

RESOURCE LIBRARY  
LESSON

## Languages and Religions of Europe

Students are introduced to the major language and religious groups of Europe. They explore how those groups align with and/or cross country borders.

**GRADES**

6 - 8

**SUBJECTS***English Language Arts, Geography, Human Geography***CONTENTS**

3 Activities

## ACTIVITY 1: INTRODUCTION TO EUROPE'S LANGUAGES & RELIGIONS | 50 MINS

### DIRECTIONS

**1. Brainstorm what makes a group.**

Ask: *What is a group?* Have a whole-class discussion about what makes a group. Ask: *What can groups be based on?* Write students' ideas on the board. Encourage students to include criteria such as religious affiliation, language, race, and nationality, and to think of different ways people might describe themselves.

**2. Have pairs or small groups identify groups, at different scales, that they know.**

Divide students into pairs or small groups and distribute a copy of the Five-Column Chart to each group. Draw a five-column chart on the board and model labeling the chart with the following headings: School, City, State, Country, and Continent. Have each pair or small group label their charts and list as many groups in each category as possible. Provide support, as needed.

### **3. Have a whole-class discussion about the groups students identified.**

Have each pair or group share their list with the class. Compile a class list on the board in the five-column chart you drew. Allow students to share their ideas without correction. Then ask: *Which of the groups might need to have their own region to live in? Which groups do you think can or should be mixed together?* Tell students that in the next few lessons of this unit, they will explore the human geography of Europe, including different language and religious groups and where those groups are found in different parts of Europe.

### **4. Have students list what they already know about languages and religions in Europe.**

Ask students to look back at the notes about Europe the class took in Lesson 2: Gathering Ideas About Europe. Have students review their initial ideas about language and religion in Europe. Distribute a copy of the worksheet Cultural Overview of Europe to each student. Have students record their ideas about language and religion in item 1 on the worksheet. Tell students they will revisit the list from Lesson 2 again later in this unit, when they will make changes to the list based on what they learn.

### **5. Have students read a passage and answer questions.**

Have pairs of students read the passage on the worksheet. Then have students independently complete items 2-3 with their ideas about languages and religions in Europe. Invite volunteers to share their ideas and create a class list. Ask: *What questions do you still have about European languages and religions? What might be some good sources of information about languages and religions in Europe?*

## Tip

Make sure students understand that this activity is intended to allow them to share their ideas, not to learn correct answers. Students will return to these ideas later to make additions and corrections.

## Informal Assessment

Have each student write a reflective journal entry that addresses the following questions:

- What did you used to think about Europe's languages and religions before this activity?
- What have you learned that changed that thinking?
- What issues related to Europe's languages and religions interest you? What would you like to learn more about?
- What are you still unsure of?

## Extending the Learning

- Have students make a personal connection by brainstorming a cultural overview of your region. Ask them to include cultural differences, such as languages and religions, of people in your region. Ask students how the movement of people impacted what languages and religions are found in your region.
- Encourage students to use current events to research and report on ways people of differing languages and religions cooperate, learn to coexist peacefully, and/or assimilate.

## OBJECTIVES

## Subjects & Disciplines

- English Language Arts
- **Geography**
  - Human Geography

## Learning Objectives

Students will:

- explain what makes a group and which groups might cause conflict when combined in the same country or area

- articulate their initial ideas and expectations about what religions and languages are present in Europe

## Teaching Approach

- Learning-for-use

## Teaching Methods

- Brainstorming
- Cooperative learning
- Discussions
- Reading

## Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

- 21st Century Student Outcomes
  - Learning and Innovation Skills
    - Communication and Collaboration
- Critical Thinking Skills
  - Remembering
  - Understanding
- Geographic Skills
  - Asking Geographic Questions

## National Standards, Principles, and Practices

### IRA/NCTE STANDARDS FOR THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

- Standard 9:

Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

# NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM STANDARDS

- **Theme 1:**

Culture

- **Theme 5:**

Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

## NATIONAL GEOGRAPHY STANDARDS

- **Standard 10:**

The characteristics, distribution, and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics

- **Standard 13:**

How the forces of cooperation and conflict among people influence the division and control of Earth's surface

### **Preparation**

## BACKGROUND & VOCABULARY

### Background Information

Some groups cause conflict when combined in the same country or area. You can look at languages and religions in Europe to see how cultural differences have divided Europeans. Europeans speak a variety of languages. They worship in many different churches, mosques, and temples. They have diverse language backgrounds. For centuries, Europeans' cultural differences contributed to a war-torn landscape. Armies battled over which church would minister to the people or which group would control a territory. In the 20th Century, millions died in World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1939-1945). Both wars began in Europe. They were fueled in part by these cultural divisions. Today, language and religion still divide Europeans. However, they are also united in organizations such as the European Union, Council of Europe, and United Nations. These organizations resolve problems through negotiation and cooperation.

### Prior Knowledge

# Recommended Prior Activities

- None

## Vocabulary

| <b>Term</b>       | <b>Part of Speech</b> | <b>Definition</b>   |
|-------------------|-----------------------|---|
| city              | <i>noun</i>           | large settlement with a high population density.  |
| continent         | <i>noun</i>           | one of the seven main land masses on Earth.   |
| Council of Europe | <i>noun</i>           | international organization based in Strasbourg, Germany, established "to promote democracy and protect human rights and the rule of law in Europe." |
| country           | <i>noun</i>           | geographic territory with a distinct name, flag, population, boundaries, and government.  |
| culture           | <i>noun</i>           | learned behavior of people, including their languages, belief systems, social structures, institutions, and material goods.                         |
| European Union    | <i>noun</i>           | association of European nations promoting free trade, ease of transportation, and cultural and political links.                                     |
| language          | <i>noun</i>           | set of sounds, gestures, or symbols that allows people to communicate.  |
| region            | <i>noun</i>           | any area on Earth with one or more common characteristics. Regions are the basic units of geography.  |
| religion          | <i>noun</i>           | a system of spiritual or supernatural belief.   |
| state             | <i>noun</i>           | nation or national government.  |
| territory         | <i>noun</i>           | land an animal, human, or government protects from intruders.   |
| United Nations    | <i>noun</i>           | international organization that works for peace, security and cooperation.  |

## Before Moving on to the Next Activity

Students can do Lesson 6, Activity 1 and Lesson 6, Activity 2 in sequence. Or the class can divide into small groups, with each group doing one activity and later presenting their findings to the class.

### ACTIVITY 2: THE LANGUAGES OF EUROPE | 50 MINS

### DIRECTIONS

### 1. Have students read a passage about languages of Europe.

Introduce the vocabulary term *language family*. A language family is a "group of languages with a common ancestry and similar words." Tell students that Indo-European is the largest and most widespread language family. It is the primary language family in the United States. Divide students into pairs. Distribute a copy of the handout Languages of Europe to each pair. Have partners read the passage and sketch a diagram of the Indo-European language family tree. Answer any questions they may have.

### 2. Have students compare and contrast maps of language groups and political boundaries.

Distribute copies of the worksheet Mapping the Languages of Europe and the maps Country Borders in Europe and Dominant Languages of Europe. Have students complete the worksheet by comparing and contrasting language groups and political boundaries. As you walk around the class, check for student understanding of language groups.

### 3. Have a whole-class discussion about the languages of Europe.

Regroup as a whole class and discuss what students noticed as they compared and contrasted. Ask:

- *Are there more or fewer language groups than you expected? Explain.*
- *Within each language group, there are many dialects of each language. So even within the groups there are differences. Do you think these divisions within groups are also important? Why or why not?*
- *Why do you think language is important to groups and regions?*
- *Is a common language necessary? Why or why not?*

## Modification

You can also use this activity in English Language Arts classes to focus on word origin, word families, spelling, and related vocabulary skills.

## Informal Assessment

Have students apply these ideas about groups and regions to the issue of human migration. Ask students to write about what it would be like for a group of people to move into a region where the rest of the population spoke a different language. Have them include details about the difficulties the new group would face and what choices the people within that region could make about how to handle the newcomers.

## Extending the Learning

Remind students that language diversity in Europe is steeped in the history of the region. Discuss the past and growing language diversity in your local area or state and the United States. Ask: *What are the pros of increasing language diversity? What are the cons? How does ethnic diversity impact our state and our community?*

## OBJECTIVES

## Subjects & Disciplines

- English Language Arts
- **Geography**
  - Human Geography

## Learning Objectives

Students will:

- name and describe languages spoken in Europe
- analyze maps to identify regions where languages and country borders do not correspond

## Teaching Approach

- Learning-for-use

## Teaching Methods

- Cooperative learning
- Discussions
- Reading



- Writing

# Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

- 21st Century Student Outcomes
  - Learning and Innovation Skills
    - Communication and Collaboration
- Critical Thinking Skills
  - Analyzing
  - Understanding
- Geographic Skills
  - Acquiring Geographic Information
  - Analyzing Geographic Information
  - Answering Geographic Questions

## National Standards, Principles, and Practices

### IRA/NCTE STANDARDS FOR THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

- Standard 9:

Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

### NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM STANDARDS

- Theme 1:

Culture

- Theme 5:

Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

### NATIONAL GEOGRAPHY STANDARDS

- Standard 1:

How to use maps and other geographic representations, geospatial technologies, and spatial thinking to understand and communicate information

- **Standard 10:**

The characteristics, distribution, and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics

- **Standard 13:**

How the forces of cooperation and conflict among people influence the division and control of Earth's surface

- **Standard 4:**

The physical and human characteristics of places

## **Preparation**

# BACKGROUND & VOCABULARY

## Background Information

Although small in area, Europe has been a world interaction zone of people and cultures. A key cultural component that shapes national and cultural identity in Europe is language. There are over 30 languages spoken in Europe today. Most Europeans speak an Indo-European language. Indo-European languages developed during the Neolithic times in the Middle East. Through immigration, they spread into Europe and displaced/drove out the languages that were originally spoken on the continent. There are six Indo-European languages spoken by millions of people in Europe today, including: Hellenic (Greek); Romance (Latin-based languages of the Mediterranean and Romanian); Celtic (largely extinct, but Gaelic, Welsh, and Breton); Germanic (Scandinavian languages, modern German, Dutch, and English); Balto-Slavonic; and Illyrian-Thracian (Albanian). There are also several prominent non-Indo-European languages in Europe. These languages belong to their own language families, including the: Uralic family (Finn-Ugric); Semitic family (Arabic and Hebrew); Altaic family (Turkish); and Basque (unknown origin).

Languages are evolving in Europe at an incredibly rapid rate—just as English is evolving in the United States. Developments such as text messaging and the Internet are creating new methods of communication in all languages. Many European languages have seen an influx of English words due to the rise of the Internet and diffusion of technology with English names.

For example, since the rise of the Internet, Hungarian has adopted the words email and Internet, as well as added verbs that mean to email and to go on the Internet (*emailezik* and *internetezik* respectively).

## Prior Knowledge

## Recommended Prior Activities

- None

## Vocabulary

| Term            | Part of Speech   | Definition   |
|-----------------|------------------|--|
| border          | <i>noun</i>      | natural or artificial line separating two pieces of land.  |
| country         | <i>noun</i>      | geographic territory with a distinct name, flag, population, boundaries, and government.                                     |
| dialect         | <i>noun</i>      | distinct variation of a language, usually marked by accents and grammar.   |
| diversity       | <i>noun</i>      | difference.  |
| ethnic          | <i>adjective</i> | having to do with characteristics of a group of people linked by shared culture, language, national origin, or other marker. |
| fluent          | <i>adjective</i> | able to speak, write, and understand a language.   |
| human migration | <i>noun</i>      | the movement of people from one place to another.  |
| language        | <i>noun</i>      | set of sounds, gestures, or symbols that allows people to communicate.   |
| language family | <i>noun</i>      | group of languages descended from a common ancestral language.   |
| population      | <i>noun</i>      | total number of people or organisms in a particular area.  |
| region          | <i>noun</i>      | any area on Earth with one or more common characteristics. Regions are the basic units of geography.                         |

## ACTIVITY 3: THE RELIGIONS OF EUROPE | 50 MINS

### DIRECTIONS

### 1. Have students read a passage about religions of Europe.

Divide students into pairs. Distribute a copy of the worksheet Religions of Europe to each pair. Have partners read the passage. Answer any questions they may have.

### 2. Have students compare and contrast maps of dominant religions and political boundaries.

Distribute copies of the maps Dominant Religions of Europe and Country Borders in Europe. Explain to students that the map Dominant Religions of Europe shows data that was collected by country, so the division lines correspond to country borders. Ask students to note the following features as you point them out:

- If a country is shaded to indicate only one religion is practiced, that means that at least 60 percent of the population in that country follows the same religion. Up to 40 percent of the population of these countries could follow different religions.
- Countries that are striped have two major religious groups, each with at least 30 percent of the population. Again, up to 40 percent of the country could practice religions that are not shown on the map.
- The Netherlands is shaded as "other" because it has no dominant religious group.

Have students complete the worksheet by comparing and contrasting religious groups and political boundaries. As you walk around the class, check for student understanding of religious groups.

### 3. Have a whole-class discussion about religions of Europe.

Regroup as a whole class and discuss what students noticed as they compared and contrasted. Ask:

- *Are there more or fewer religions than you expected? Explain.*
- *What is the relationship between religion and government in most countries?*
- *Why do you think religion is important to groups and regions?*
- *Can people from different religions be part of the same country without it causing conflict? Why or why not?*

#### 4. Have students reflect on what they learned about languages and religions in Europe.

Use the three overhead map transparencies to look at how major language and religious groups of Europe align with and/or cross country borders. As a class, map all of the possible conflict areas by shading areas on the Country Borders in Europe map transparency. Then ask:

- *Why might religion and language differences cause conflict in a country? Do they have to cause conflict?*
- *How could religion and language unite people in a country?*
- *What parts of Europe seem to have the most possible conflict areas? Which areas stand out as having potential for conflict regarding both language and religion?*
- *Are there any possible conflict areas that you recognize from news stories about conflict in Europe?*
- *Why do you think people have conflicts about religion and language? What could be done to help people see difference as positive instead of negative?*

## Tip

Students may be unfamiliar with the concept of denominations or sects within a religion. Build scaffolding by tapping into their likely familiarity with major religions, such as Christianity, and the names of denominations within them.

## Informal Assessment

Project or post the questions from Step 4 in a visible place in the classroom and ask students to work independently to write their answers to the questions.

## Extending the Learning

- Have students do additional research on how religious groups have moved through Europe and report back to the class.
- Have students use the map of possible conflict areas as a basis to do research on some of these areas to see how people have handled their differences. Ask students to research the following questions: *Which groups have been able to live peacefully in the same region? Which groups have encountered conflict because of their differences? Why do you think some groups can cooperate while others cannot?*

## OBJECTIVES

# Subjects & Disciplines

- English Language Arts

## Geography

- Human Geography

# Learning Objectives

Students will:

- name and describe religious groups in Europe
- analyze maps to identify countries where there is no dominant religion
- explain why language and religion might cause conflict within and between countries
- identify areas in Europe where conflict over religion or language might be expected
- describe how language and/or religion could unite a country, and how diversity can be seen as a strength

# Teaching Approach

- Learning-for-use

# Teaching Methods

- Discussions
- Hands-on learning
- Reading

# Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

- 21st Century Student Outcomes
  - Learning and Innovation Skills
    - Communication and Collaboration
- Critical Thinking Skills

- Analyzing
- Understanding
- Geographic Skills
  - Acquiring Geographic Information
  - Analyzing Geographic Information
  - Answering Geographic Questions

# National Standards, Principles, and Practices

## IRA/NCTE STANDARDS FOR THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

- Standard 9:

Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

## NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM STANDARDS

- Theme 1:

Culture

- Theme 5:

Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

## NATIONAL GEOGRAPHY STANDARDS

- Standard 1:

How to use maps and other geographic representations, geospatial technologies, and spatial thinking to understand and communicate information

- Standard 10:

The characteristics, distribution, and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics

- Standard 13:

How the forces of cooperation and conflict among people influence the division and control of Earth's surface

- Standard 4:

The physical and human characteristics of places

## Preparation

# BACKGROUND & VOCABULARY

## Background Information

A key cultural component that shapes national and cultural identity in Europe is religion. Religion has been a prominent part of European culture and identity since before the Roman Empire. However, it was during the Roman Empire that different religions began to recruit and convert others and expand beyond their regional centers in Europe. There are three methods for measuring the religiousness of a population: affiliation, practice, and belief. The first method, affiliation, is the loosest measurement of one's religion; it refers to when people are born into or associated with religions, even if they do not practice or even believe in them. Countries with high affiliation in Europe are still very common, though in many countries affiliation is much lower than in the United States. The next method of measurement is practice. When analyzing the amount of people that actually practice a religion—meaning they pray regularly or attend holy services—the numbers in Europe drop dramatically. It is important to note that this is place specific. The final method, belief, varies by religious background. In some countries, belief can be affected by political situations.

The major religions currently dominating European culture are Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Though Europe is predominantly Christian, this definition changes depending upon which measurement is used. In the Balkans, a handful of states have a majority, plurality, or large minority of the population that is affiliated with Islam. These states include Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia Herzegovina, and Macedonia. In addition, Arab, Turkish, and other non-European originating immigration has increased the number of people practicing Islam throughout Europe. Most of the Jewish populations of Europe were eradicated or forced to flee before and during the World War II. Afterward, many of those surviving resettled in Israel. Following the two world wars, Christianity in Europe has largely begun to wane. Though it is still very much a cultural component, the amount of people practicing and affiliating with churches continues to rapidly decline.

## Prior Knowledge

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## Recommended Prior Activities



- None

# Vocabulary

| <b>Term</b>               | <b>Part of Speech</b> | <b>Definition</b>  |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| <b>birthrate</b>          | <i>noun</i>           | the ratio of the total number of live births to the total population in a given time and area.       |
| <b>border</b>             | <i>noun</i>           | natural or artificial line separating two pieces of land.  |
| <b>country</b>            | <i>noun</i>           | geographic territory with a distinct name, flag, population, boundaries, and government.             |
| <b>government</b>         | <i>noun</i>           | system or order of a nation, state, or other political unit.   |
| <b>immigration</b>        | <i>noun</i>           | process of moving to a new country or region with the intention of staying and living there.         |
| <b>language</b>           | <i>noun</i>           | set of sounds, gestures, or symbols that allows people to communicate.                               |
| <b>political boundary</b> | <i>noun</i>           | imaginary line separating one political unit, such as a country or state, from another.              |
| <b>population</b>         | <i>noun</i>           | total number of people or organisms in a particular area.  |
| <b>region</b>             | <i>noun</i>           | any area on Earth with one or more common characteristics. Regions are the basic units of geography. |
| <b>religion</b>           | <i>noun</i>           | a system of spiritual or supernatural belief.  |



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