



Exploring Religious Literacy in Children's Museums: Some Whys and Hows

**Introductions:
Who we are & where we're coming from**



Who we are

- > dedicated to children birth-12 and their families since 1980
- > 1+ million served annually, including 250k in neighborhoods
- > audience reflects Houstonians
- > bilingual, English and Spanish



A Playground for Your Mind™

City of Houston's child population is one of the largest & most diverse in the nation.

- 1.35 million ages 0-12¹⁰
- 29% live in households below the poverty level¹
- 19% Black, 54% Latinx, 20% White¹
- 28% foreign born¹



New Year's Noon Celebration 2016

Project-based learning

linked to school standards

Exhibits

12 exhibits

Tot*Spot

SECRET spy missions

Learning labs

- Science Station
- Power Science Lab
- Maker Annex
- Library



Onsite STEM Labs



Invention Convention Exhibit,
Earthquake Table

Onsite

>30% free annually

Free visit programs

- Free Family Passes
- Open Doors group visits
- Free Family Nights weekly
- Family Math Adventures

Open Doors partners

1,200+ partners:

501(c)3, local government,
faith-based, school-based,
WIC

Community programs

100% free to families

Out-of-school time programs

- Afterschool STEM
- Summer literacy camps
- Activity kits for home use



Parent engagement programs

- Parent/child workshops
- School family learning events
- Literacy kits for loan & to keep

Highlights



- Founded in 1913 by science teachers and professors
- Fostering child-directed play and learning through hands-on open exploration
- Visitor demographics
- Arts & Culture overview

**Introductions:
Who we are & where we're coming from**

Activity

**What's something
you believe
deeply?**

3' free write

Activity

**What's
something you
believe
deeply?**

**Notice: how do
you feel
reflecting on
this?**

Activity

**What's
something you
believe deeply?**

**Notice:
how did this
experience
feel?**

Share Out

**Wonder:
what might
visitors
experience?**



Faithful Friends

Exploring Religious Differences

CMH Kids



Christina M



111



1.8 hours of discussion



Member



Share



32 Topics



32 Members

Apr 19, 2022

What words describe you?



Mar 10, 2022

Tell Us All About You!



May 23

Being a good friend



Mar 9, 2022

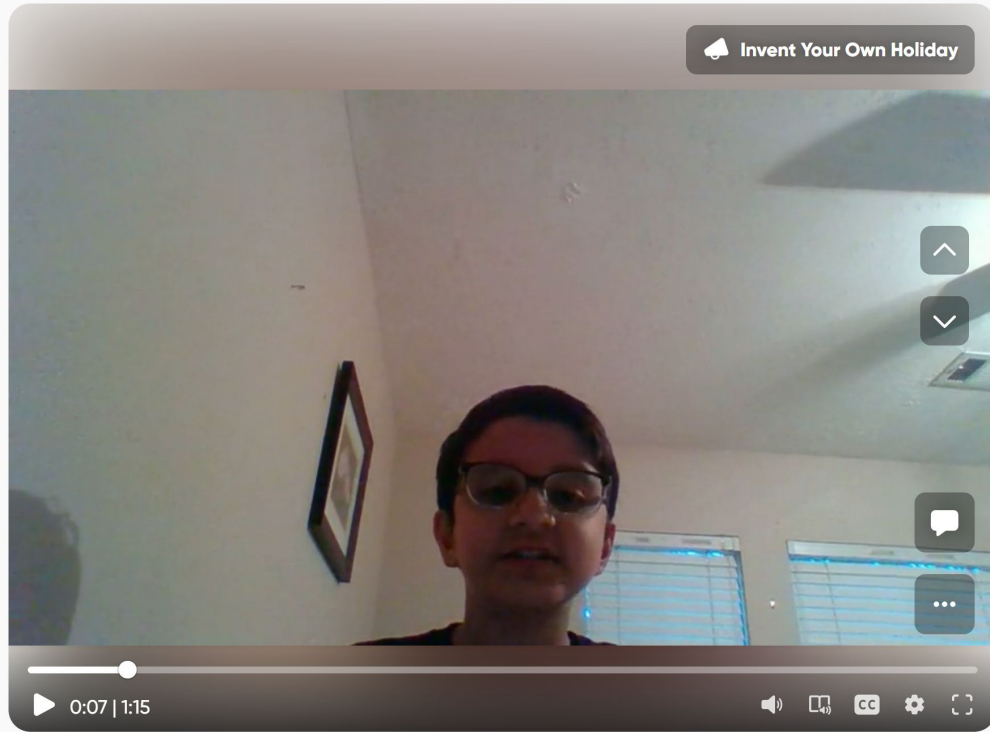
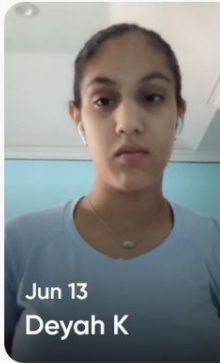
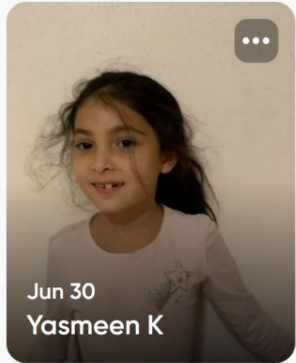
Tell Us About Your Faith



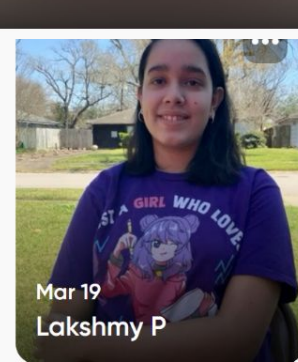
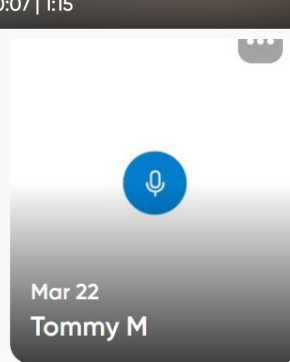
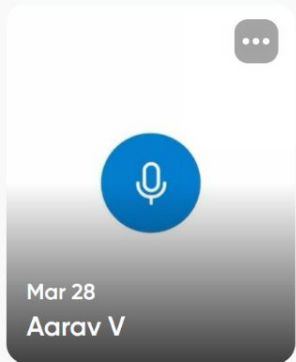
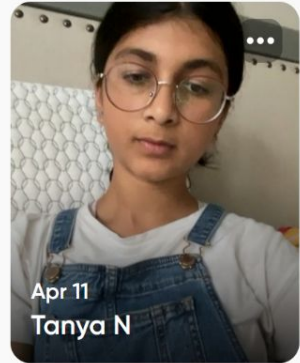
Record

Invent Your Own Holiday

10 Responses

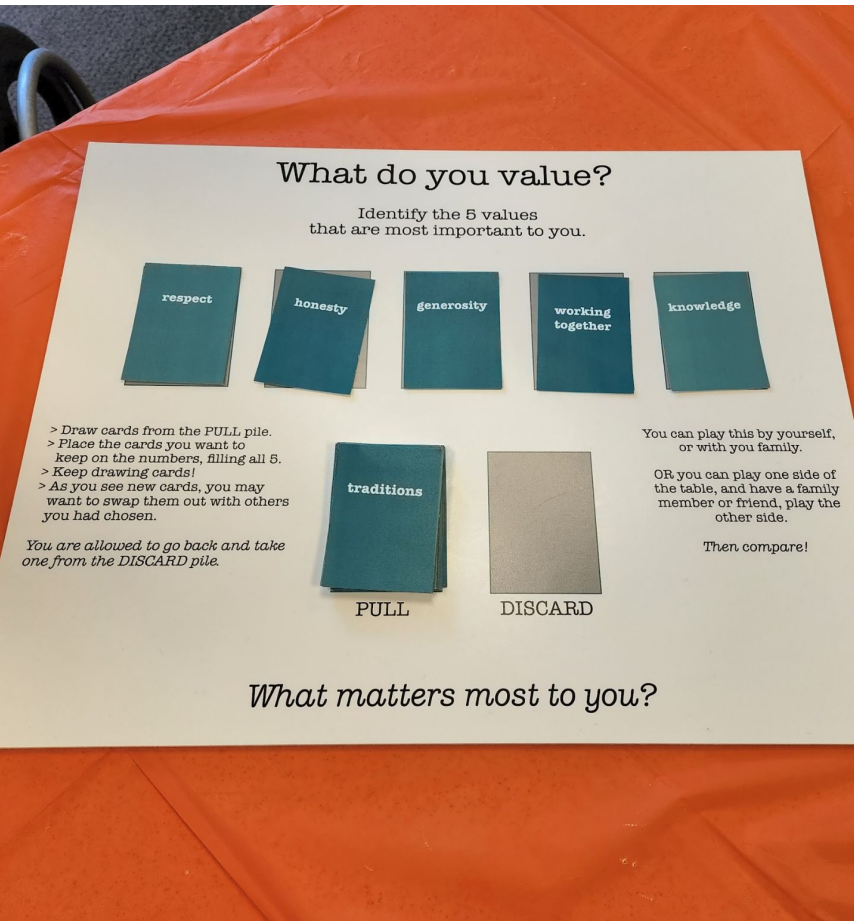
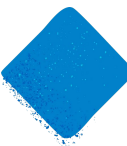


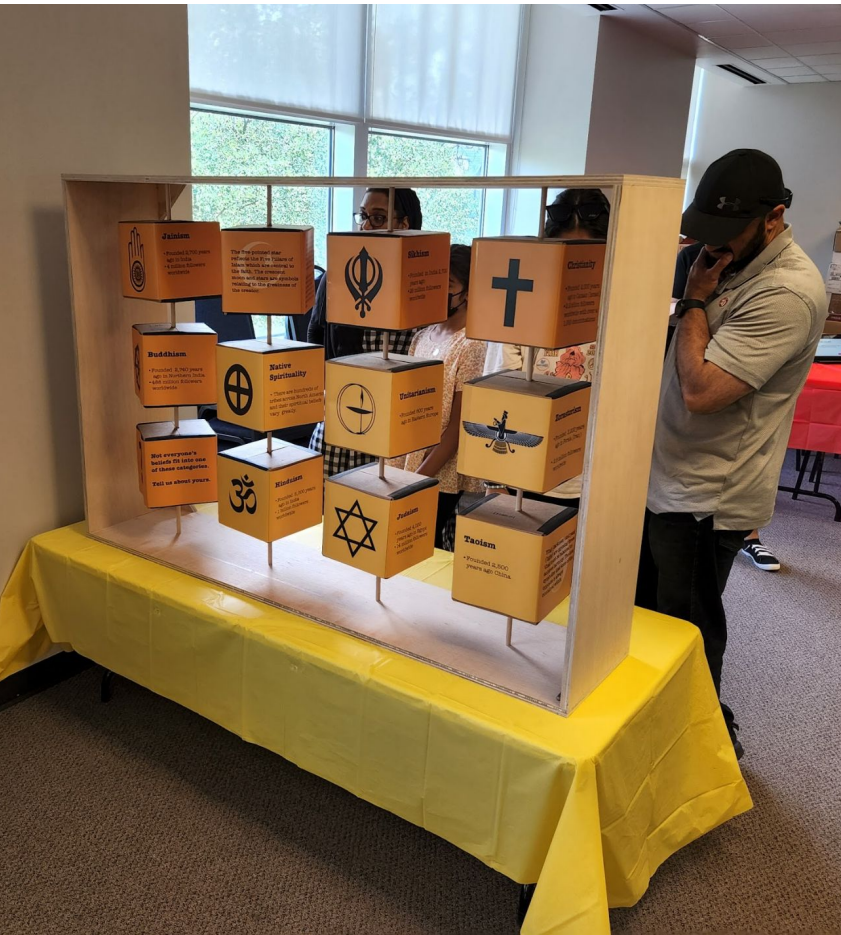
Search responses



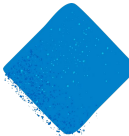


What do you value? (prototype)



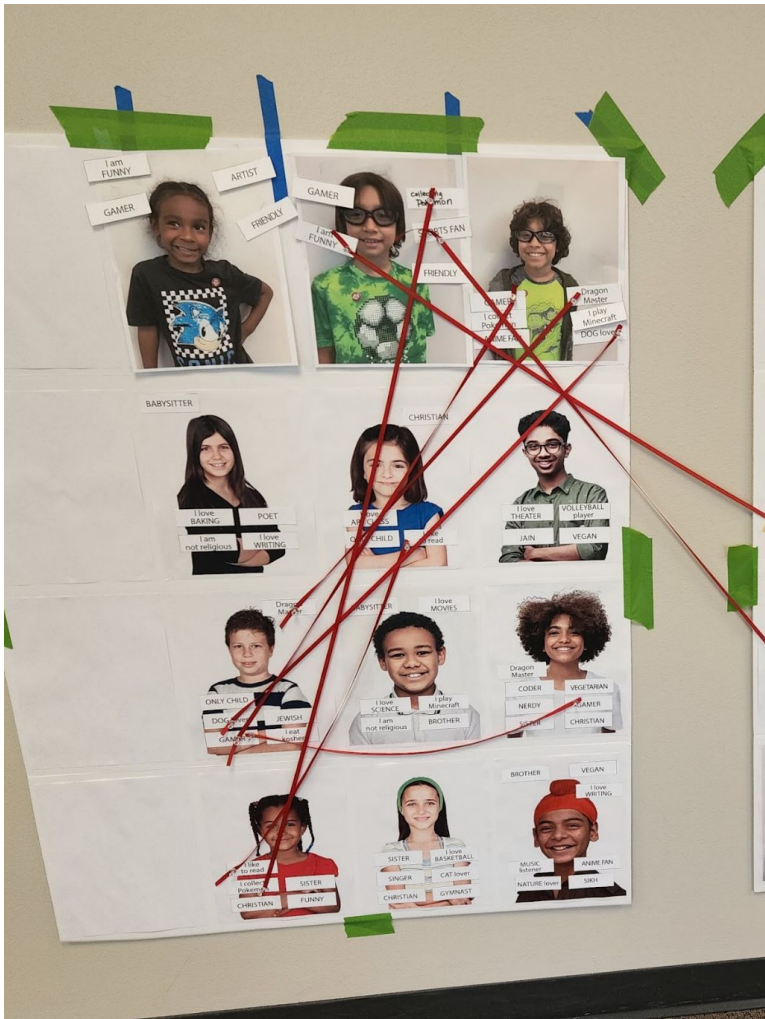
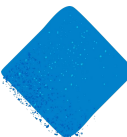


Religious Symbols (prototype)





How are we alike/different? (prototype)



What are your reasons for wanting your child to explore the values and traditions of different religions?

Reduce fear of unknown; Increase respect for others

Highlight shared values, like love and hope; Reduce misconception and stereotypes

Create helpful dialogue within families

People understand how to ask questions of others

to show support through well-wishes during times of special observances

Help make children better friends with people from different faith backgrounds

Learn about shared values like love and hope

Help children understand how to make friends with people from religious backgrounds different than their own

What are your reasons for not wanting your child to explore the values and traditions of different religions?

It is confusing for children to be exposed to different religions

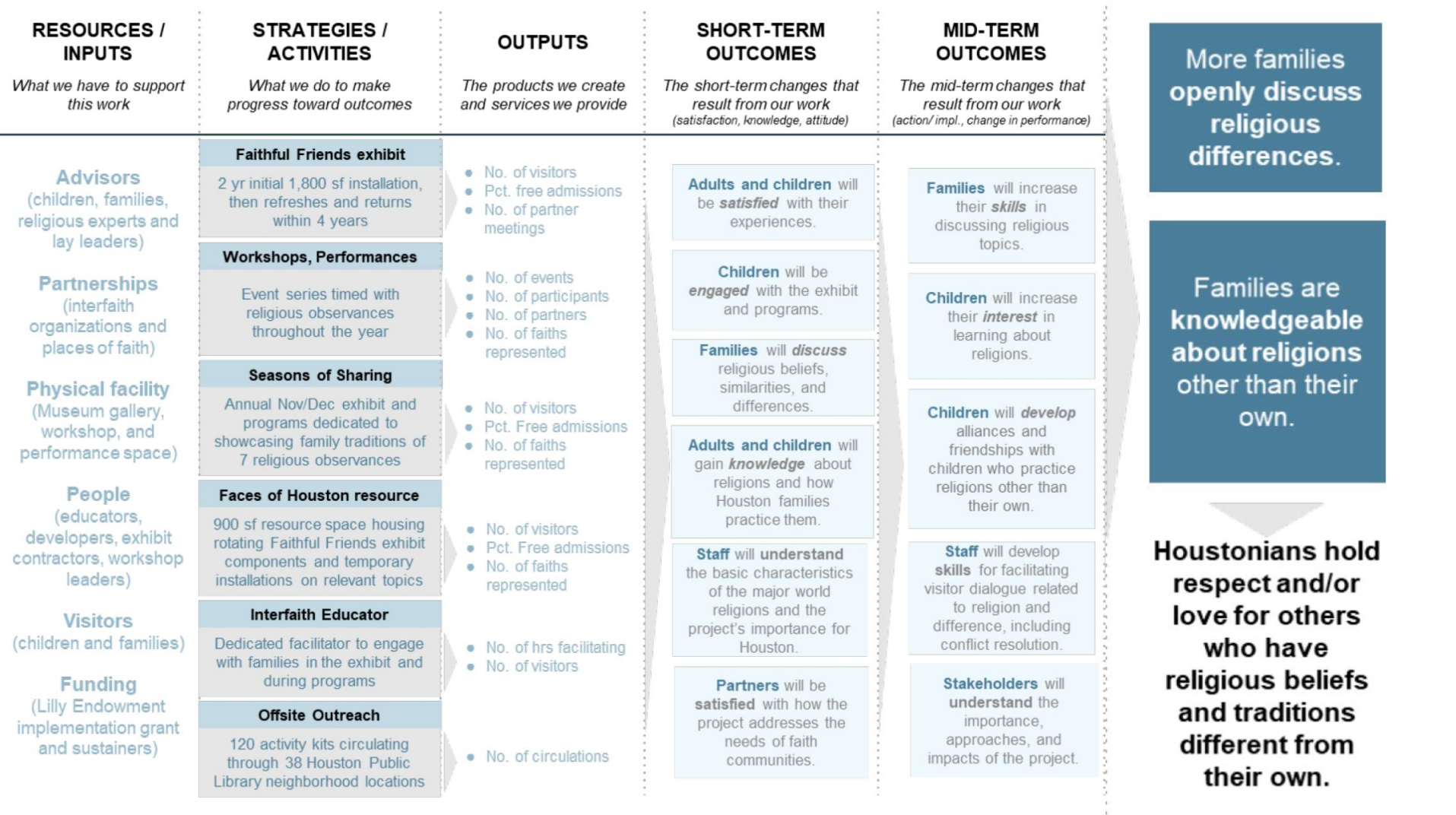
The exhibit could show bias to another religion that I do not believe in

Religion divides

I choose for my child not to know about religion

Do you think it is important for children to be familiar with the values and practices of different religions? And, at what age?

1. Extremely important	66	56%	11-12 years old	2	2%
2. Very important	35	30%	13 years old or above	8	7%
3. Important	1	1%	5-6 years old	32	28%
4. Somewhat important	14	12%	7-8 years old	19	16%
5. Not so important	1	1%	9-10 years old	4	3%
			under 5	51	44%





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The Beginnings of Religious Literacy at Boston Children's Museum



Religious Literacy Orientation

Framework #1: Mona Abo-Zena, Assistant Professor, College of Education and Human Development, University of Massachusetts, Boston

- Cognitive - *“Is God bigger than a dinosaur?”*
- Social - *“Why does grandma wear a prayer shawl?”*
- Physical - *“Why don’t we eat pork?”*
- Emotional - *“Where did the dead dog go?”*

Religious Literacy Orientation

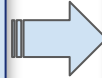
Framework #2: Diane L. Moore, Founding Faculty Director of Religion and Public Life, Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts

- In order to reduce stereotypes, prejudice, and violence, it is critically important to recognize the great diversity within religions.
- An embodied understanding of the ways religion has enacted structural violence, particularly towards marginalized communities.
- A tool for examining the positionality and power structures inherent within institutions.

The Cost of Religious Illiteracy

If

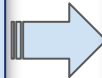
Religion and spirituality is embedded in each person's development, lived experiences, and culture



Then

The omission of religion and spirituality limits our ability to reflect the reality of children's lives and engage families.

Mainstream [white, western] religious beliefs and values are threaded into everyday experiences, and can uphold structures of oppression



By keeping spirituality and religion invisible, there is no opportunity to have dialogue about bias, stereotyping, and misinformation.

Mission

The Religious Literacy Initiative supports families by **providing opportunities to develop a curiosity** about the ways in which religion is embedded in identity and culture. Through various platforms, including exhibits, programs, object-based learning and community collaborations the goal of this initiative is to help children, families and caregivers feel more comfortable talking about their religious identities and **develop skills to practice empathy towards other people.**

The overarching goal of the Religious Literacy Initiative is for children, families, and caregivers, regardless of belief systems and practices, **including those with no religious beliefs or affiliation**, to feel supported in engaging with topics that affect children's identity development and wellbeing.

The Religious Literacy Initiative is designed to provide children, **and the adults who care for them**, opportunities to:

- Understand how beliefs and values develop as a facet of identity
- Develop a sense of curiosity and comfort around differing belief systems and lived experiences
- Celebrate religious, cultural and familial traditions

Vision

Our vision is to establish Boston Children's Museum as a model for other cultural institutions to **center the lived experiences of children and families with diverse identities, beliefs and religions.**

We do this through:

- Generating ongoing learning opportunities about religious literacy from experts in the field, and offering staff professional development
- Serving as a resource to other museum professionals by **sharing materials, tools, research** and facilitating convenings
- Defining new ways of integrating a religious literacy lens across our work, policies and procedures

Religious Literacy Application



Share knowledge and build cultural wealth

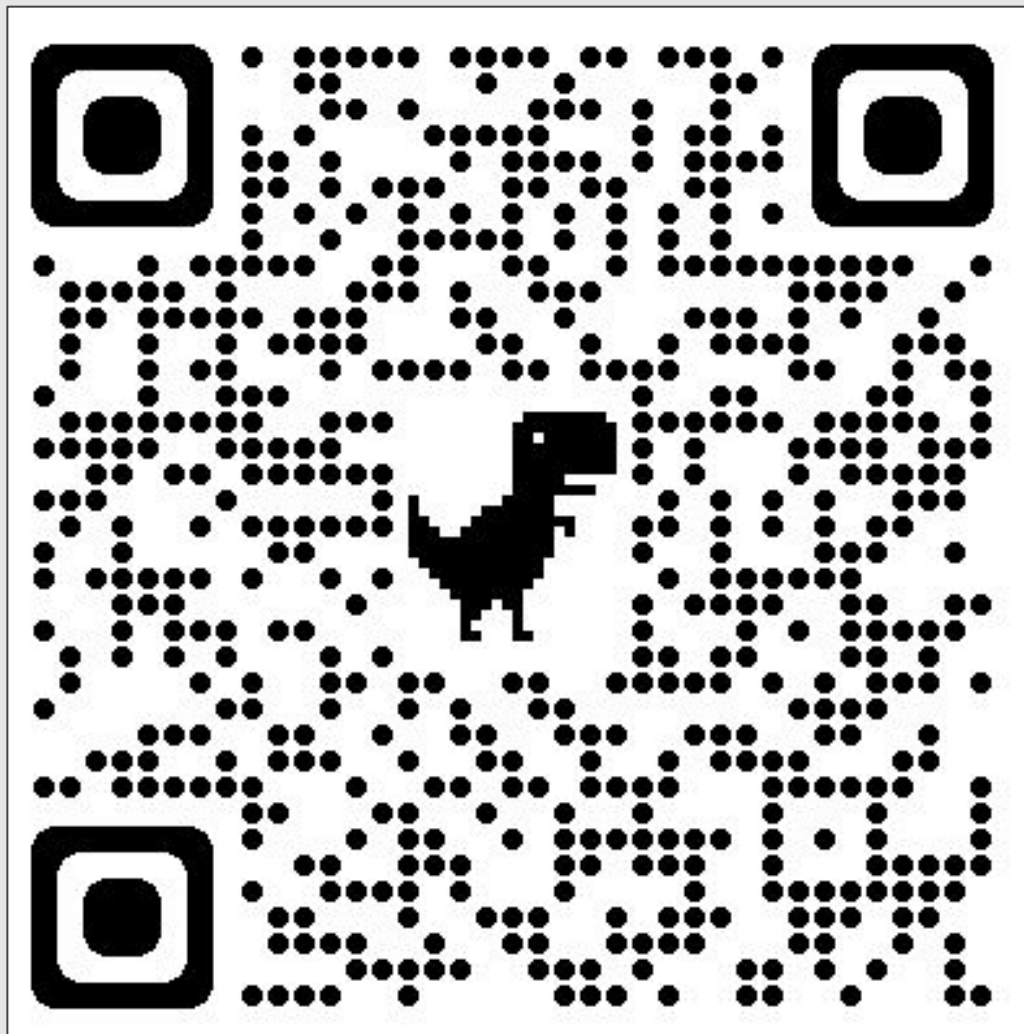


Encourage play and curiosity



Explore values that connect with religious ideas

Reflecting on Religious Literacy at Your Museum



OR VISIT

pollev.com/religionacm125

Based on what you've heard today, what might be some ways that you can start approaching Religious Literacy within your museum?

- Individual reflection: 2 minutes
- Pair and share: 4 minutes
- Group of 4 share: 8 minutes

Questions

