in the primary grades, although many parents and educators are nervous about the ability of even upper elementary students to handle discussions of religion. Leave religion to the family and faith communities, goes the familiar argument, and wait until students are older to discuss the role of religion in history and society.

Of course, we agree that formation of faith is the job of families and religious communities. But, as we have already discussed at length, learning about religion is not the same as religious indoctrination. Far from being a way to usurp the role of parents or clergy, study of religion in the elementary grades is part of the

core of the schools' mission to provide a good education and to prepare students to live in a democratic society. Properly considered, the study of family, community, various cultures, the nation, and other key themes and topics important in the early grades all require some discussion of religion.

At the same time, as we noted in Chapter 2, the fear of religious indoctrination is not without foundation. There are teachers today, as there have been in the past, who may use their position to promote their own faith or to be hostile to religion. That is why we urge that teacher education include more exposure to the First Amendment as well as to the study of religion.

But the fact that it isn't easy to achieve a fair and balanced elementary curriculum is no reason not to try. Silence about religion can also be a form of indoctrination—however unintentional. The notion that individuals can understand all of human life and history without reference to religion is itself a view of life that is antithetical and hostile to religious claims.

The New Consensus and Standards

As we discussed in Chapter 2, the New Consensus concerning religion in the curriculum should help to dispel fears among educators about dealing with religion in the early grades. Religious and educational groups from across the religious and political spectrum have agreed that there are many opportunities on the elementary level for study about religion.

This view is also reflected, at least in principle, in the *Curriculum Standards for the Social Studies* issued by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS). The standards mention religion in 2 of the 10 thematic strands that “form the framework of the social studies standards” (NCSS, 1994, pp. 21, 25).

These kinds of statements give permission for more mention of religion, but whether they will encourage serious treatment of religion in the elementary curriculum remains to be seen. The NCSS standards, for example, fail to do more than make a passing reference to religion. When the standards spell out what is meant by teaching “Culture” in the early grades, they do not explicitly mention religion. They emphasize “culture and cultural diversity.” They tell us that students should explore the ways “groups, societies, and cultures address similar human needs and concerns,” and “describe ways in which language, stories, folktales, music, and artistic creations serve as expressions of culture and influence behavior of people living in a particular culture” (NCSS, 1994, p. xiii). Much in the study of cultures, of course, could very well involve teaching about religious practices and beliefs. But *none* of the sample classroom activities for teaching this theme, or any other theme, in the early grades deal with religion (NCSS, 1994, pp. 49–75). This is odd, given the centrality of religion in most cultures. Perhaps the authors of the standards assume that religion will come up naturally. In our experience, however, if religion is ignored in the framework or the textbook, it will be ignored in most classrooms.

On balance, however, the NCSS standards are a potential step forward for the study of religion in elementary schools because they encourage the study of different cultures, the development of chronological thinking, and the inclusion of primary sources and historical narratives in the early grades. The same might be said of the *National Standards for History*. Although the K–4 history standards include only a couple of brief mentions of religion, there are many opportunities to include religion in the study of various cultures and historical narratives. The history standards explicitly encourage inclusion of religious ideas and events in the upper elementary grades (National Center for History in the Schools, 1996).

The California Example

According to the traditional model of elementary education—a model widely adopted until very recently— young children are not ready for history, much less religious events and people in history. In this view, the child's focus should be on immediate surroundings and the present-day world of family, school, neighborhood, and community. As it is usually practiced, this approach leaves little room for religion beyond mentioning a few symbols and places of worship.

Fortunately, in the last decade educators and developmental psychologists have successfully challenged these assumptions about children's learning (Gagnon, 1989, pp. 175–177). Like the standards just discussed, some state frameworks, notably the *History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools*, now encourage considerable discussion of history in the early grades. Again, this opens the door for study of religion. In California, beginning in kindergarten, students “reach out to times past,” and in grades 1, 2, and 3 they learn about various cultures and read stories about historical figures. Students tackle California history in grade 4, begin American history in grade 5, and study ancient civilizations in grade 6. On all levels, the framework offers many opportunities, some stated and some implied, for study of religion (California Department of Education History-Social Science Curriculum Framework and Criteria Committee, 1987, 1997).

This is no accident. The drafters of the California framework intend a history-enriched primary curriculum and history-centered upper elementary curriculum to encourage more study of religion. We have found that in practice the framework has led to more discussion of religion in California classrooms, particularly in 6th grade.¹ Sixth grade students are studying Hebrew religion (including passages from Hebrew Scripture), the origins and spread of Buddhism, Confucian teachings and influence in China, and the teachings of Jesus and the rise of the Christian church. Charlotte Crabtree, a leader in the California effort and a member of the influential Bradley Commission on History in the Schools, summarizes the case for religion this way:

Elementary school studies of U.S. and world history, necessarily centered on the lives of people in order to motivate and sustain children's interest, also provide fruitful opportunities to explore with children the important role of ideas, religion, and the arts in shaping individual behavior and group culture, and in instituting or restricting change. No adequate understanding of human history is possible, we believe, without examining people's most dearly held religious and secular beliefs and the influences of those beliefs upon their ethical and moral commitments and choices, and upon their actions in political, economic, and social life. (Gagnon, 1989, pp. 184–185)

We agree. Study of human society and history, including religious society and history, should begin in the earliest grades. Elementary education provides the foundation—the basic knowledge and skills—for the more complex and challenging discussions that come later. Leaving religion out not only gives a distorted and false view of the world and human nature, it deprives students of the tools they will need for further study in middle and high school.

The Core Knowledge Approach

Another influential assault on the view that young children are not developmentally ready for study of religion comes from E.D. Hirsch Jr., founder of the Core Knowledge movement. Hirsch is convinced that students need to be introduced to at least the basic ideas and stories of the world's religions at a young age as preparation for critical understanding later on. Beginning in 1st grade, religion should be treated as an integral part of the great world civilizations and a shaping force in world and U.S. history. These first discussions of religion focus on the core beliefs and symbols as well as on important figures and events.

Hirsch's ideas about what children need to know concerning religion are reflected in the Core Knowledge Sequence, now used in at least several hundred schools throughout the United States. Study of the history of world religions begins in 1st grade with introductions to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and a discussion of the religion of ancient Egypt. Second graders learn something about Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Greek myths. In 3rd grade, students are introduced to Roman religion, the spread of Christianity, Byzantium, Constantine, Viking religion, Native American religious beliefs, and the religious motives for coming to America during the colonial period. Fourth graders tackle the Christian Church in the Middle Ages, the spread of Islam, Islamic civilization, the Crusades, and religious art. By 5th grade students are discussing the Reformation; the Counter-Reformation; the Eastern Orthodox Church in Russia; Shinto

and Buddhism in feudal Japan; the Aztec, Maya, and Inca religions; and the Mormons in the story of westward expansion in the United States. Finally, in 6th grade, students examine monotheism, covenant, and other central ideas of Judaism and Christianity; and, in American history, religious issues in the story of immigration and social reform (Holdren and Hirsch, 1996).

Clearly, the Core Knowledge approach takes religion seriously in the early grades. The major faiths of the world are well represented, though Core Knowledge places more emphasis on biblical literacy because of the pervasive influence of the Bible in American culture. Are most elementary teachers prepared for this challenge? Probably not, no more than they are prepared to teach other parts of the Core Knowledge Sequence. But the fact that curricular materials and some educational opportunities are available to support the sequence should help to address this challenge. The Core Knowledge Foundation has assembled an outstanding list of resources for introducing religion to young children, as well as sample lessons developed by teachers.²

Even with offers of support and assurances of legality, teaching about religion still frightens some school officials. We spoke with administrators at two Core Knowledge schools in Tennessee and Kentucky who reported that they are not using the religion components of the sequence, though one said that the school plans to do so in the future. By contrast, the Nashville schools, which adopted Core Knowledge in fall 1997, are including all of the content concerning religion.

Religious Diversity and Freedom

Placing religion at the core of what students need to know is necessary for civic as well as academic reasons. High school student Chana Schoenberger discovered how important “core knowledge” about religion can be while attending a summer program at the University of Wisconsin at Superior. Eight faith groups were represented among the 20 students who participated with her in the program: Jewish, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Hindu, Muslim, Mormon, Jehovah’s Witness, and Lutheran. She was amazed at how little they knew about one another—and what they did “know” about other faiths was distorted and wrong. The ignorance of her peers bothered her, but what hurt was when the teacher casually remarked (in reference to using government money for his study wisely) that he “wouldn’t want them to get Jewed.” When Chana returned to school that fall, she decided to get involved in a program to inform other students about the various religions in the school. “People who are suspicious when they find out I’m Jewish,” she wrote later, “usually don’t know much about Judaism” (Haynes and Thomas, 1994, 1996, chap. 7, pp. 11–12).

As Chana and her friends discovered, America is a very diverse place. In fact, the United States is the most religiously diverse country on earth, and, if polls are to be trusted, the most religious of all Western nations. According to one recent survey, 79 percent of Americans say religion is an important part of their life. On a weekly basis, 71 percent of Americans claim they pray, 40 percent attend religious services, and 43 percent read the Bible (Angus Reid Group, 1996).

In much of the rest of the world, such deep and diverse religious commitment is rarely accompanied by political civility. We need only think of Bosnia, India, Sri Lanka, and many other nations across the globe. Thanks in large measure to the religious liberty provisions of the First Amendment, the United States is the exception to this tragic pattern. But Americans seem to forget that the American experiment of living with deep religious differences is still new and fragile. Our culture wars should be a sufficient reminder that religious arguments matter. If allowed to deepen unchecked, they can poison our public life—including our schools—with hatred and division.

The task of sustaining this unprecedented experiment in religious diversity and freedom begins in kindergarten. Students should learn in the earliest grades that we are different in how we understand the world, and that our civic agreements protect our right to be different. Simultaneously, of course, they must learn how citizens deal with religious and other differences in the classroom, neighborhood, and wider community. Even the youngest children can begin to practice what the *Williamsburg Charter* terms the “Golden Rule for civic life”: Our rights are best protected when we guard the rights of others, even those with

whom we disagree (Haynes and Thomas, 1994, 1996, Appendix A, p. 11). These two aims—some basic knowledge of the religious beliefs and practices of others and a commitment to our civic framework of religious liberty—should be essential components of the elementary school curriculum.

The Major Issues

No matter how persuasive the argument or how good the curriculum, including study of religion in the elementary grades will not be easy. Even as this chapter was being written, a call for help came from a Nashville elementary school that had recently introduced the Core Knowledge curriculum. An angry parent objected to the use of the Bible by her child's 6th grade teacher when teaching about the ancient Hebrews. The teacher was using the Bible appropriately and following the curriculum guidelines of the school, but the parent couldn't understand why the Bible is allowed in a public school.

Parents are understandably nervous about how teachers will present religion to their children. Will they promote one religion over others? Are they prepared to teach about various faiths fairly and accurately? When the Nashville schools first adopted Core Knowledge, the district did much too little to prepare teachers to teach about the many religious ideas, symbols, individuals, and history required by the curriculum. Some teachers worked hard to prepare themselves. Others weren't sure how to handle religion. Faced with explaining the idea of covenant in the Hebrew Scriptures, one well-intentioned, but slightly confused teacher finally blurted out to her 6th graders that God "made a deal" with Abraham.

Fear of controversy (or poor teaching) should not deter public schools from dealing with religion in the curriculum. It can be done, but it takes work. Parents have the right to expect that teachers will receive appropriate staff development and curriculum resources. In places where this is done, the vast majority of elementary teachers report strong parental support for religious literacy, including biblical literacy. Most of them begin each year by informing parents about what they will be doing in the study of religion and why. In their experience (and ours) parents overwhelmingly favor including religion once they understand the constitutional and educational rationales for doing so.

Religion and Religious Holidays

With all of the challenges, taking religion seriously is not as costly or controversial as ignoring religion or including it in ways that are unconstitutional. The "December dilemma" mentioned at the beginning of this chapter is the best illustration of what we mean. Put a crèche in the school lobby (with a menorah and a Christmas tree), as one school district did in December, and you are threatened with a lawsuit for promoting religion. Remove the crèche (but leave the Menorah and tree), and many Christians protest that their faith is now excluded, and some Jews ask if this means that school officials don't consider the Menorah a religious symbol. When the superintendent tries to take it all away, even more people get angry.

As we mentioned at the outset, Williamsville and other school districts have found a better way: teach *about* religion, including religious holidays. Because (unfortunately) many school districts link much of the elementary curriculum to holidays, and because (again, unfortunately) holidays may be one of the only times in many schools when religion gets mentioned, it is important to say something about what academic treatment of religious holidays entails.

The same coalition of religious and education groups that sponsored "Religion in the Public School Curriculum" (discussed in Chapter 2) also produced "Religious Holidays in the Public Schools: Questions and Answers."³ Finally, after many years of bitter arguments, a broad consensus has been reached on religious holidays in public schools:

The study of religious holidays may be included in elementary and secondary curricula as opportunities for teaching about religions. Such study serves the academic goals of educating students about history and cultures as well as about the traditions of particular religions in a pluralistic society. (Haynes and Thomas, 1994, 1996, chap. 10, p. 2)

This is a constitutional approach that addresses deeply held convictions of people on both sides—those who don't want public schools to promote religion and those who don't want public schools to become religion-free zones. For example, in our experience most conservative Christians would much prefer that schools teach something about the religious meaning of Christmas rather than promote the shopping mall version of the holiday. And people who oppose religious celebrations in public schools will usually support the academic study of Christmas.

What does this agreement look like in the classroom? The crèche, the menorah, the crescent and star, and other religious symbols are used as teaching aids. Traditional carols and music from other traditions are sung and played as part of the study of music. In short, as long as there is an educational goal, religious art, music, literature, and symbols have a place in the elementary classroom. The important distinction for teachers to keep in mind is the difference between teaching about religious holidays, which is permissible, and celebrating religious holidays, which is not.

The key skill an elementary teacher needs when teaching about religious traditions is the ability to teach through attribution (e.g., "Many Christians believe that . . ."). In this way teachers avoid injecting their personal views into the discussion while allowing the religious tradition to speak for itself.

No matter how careful they are, however, if teachers limit their study of holidays to Christian—or even Christian and Jewish—celebrations, they create a perception of unfairness. They must make an effort to teach a variety of traditions at various times of the year. As we discussed in Chapter 2, a fair and neutral curriculum will include a diversity of views. Those holidays that are central events in the major traditions should be considered, along with those that may have special significance for people in the local community.

School assembly programs in December are a special challenge, given that Christmas concerts and Nativity pageants have a long and cherished history in many schools. The sponsors of "Religious Holidays in the Public Schools" advise schools to "devise holiday programs that serve an educational purpose for all students—programs that make no students feel excluded or identified with a religion not their own" (Haynes and Thomas, 1994, 1996, chap. 10, p. 3). This means that the December holiday program should include religious music—to leave out traditional Christmas carols would be absurd and unfair—but such concerts should include a variety of music, secular and religious.⁴ The coalition also agrees that Nativity pageants or plays portraying the Hanukkah miracle are inappropriate in public schools. Reenactment of these sacred events puts the school in the position of sponsoring a devotional experience that more appropriately belongs in a church or synagogue.

It is particularly unfortunate when schools attempt to justify Christmas celebrations (as opposed to programs with an educational purpose) by mixing in a celebration of Hanukkah. Two constitutional wrongs do not equal a constitutional right. It is also wrongheaded to focus on Hanukkah as the chief opportunity to teach something about Judaism. Hanukkah is a minor Jewish holiday (and it is *not* the Jewish Christmas). Passover, Rosh Hashanah, or Yom Kippur are all much better choices for substantive teaching about the Jewish faith.

But what about the cultural Christmas with its trees and wreaths, or the cultural Easter with its eggs and bunnies? In our view, the first obligation of a school district is to find a way to treat religious holidays academically. Then, once a commitment is made to appropriate study of religion, the district is in a better position to tackle trees and bunnies. When dealing with these cultural symbols, the question may not be a legal one (after all, the majority of the Supreme Court justices have indicated that they see the Christmas tree as a secular symbol), but rather "what is the right and sensitive thing to do in our community?" Whatever the courts say, many parents and students see cultural Christmas and Easter decorations and activities as promotion of religion, while others, particularly conservative Christians, are offended if such symbols are all that students learn about the Christian faith.

The solution is for schools and communities to sit down together and come to some agreement about how their schools will treat both religious and cultural holiday symbols. When districts do this, they find much support for academic treatment of religious holidays, and, building on that agreement, they find ways to tone down the cultural trappings. It may not be illegal, but it is surely insensitive to have weeks of Santa and

Frosty throughout the school. Teachers and administrators shouldn't assume that everyone expects Santa on Christmas morning or a visit from the Easter Bunny on Easter Sunday. Art projects and other class activities should give students a choice that respects the kinds of celebrations, religious or otherwise, that their families practice. Rather than pulling out the school tinsel or other decorations, let student-initiated art decorate the halls at various times of year, including December. In these and similar ways, elementary schools can finally get beyond the debate about where to put the crèche or menorah and begin to teach students what these and other symbols actually mean in the traditions they represent.

Role-Playing

If Nativity pageants are inappropriate in an assembly program, what about reenacting other religious ceremonies in the classroom as a hands-on way to teach about religions? Some elementary school teachers, for example, role-play the Seder meal as part of the study of Judaism. Isn't this a valuable activity for getting students to empathize with the religious traditions they are studying?

Although some texts and curriculum guides suggest such activities, we advise against them. No matter how carefully planned or well intentioned, role-playing religious ceremonies risks undermining the integrity of the faith involved. This may be more of a problem for some traditions than for others. Reenacting the Catholic Mass, for instance, would surely raise more objections than reenacting the Seder meal. But in all cases, the possibility that a moment or ritual considered sacred might be trivialized or mocked, even unwittingly, is too great to risk. The other problem, of course, is the very real possibility that the activity will violate the conscience of students who participate. Even if they volunteer, students may not be aware of the religious implications of what they are doing.

Yes, we encourage helping students to get inside the religions they study, what we described in Chapter 2 as "informed empathy." But instead of reenactments, we suggest using audiovisual resources and primary source documents (and objects) to give students some feel for how individuals practice the rituals of the faith.

Literature

One of the most natural and appropriate ways to include teaching about religion in the elementary grades is through children's literature. Carefully chosen stories from and about the various religions help students to get some sense of what these traditions are all about—to see them from the inside.

Although there has been some improvement in recent years, reading texts for elementary grades are still poor in their treatment of religion (as Paul Vitz documented in his famous study more than a decade ago). Writers of basal readers, as well as many teachers, have been afraid to include stories with religious themes, ideas, and images. Sometimes a story from Hindu or Buddhist legends might sneak in, but rarely one from Judaism or Christianity (Vitz, 1986).

Fortunately, however, things are beginning to change as state guidelines such as those of California acknowledge the importance of including study about religion in the curriculum. Today there are a growing number of books for children about the world's major faiths—literature books and history books—suitable for use in public schools. The widely praised *Molly's Pilgrim* by Barbara Cohen is a good example of a book for primary grade children that includes religious belief and practice as a natural part of the story. For upper elementary students, Mary Pope Osborne's *One World, Many Religions: The Ways We Worship* is a scholarly, but lively, introduction to the major faiths.

The key is to select material that is both accurate about the religion under discussion and intended for a broad audience. If using sacred texts, teachers should be careful to put the story in the context of learning *about* the religion. Again, attribution is important: the children need to understand that they are learning about what the people of a particular religious tradition believe and practice. Devotional books intended for faith formation or religious education should not be used in a public school classroom.

Guest Speakers

An additional resource might be a guest speaker. In Nashville recently an orthodox Jewish Rabbi gave 6th graders in an elementary school a firsthand account of what it means to be a Jew. The students were fascinated, asking about everything from the little things they noticed (“Why don’t you shake hands with women?”) to big ideas they were studying (“What does it mean to keep kosher?”).

Although presentations like this can bring religion alive for students, we do have a few concerns. First, the teacher must put the visit in context, noting, in this case, that the speaker represents one of several major perspectives about Jewish law and life within Judaism. Second, the teacher must make sure that the guest has the background necessary for an academic discussion of the faith. Third, the teacher must be sure that the guest understands what is expected of him or her. Guest speakers on religion must be informed about the First Amendment guidelines for teaching about religion and know exactly what they are being asked to speak about.

Students should not be asked what their faith is, much less to speak as a representative of that faith. They are free, of course, to speak about their faith as long as their comments are germane to the discussion. But the teacher should not rely on students to “fill in the gaps” about their religion.

Conclusions

An elementary school curriculum that ignores religion gives students the false message that religion doesn’t matter to people—that we _live in a religion-free world. This is neither fair nor accurate. Silence about religion also denies students the promise of a good education. If they are to understand the world they live in, they must be exposed at an early age to the religious dimensions of society, history, literature, art, and music. Without this foundation, they will be unprepared for the more complex and critical study of the upper grades. Finally, students must begin in the primary grades to learn about the rights and responsibilities of religious liberty, the fundamental principles that sustain our nation across deep and abiding differences.

Despite what we believe to be a strong case for including religion in the elementary curriculum, we have tried to emphasize just how difficult it is to take religion seriously when young and impressionable children are involved. Nowhere in public schools do teachers need to be more cognizant of the power of their example than in the early grades. That is why the First Amendment framework we outlined in Chapter 1 must be clearly and firmly in place in the elementary school. And that is also why staff development programs and academically sound resources focused on teaching about religions must be made available to all elementary teachers.

We began our discussion by invoking the example of Williamsville, New York. We could add Ramona, California; South Orangetown, New York; and many other places that are now working to take religion more seriously in their schools. No, it isn’t easy. But the renewed trust between parents and teachers, the broad community support for doing the right thing, and the enrichment of the curriculum are some of the very important reasons why the effort is worthwhile—and vital to the future of public education.

Suggested Readings _and Resources

Elementary teachers need a concise description of the various religious groups that they encounter in their classroom and teaching. We suggest *America’s Religions: An Educator’s Guide to Beliefs and Practices* (1997) by Benjamin J. Hubbard, John T. Hatfield, and James A. Santucci, available from Teacher Ideas Press (telephone: 800-237-6124). A discussion of each tradition is followed by a helpful section on possible classroom concerns.

Teachers also need a calendar noting major religious holidays with brief descriptions of their significance. One can be obtained from The National Conference (telephone: 212-206-0006).

Resources for teaching children about religion in history, art, music, and literature are listed in *Books to Build On: A Grade-by-Grade Resource Guide for Parents and Teachers* (1996), edited by John Holdren and E.D. Hirsch Jr. Public school teachers need to preview carefully all of the recommended books that deal with religion to make sure that they are accurate and that they are not intended for devotional use. For more information about Core Knowledge, contact the Core Knowledge foundation (telephone: 800-238-3233).

Using suggestions of classroom teachers, the First Amendment Center has compiled a list of children's literature with religious ideas and themes appropriate for use in a public school (telephone: 703-284-2826). The center also provides *Living With Our Deepest Differences: Religious Liberty in a Pluralistic Society*, a set of lessons for upper elementary students about the meaning and significance of religious liberty in American history.

We strongly urge that parents be informed about how religion will be treated in the classroom. One approach is to make available to parents *A Parent's Guide to Religion and the Public Schools*, a brief pamphlet published by the National PTA and the First Amendment Center (available free from the center, The Freedom Forum, 1101 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, VA 22209).