#2.3 Buddhism

1. Buddhism Overview

Buddhism is a belief system that originated in _________ in the ____________. Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha Gautama, better known as the ___________(the ________________) who was born a prince in northeastern India, around 480 B.C.E., but then devoted his life to finding answers to spiritual questions.

Buddhism’s sacred text is called the Tripitaka, or Three Baskets of Wisdom, and is made up of the teachings of Buddha as they were passed down over generations. Most Buddhist texts take the genre of sutra, such as the ________________ and the Lotus Sutra.

Buddhism originated from a time and place the was dominated by Hinduism. As a result the two belief systems share some concepts, but differ in others.

The core beliefs of Buddhism are:

- _____________
- _____________
- _____________
- _____________
- _____________
- _____________

2. The Sacred Books of Buddhism

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<th>Tripitaka- “Three Baskets of Wisdom”</th>
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The Tripitaka (Sanskrit) or Tipiṭaka (Pāli), meaning "three baskets," is the formal term for the earliest surviving Buddhist teachings. It is also called the "Pali Canon" named after the language it was written in.

The teachings were passed down orally for around 200 years after the Buddha’s death before they were finally written down by Buddhist monks.

The Pali Canon falls into three general categories, or baskets, the first was the code of ethics to be obeyed by the early monks and nuns. The second category consists primarily of accounts of the Buddha’s teachings. The third category contains early commentary on the Buddha’s teachings from his followers.

1. Who wrote the Tripitaka?
2. What is contained in the Tripitaka?

3. Before the Tripitaka was written down, how were the stories in it passed from generation to generation? For how long were they passed down in this way?

4. As a source, why might a historian question the reliability of the Tripitaka as a historical document?

3. Core beliefs

Directions: Read the notes below and answer the questions that follow.

1) Philosophy or Religion?

Many people debate whether Buddhism is a philosophy or a religion. We refer to it as a “belief system” which includes both religions and philosophy.

Those who argue that Buddhism is a philosophy note that there is no worship of gods in the beliefs and practices associated with Buddhism. Instead, one’s spiritual journey is guided by their own determination and their teacher. In this way, Buddhism is different than Hinduism which has thousands of gods.

1a. Why do some people consider Buddhism a philosophy rather than a religion?

2) Reincarnation, Enlightenment, and Nirvana

Like Hindus, Buddhists believe that there is escape from the cycle of reincarnation. For Buddhists, the goal of spiritual life is to reach “nirvana” after death. It is similar to moksha that Hindus strive for. Nirvana, in Sanskrit, means “blown out,” as in a candle. It is the state of a still and empty mind. This can be accomplished by reaching a state of enlightenment like the Buddha did through intense meditation.

Statue of the reclining Buddha in Gal Vihara, Sri Lanka. The image of the reclining Buddha represents the last moments of the Buddha’s life before he died and entered state of nirvana.

2a. Do Buddhists believe in reincarnation?
2b. What is nirvana?

2c. How do Buddhists believe one can achieve enlightenment?

### 3) The Middle Path

Before devoting his life to seeking spiritual truth, according to legend, Siddhartha Gautama lived a life of luxury. When he left his father’s palace, he became an ascetic, a person who practices extreme self-discipline and denies themselves any comfort. He found that neither route brought him enlightenment. Instead, it was the Middle Path, sometimes called the Middle Way. Buddha’s teachings are meant to lead his followers down the Middle Path to enlightenment.

**Read it from the Sacred Text!**

The following text is an excerpt from Buddha’s sermon in which he describes the Middle Way. It is known as “Setting in Motion the Wheel of Law [Dharma].” This story was passed down orally by Buddhists until it was written down about two hundred years later in a collection known as the Three Baskets of Wisdom, or the *Tipitaka*.

**Excerpt 1 from “Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Law[Dharma]” from the *Tripitaka***

And the Blessed One thus addressed the five Bhikkhus [men that later became Buddha’s followers]: ‘There are two extremes, O Bhikkhus, which he who has given up the world, ought to avoid. What are these two extremes? A life given to pleasures, devoted to pleasures and lusts: this is degrading, sensual, vulgar, shameful, and profitless; and a life given to humiliation: this is painful, shameful, and profitless. By avoiding these two extremes, O Bhikkhus, the Buddha has gained the knowledge of the Middle Path which leads to insight, which leads to wisdom, which conduces to calm, to knowledge, to Nirvâna.

3a. What are the “two extremes” that Buddha warns his disciples about?

3b. Why is each extreme “profitless?”

3c. What does the Buddha suggest his disciples strive for instead of the “two extremes?”
**4. Four Noble Truths**

Buddha taught four principles that he believed to be true. They are called the Four Noble Truths. Put simply they are:

1. The Noble Truth of Suffering: **Life is suffering.**
2. The Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering: **Suffering is caused by desire.**
3. The Noble Truth of the Cessation [Stopping] of Suffering: **To end suffering, one must end desire.**
4. The Noble Truth of the Path: **To end suffering, follow the Eightfold Path.**

**Excerpt 2 from “Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Law[Dharma]” from the Tripitaka**

'This, O Bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of Suffering: Birth is suffering; decay is suffering; illness is suffering; death is suffering. Presence of objects we hate, is suffering; Separation from objects we love, is suffering; not to obtain what we desire, is suffering. Briefly...clinging to existence is suffering.

'This, O Bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering: Thirst, that leads to rebirth, accompanied by pleasure and lust, finding its delight here and there. (This thirst is threefold), namely, thirst for pleasure, thirst for existence, thirst for prosperity.

'This, O Bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering: (It ceases with) the complete cessation of this thirst,--a cessation which consists in the absence of every passion,--with the abandoning of this thirst, with the doing away with it, with the deliverance from it, with the destruction of desire.

'This, O Bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of the Path which leads to the cessation of suffering: that holy Eightfold Path, that is to say, Right Belief, Right Aspiration, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Means of Livelihood, Right Endeavour, Right Memory, Right Meditation....

4a. What does the Buddha list as examples of suffering?

4b. Buddhists believe that the 2nd Noble Truth, “Suffering is caused by desire,” is true. Do you? State a claim and provide evidence (examples from your experience) to support it.

4c. According to Buddha, how can one end suffering?
Buddhism’s Four Noble Truth states, “To end suffering, follow the Eightfold Path.” The Eightfold Path describes how one should act to eliminate desire and thus suffering. The Eightfold Path is the moral code of conduct for Buddhists, similar to the Ten Commandments in Judaism and Christianity.

Excerpt 3 from “Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Law [Dharma]” from the Tripitaka

'Which, O Bhikkhus, is this Middle Path the knowledge of which the Tathâgata has gained, which leads to insight, which leads to wisdom, which conduces to calm, to knowledge, to the Sambodhi, to Nirvâna? It is the holy Eightfold Path, namely, Right Belief, Right Aspiration, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Means of Livelihood, Right Endeavour, Right Memory, Right Meditation. This, O Bhikkhus, is the Middle Path the knowledge of which the Tathâgata has gained, which leads to insight, which leads to wisdom, which conduces to calm, to knowledge, to the Sambodhi, to Nirvâna.

'But since I possessed, O Bhikkhus, with perfect purity this true knowledge and insight into these four Noble Truths...then I knew, O Bhikkhus, that I had obtained the highest, universal Sambodhi....

'And this knowledge and insight arose in my mind: "The emancipation of my mind cannot be lost; this is my last birth; hence I shall not be born again!"

5. What do Buddhists suggest people do to alleviate suffering?

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1 The belief that life is suffering, that the Eightfold Path is a way to eliminate suffering and that it is possible to do.
2 The process of removing bad thoughts, desires, and cruelty from one’s mind before embarking on the path to Enlightenment.
3 Not lying, cursing, or speaking badly about others.
4 Conducting one’s self honestly, and without killing or stealing.
5 Only doing jobs that do not harm others.
6 Avoids all distractions and bodily desires.
7 The act of focusing one’s mind only on important topics like life, suffering and death.
8 Focused concentration that can lead to Enlightenment.
6. Rejection of the Caste System

Buddhism started in a region of the world where Hinduism dominated, but **Buddha rejected a major part of Hindu society: the caste system.**

Buddha taught that anyone, regardless of their place in society, could achieve enlightenment if they realized the Four Noble Truths and followed the Eightfold Path.

6a. If you were a member of the Brahmin caste, how would you react to Buddha’s teachings? Why?

6b. If you were a member of the Untouchables or the Shudras caste, how would you react to Buddhism? Why?
How are the beliefs, practices, and effects on social order of Hinduism and Buddhism similar? How are they different?
Directions: Review what you've learned about Hinduism and Buddhism, then fill in the Venn Diagram below to show what the belief systems have in common and how they differ.
1. Hinduism and Buddhism are similar in that both religions
   (1) practice a belief in many gods
   (2) provide followers with a rigid social caste system
   (3) stress attainment of a better life through spiritual rebirth
   (4) look to the teaching of one person for their basic beliefs

2. The Buddhist religion teaches that salvation is earned by
   (1) following the Ten Commandments
   (2) worshipping Allah as the one true god
   (3) learning to give up selfish desire
   (4) being baptized and confirmed

3. The terms Brahma, dharma, and moksha are most closely associated with which religion?
   (1) Judaism
   (2) Islam
   (3) Hinduism
   (4) animism

4. According to Buddhist principles, believers can end personal suffering by
   (1) doing good deeds
   (2) eliminating selfish desires
   (3) making pilgrimages to Mecca
   (4) relying on divine help

Base your answer on the diagram and on your knowledge of social studies.

5. The diagram illustrates the key concepts of which religion?
   (1) Islam
   (2) Christianity
   (3) Hinduism
   (4) Buddhism

Source: The Human Experience, Glencoe
6. Which speaker is most likely a Buddhist?
   (1) A
   (2) B
   (3) C
   (4) D

7. Which speaker expresses a belief in reincarnation?
   (1) A
   (2) B
   (3) C
   (4) D

8. Which belief is shared by Hindus and Buddhists?
   (1) Everyone should have the same social status.
   (2) People should pray five times a day.
   (3) The soul can be reincarnated.
   (4) Material wealth is a sign of the blessing of the gods.

9. Which belief system is most closely associated with the terms Eightfold Path, Four Noble Truths, and nirvana?
   (1) Buddhism
   (2) Christianity
   (3) Judaism
   (4) Shinto