NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

RESOURCE LIBRARY
ACTIVITY : 50 MINS

The Religions of Europe

Students read about dominant religions in Europe. They compare and contrast a map of religious groups in Europe to a political map of Europe and identify areas in Europe where they might expect conflict over religion.

GRADES

6 - 8

SUBJECTS

English Language Arts, Geography, Human Geography

CONTENTS

3 PDFs

OVERVIEW

Students read about dominant religions in Europe. They compare and contrast a map of religious groups in Europe to a political map of Europe and identify areas in Europe where they might expect conflict over religion.

For the complete activity with media resources, visit:
http://www.nationalgeographic.org/activity/religions-of-europe/

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

What You'll Need

MATERIALS YOU PROVIDE

- Map transparencies
- Pencils
- Pens

REQUIRED TECHNOLOGY

- Internet Access: Optional
- Tech Setup: 1 computer per classroom, Projector

PHYSICAL SPACE

- Classroom

GROUPING

- Large-group instruction
- Small-group instruction

OTHER NOTES

Before starting the activity, make transparencies of key maps. Print the following maps on transparency paper: Country Borders in Europe, Dominant Languages of Europe, and Dominant Religions of Europe.

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

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
birthrate	*noun*	the ratio of the total number of live births to the total population in a given time and area.
border	*noun*	natural or artificial line separating two pieces of land.
country	*noun*	geographic territory with a distinct name, flag, population, boundaries, and government.
government	*noun*	system or order of a nation, state, or other political unit.
immigration	*noun*	process of moving to a new country or region with the intention of staying and living there.
language	*noun*	set of sounds, gestures, or symbols that allows people to communicate.
political boundary	*noun*	imaginary line separating one political unit, such as a country or state, from another.
population	*noun*	total number of people or organisms in a particular area.

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
region	*noun*	any area on Earth with one or more common characteristics. Regions are the basic units of geography.
religion	*noun*	a system of spiritual or supernatural belief.

For Further Exploration

Articles & Profiles

- National Geographic Education: Europe—Human Geography

Maps

- NG MapMaker 1-Page Map: Europe
- National Geographic Education: Europe MapMaker Kit
- NG MapMaker Interactive: Europe
- National Geographic Education: MapMaker Interactive: Europe—Major Religions

Websites

- National Geographic Education: National Teacher Leadership Academy (NTLA)

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