



# Sociology

*Religion in America: Using Data Bases  
to Unlock the Sociological Imagination,  
by Wendy Youngblood Shepaug Valley High School, Washington CT*

# Essential Question: *How is America religious?*

## *Subquestions:*

1. What does it mean to be religious?
2. Are Americans religious in the same ways? How can you tell?
3. Why does religion in America matter to me?

# Course Goals *relative to unit*

- In short and long projects students will study behavior and populations using a variety of sociological tools.
- Students will learn to locate, interpret and apply information from many sources (specifically navigating data bases) to make informed judgments about social issues.
- Perhaps most importantly, students will learn to unlock their sociological imagination, reaching beyond the anecdotal parameters of their lived experiences to appreciate the wider, more complex and dynamic reality of the American populace.



# *Understanding by Design*

## **Unit Placement/Sequence:**

mid-October, 3<sup>rd</sup> unit, following:

- \* Behavioral Observation (use of scientific method to gather data);
- \* Intro to Sociology (history of the discipline, sociological imagination, theoretical perspectives)
- \* *Duration: one week of 84-minute periods (maybe 6-7 days, depending on pacing)*

## **Enduring Understandings:**

- \* Religion is an important social institution that affects how people live their lives
- \* There is great diversity of religious experience within the United States
- \* Sociologists gather, organize and interpret data to learn about patterns of behavior in society

# Skill Goals

- **Access and apply information from a variety of data tools to develop conclusions and make judgments**
- **Interpret trends in data**
- **Predict, identify and describe correlation**
- **Hypothesize about causation**
- **Reflect, make connections about the role of religion in their lives**

# Day One: Starting from the Personal

1. Writing prompt: *What does religion mean to me/in my life?*  
(~15-20 minutes)
2. Identify belief/practice (crayons)
3. In small groups, identify Commonalities & Differences from responses
4. Name the thematic groups generated by Comm/Diff exercise
5. Discuss in small groups: *How are we alike? How are we different? What explains those similarities/differences?*
6. Lexicon Intro: Religion Tree on board

*HW: research one denomination: Beliefs/Practices*

*Extra Credit option: attend services with a friend/relative of a different denomination/faith.  
(hypothesize, observe, record, draw conclusions, reflect)*

# Day Two: Me & Others

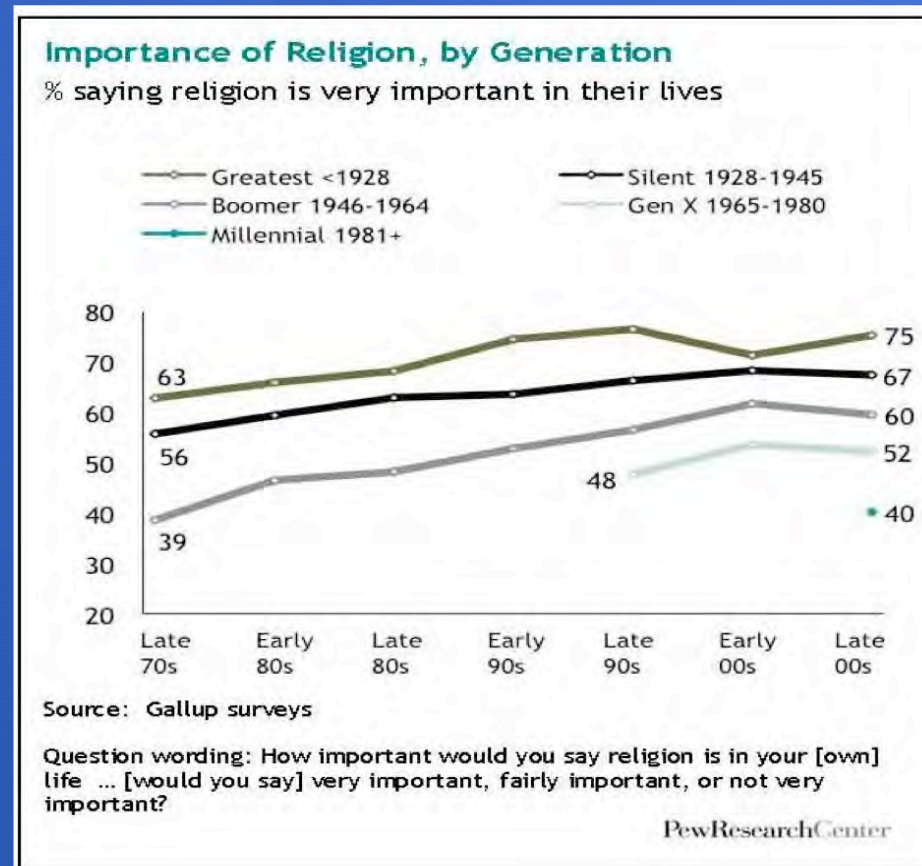
1. Meet in groups to chart HW info on denominations: beliefs/practices
2. Hypothesize: *am I more or less religious than most?*
  - a. define "religious"
  - b. class/CT/gender/US/other groups
3. Compare Yourself Survey

Hypotheses confirmed/not confirmed: why?
4. Write 7-10 questions for parents regarding their religious beliefs & practices (can use up to 5 Qs from survey)

*HW: interview parents and record responses*



# Data Literacy: Religion by Generation



- What is the title of this graph?
- What information is on the x and y axes?
- What do the different lines represent?
- Why is one line shorter than the others?
- Is the question a good one? Explain your answer.
- Are the answer choices good? Explain your answer.



# Day Three A: Investigating Data

What does data tell us? *Analyzing examples...*

1. Finding info on Beliefs and Behaviors:

<http://www.thearda.com/learningcenter/tutorials/Finding%20Info%20on%20Beliefs%20and%20Behaviors.doc>

2. CT rates of religious adherence:

<http://www.thearda.com/mapsReports/maps/map.asp?state=7&variable=611>

3. Jewish Congregations: [http://www.thearda.com/Denoms/D\\_1210\\_t.asp](http://www.thearda.com/Denoms/D_1210_t.asp)

4. Income distribution by denomination:

<http://pewforum.org/Income-Distribution-Within-US-Religious-Groups.aspx>

Use ARDA site to investigate demographics of 3 denominations. Write down 5 interesting facts. Be prepared to defend your choices.

# Day Three B: Using Data

Students use [www.thearda.com](http://www.thearda.com) & [www.pewforum.org](http://www.pewforum.org) to record the following:

- 2 ways researchers ask a question about an issue
- 3 interesting facts about your issue
- something that surprised you
- Why is the wording of a survey question important?

*HW: reflect on what you learned about your social issue and American religious beliefs*

# Day Four: Analyzing Data

Students investigate databases to learn more about Americans' religious practices and beliefs

- *Goal: Find 3 correlations (patterns) in belief and/or practice within a demographic group or between 2 groups . What does the correlation suggest about the group(s)?*
- *Challenge: Is the relationship causal? Explain your reasoning*

## Quicklinks

- [ARDA: Most Popular Archive Searches](#)
- [ARDA Quick Stats by Topic](#)
- [Pew Forum: Topics](#)
- [Pew Forum: Beliefs and Practices](#)

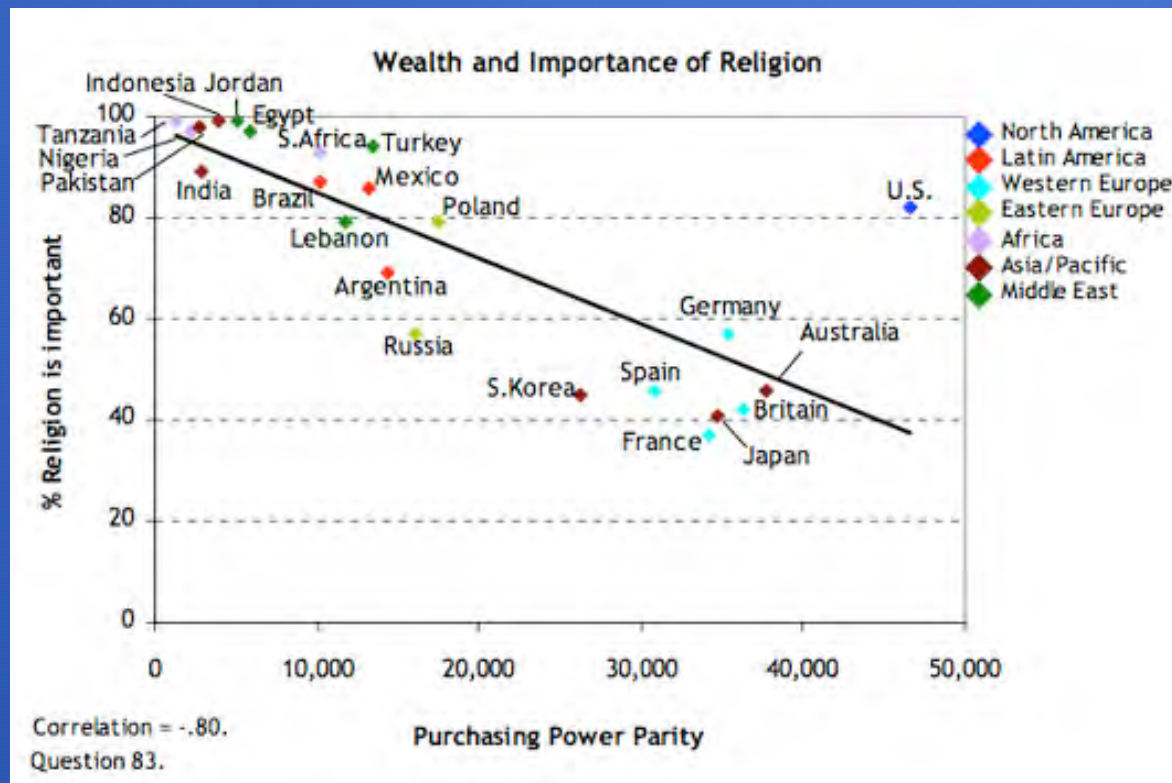


# Day Five A: *How is data used in the real world?*

- Public policy
- Our understanding of ourselves & others

# Why is America So Religious?

by Charles Blow, in Op-Ed, *New York Times*, 9/29/08



- ★ What does this graph tell us:
  - about religion?
  - about the US?
  - about other nations?
- ★ How is this information conveyed?

# Day Five B: A Public Debate

Listen to excerpt from 2/16/2007 NPR:

## *Is America Too Damn Religious?*

*Yes: Rev. Barry Lynn, Susan Jacoby, Allan Wolfe*

*No: Jean Bethke Elshtain, Albert Raboteau, William Galston*

- Students record key arguments from each side on T-charts
- Students rank arguments from most to least persuasive, discuss choices
- Exit card: Students answer “Is America Too Damn Religious?” with reasons



# Summative Assessment

In-class written reflection, followed by fishbowl:

*How is America religious?\**

*How do you know? Why does it matter?*

- Reflections scored with *Developing Defensible Conclusions and Judgments* rubric (schoolwide competency)
- Fishbowl participation scored with *Effective Communication* rubric (schoolwide competency)

*\*variation: How are Americans religious?*