

## **India & South Asia: From Area Studies to Ethnic Studies**

### **Introduction to the Course for Educators**

Dear Colleague,

I hope you are able to implement some version of this course at your institution! I have it aligned to Washington State Social Studies Standards, but it is right in line with Common Core-driven expectations and should fit well with any state's standards. This course also very much supports the new Washington Ethnic Studies Framework.

Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions or suggestions:  
Rachel Heilman, Issaquah High School ([HeilmanR@issaquah.wednet.edu](mailto:HeilmanR@issaquah.wednet.edu))

Here is some information beyond the syllabus that you may find helpful:

#### **Level**

The course is leveled at Grades 11-12 (once students have completed a World History and perhaps a World Geography course). The topics students would benefit most from having before the course are imperialism and globalization in addition to having the reading and writing skills that 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Grade courses typically help develop.

You could level up for an undergraduate setting if you feel it's appropriate (or if you'd like to extend it to a year-long course in high school) by using one or more of the optional texts. You could include a book study with each unit, choose one of the optional texts that complements your discipline to use throughout, or even use a novel of your choice. Each weekly agenda includes suggested sections of the optional texts that apply, so that might help you consider which best matches your own goals and preferences.

I provided modified options when I thought it would typically be needed, but beyond that I think leveling down would require that you doing some fairly significant modification yourself or add lessons to provide context and reading/writing support.

#### **Pacing**

The class is organized as a one-semester (18 week) course based on the weekly agendas. However, the weekly agendas are organized by lesson – so you could simply redistribute those to fit your time frame more exactly.

I have not provided estimated time for each lesson because there can be so much variation in bell schedules and even class ability and personality. I did estimate what could be done in a typical week, though, and constructed the

weekly agendas to match what I think a high school level class would accomplish in a week's worth of lessons.

### **Required Materials**

I developed the course so that there is no text that you need to purchase – you'll just need to make copies of the articles or provide readings digitally. You may want to have your institution purchase a few of the optional texts to provide you with some background for yourself. You could also have a class set of one of them if you want to expand any of the units or if you have more than a semester, but it isn't necessary and none of the lessons require it.

### **Modifying for Other Courses**

Although the units all work together, you could use just one of them as part of a different course. Unit 1 goes well with a Geography course, Unit 2 would fit well in a History course, and Unit 3 might complement a Sociology or Ethnic Studies course. You could also use one in a literature course as an introduction to a South Asian novel if they match thematically. Unit 1 would serve as an introduction to the region.

### **Controversial Material**

I haven't included anything that is controversial in terms of academic approaches to the region, but since you will be teaching about South Asian culture and are likely to have students with South Asian heritage who bring their personal and family experiences with them it's possible that things may feel controversial at times. For example, the course includes an examination of national identity in India that shaped what have become the contentious politics of today, you'll encounter U.S. immigration policy, and there is a lesson on caste and how it is experienced by South Asians in the U.S.

You will have your own philosophy underpinning your teaching and your own vision for the purpose of education. Keeping that in mind as you teach the course will guide your response to any parent or student complaints.

I developed the coursework with my own philosophy in mind – in our classroom community we are working towards exposure to academic work on these subjects, learning from the experiences of others, and building habits of mind that lead to successful completion of future academic work in addition to meaningful participation in a diverse society. My purpose is not to inform students of my opinions or demand their opinions or experiences of the world conform to anyone's thinking. This approach has never, in twenty years of teaching history and civics, led to a conflict with parents or

students that went beyond addressing their concerns by listening to their worries and explaining my purpose. That doesn't mean there are no absolute truths or values in the world, it just means that it's my job to give students the scaffolding to discover those for themselves. It also doesn't mean I won't have a situation I can't keep civil next week – we're all people and these are contentious times – so I don't want to suggest controversy never happens. I have put every effort into ensuring this class goes smoothly for you, though, and have been mindful about not setting you up for conflict.

If there is something you feel personally uncomfortable with teaching because you need more time to get familiar with the material or if your state has put legal barriers in place, you should absolutely modify as needed.

Happy Teaching!

Rachel Heilman

[HeilmanR@issaquah.wednet.edu](mailto:HeilmanR@issaquah.wednet.edu)

Issaquah High School Social Studies Dept

Issaquah, WA