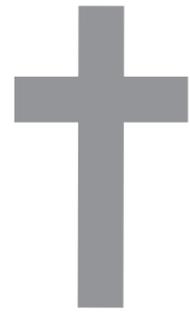




COMPREHENDING CULTURE

students should value education of world religions



Out of the corner of her eye, senior **Nicole Dudley** noticed her friend repeatedly clicking his phone on and off while she was at the dinner table with him. Dudley had assumed that he was just checking messages until she found out that he was actually continuously checking the time because he was actively observing Ramadan, the Islamic holy month. He was counting down the seven minutes he had to wait until sunset before he could eat along with everyone else.

"I didn't know that the Islam religion wants its followers to fast during Ramadan," Dudley said. "The United States is becoming more culturally diverse. I have many friends of different religions, and understanding each individual's religion is an important part of respecting who he or she is."

Religion is embedded in culture, which makes it difficult for a person to truly understand one's culture without a background in a person's religion. The United States contains a vast range of cultures, and the population of minority religion groups are slightly growing. According to a study by Pew Research Center published in May 2015, the percent of the population affiliated with a re-

ligion other than Christianity has risen 1.2 percent from 2007 to 2014, and the percent of the population with no affiliation has risen 6.7 percent. Meanwhile, the percent of the population that is affiliated with Christianity has decreased by 7.8 percent.

With diversity growing, it's likely the students will be exposed to a variety of religions as they continue into the workplace and as they attend high school daily, so diversity shouldn't be masked.

"I think that [culture] just goes along with understanding who a person is and religion is a big part of that," Dudley said. "It's the nature of what religion is. Religion, for a lot of people, is a lifestyle."

Religious ignorance often leads to misunderstanding of the people who believe and practice that religion, and misunderstandings have a tendency to become attached to stereotypes. Although people may consciously try to avoid stereotyping others, people are subject to an unconscious bias of social groups, according to Psychology Today.

"The first thing you need to understand is that we all, as human beings, want to categorize things — that's the way our brains work," psy-

chology teacher **David Apel** said. "So the first thing is being aware that you have a tendency to want to categorize people, as well as things in the world, and you have to work to try to overcome that natural tendency that we all have."

Senior **Osama Azam** identifies with Islam, and after visiting his country of origin, Pakistan, he realized that misjudgments exist everywhere. In Pakistan, he found that people often acted hesitantly toward white Americans who were visiting, but natives had more ease.

"I think even after 9/11 and everything it goes back to the same thing: everybody has misconceptions about religion and [his or her] views," Azam said. "People in the Middle East have a different conception of what's going on here, and that's exactly what was with Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda. They had a misconception on what was going on here, and so they felt like as if it was their job to kill people. And what's interesting is that if they actually paid more attention to the Quran, the killing of one person in our religion is as if you killed all of humanity."

SURVEYING STUDENTS

From a survey during lunch, 100 students answered the following basic questions about religions. The students were instructed to answer as many questions as they could correctly without the use of their friends or the Internet, and they were allowed to leave blanks if they didn't know the answer. After handing out the surveys, many students gave it one glance and immediately handed it back without even trying the questions. Other students got halfway through the survey and said things among the lines of "Oh, this is sad" or some people smirked as they tried to make a joke with the way they responded. Three out of the 100 students didn't miss any of the questions, and eight students only missed one.

1. Name the five world religions:



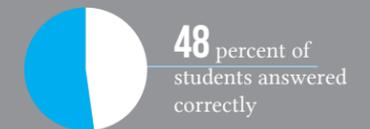
Correct Answer: Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism

2. The Torah is the sacred text of which religion?



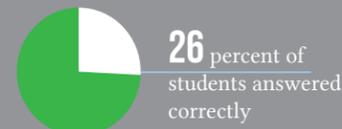
Correct Answer: Judaism

3. What religion is Ramadan associated with?



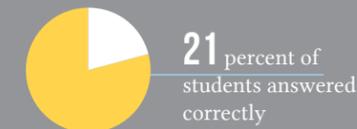
Correct Answer: Islam

4. Following the Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths to achieve enlightenment is associated with which religion?



Correct Answer: Buddhism

5. The "Om" Symbol represents the religion of:



Correct Answer: Hinduism

6. Name the two different sections of the Bible:



Correct Answer: Old and New Testament

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graphics by Kate Bowling.