**Essay Two: Theme: Belief System**

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| **Introduction:** All societies have some form of religious beliefs. A belief system is basically a set of laws or codes of behavior that help guide people throughout their lives. It consists of a set of beliefs about the origin and nature of the universe, the existence of a God or Gods, and the meaning of human life. It also provides followers with a set of customs and practices and a set of rules for proper conduct. It also provides cultural and social identity to its followers. |

**Religion One: Hinduism**

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| **Key Beliefs of Hinduism**  | **Effects/Influence of Hinduism In India** |
| * [Hinduism](http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/Homework/religion/hinduism.htm) is considered to be the oldest “living” religion in the world, since it began at least four thousand years ago in India. Many Hindus follow the code of behavior written in the Veda and Mahabharata.
* Hinduism is a polytheistic religion: meaning Hindus believe in many gods. Most Hindus believe in [reincarnation](http://www.kidspast.com/world-history/0112-reincarnation.php) ([rebirth of the soul](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWCUjx4nI98))—the belief that when the body dies, the spirit is reincarnated (reborn) into a new form. The soul may be reborn in many different forms such as another human or an insect. What they are reborn as depends on their [karma](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/india/religion/karma.htm).
* Karma is the belief that everything that people do in life determines what will happen to them in the future. If a person follows the [dharma](http://www.ometc.net/2011/06/teachings-of-hindu-dharma.html), he or she can expect to be reincarnated into a higher form in their next life, or have good luck in the future.
* Dharma is a life path of truth, duty, religion and good behavior. If a person lives the dharma they will have good karma and be reincarnated into a higher form. In addition, Hindu society follows a rigid class structure.
* Hindu society is divided in classes known as the caste system. Priests are the most powerful, then the warriors, and then comes the merchants, the lowest class is known as untouchables. Untouchable has no human rights and usually do all the dirty works.
 | * Hindu caste system has affected India society. Hindus believe in cast system. Cast system is a rigid social structure. The Indian caste system is an unfair way to organize society into classes of people. Different castes didn’t marry, work together, or socialize. People were permanently locked into their caste. Castes were usually linked to a certain job.
* The priests and teachers were the highest caste. They made and interpreted Hindu laws for the rest. Their traditional occupation is to concern themselves with the spiritual guidance of the people, conduct rites at marriages, births, deaths and other auspicious occasions.
* The second groups were the warriors. They were soldiers, generals, and kings. Their traditional role is to defend the society from invaders and robbers, and they are expected to be both brave and high-minded. The *warriors must* study the ancient Hindu scriptures under the guidance of a priest orteacher.
* The third groups were the merchants and agriculture workers. They worked in the farms and were mostly concerned with growing crops and cattle’s for the society. They were merchants and trader, or farmers.
* The last group was the untouchables. They had to live apart from other castes and were given the jobs that no one else wanted to perform. Because of their contact with things considered unclean or polluted, the outcasts were believed to be deeply tainted. They came to be thought of as "untouchable" because people believed that their touch—or even the sight of them.
* They are not allowed to drink from the same wells, attend the same temples, wear shoes in the presence of an upper caste, or drink from the same cups in the restaurants. India's Untouchables are relegated to the lowest jobs, and live in constant fear of being publicly humiliated, paraded naked, beaten, and raped with impunity by upper-caste Hindus seeking to keep them in their place.
* After the independence of India there were many conflicts between the Hindus and Muslims and India was separated in three different countries. India with predominantly Hindu majority, Pakistan a Muslim nation and Bangladesh a nation of both Hindus and Muslims.
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**Religion Two Buddhism**

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| **Key beliefs of Buddhism**  | **Effects/ Influence of Buddhism in China/Japan/ India**  |
| * Buddhism Began in India but spread throughout china, Korea, and japan due to cultural diffusion. It was founded by Gautama a Hindu Prince later known as Buddha.
* One fundamental belief of Buddhism is often referred to as **reincarnation** -- the concept that people are reborn after dying. In fact, most individuals go through many cycles of birth, living, death and rebirth. A practicing Buddhist differentiates between the concepts of rebirth and reincarnation. In reincarnation, the individual may recur repeatedly. In rebirth, a person does not necessarily return to Earth as the same entity ever again. He compares it to a leaf growing on a tree
* Buddhist believes in four noble truth, eight fold path, and reincarnation. According to Buddhism four nobles truths are
1. Human life is a suffering
2. We suffer because we have greed and desire for material gains.
3. To be a better person everyone should give up greed and desire.
4. To reach an honest life people should follow eight fold paths.
* A person can reach enlightenment or state of happiness by following eight fold paths can be achieved by not having evil thoughts, not hurting others, be truthful, good karma, and meditation. Eight fold paths includes Do not harm or kill living things, Do not take things unless they are freely given, Lead a decent life, Do not speak unkindly or tell lies and follow the four noble truth.
* Meditation is an essential practice to most Buddhists. Buddhists look within themselves for the truth and understanding of Buddha's teachings. They seek enlightenment, or nirvana, this way. Nirvana is freedom from needless suffering and being fully alive and present in one's life. It is not a state that can really be described in words -- it goes beyond words. Meditation means focusing the mind to achieve an inner stillness that leads to a state of enlightenment. Meditation takes many forms. Meditation can be performed by sitting quietly beside a beautiful arrangement of rocks, contemplating beauty. It can be practicing a martial art such as karate or aikido since they require mental and physical control and strong concentration.
 | * During the golden age if India king Asoka sent missionaries to china to spread Buddhism. The mission achieved great success, as the region soon became a center of Buddhist learning with many distinguished monks and scholars. When the merchants’ china and japan came into this region for trade, they learnt about Buddhism and accepted it as their religion. With the support of these merchants, many cave monasteries were established along the silk trade routes across Asia.
* As interest in Buddhism grew in china, there was a great demand for Buddhist texts to be translated from Indian languages into Chinese. With a growing collection of Chinese translations of Buddhist texts, Buddhism became more widely known and a Chinese monastic order was also formed.
* Buddhism also greatly influenced the Indian religion. It gave to Indian people a simple and popular religion. It rejected ritualism, sacrifices and dominance of priestly class. It has also left its permanent mark on Indian religious thought. Buddhism appealed to the masses on account of its simplicity, use of vernacular language in its scriptures and teachings and monastic order.
* The main contribution of Buddhism to Indian life is in the domain of architecture, sculpture and painting. They bear a testimony to the heights reached by them in the field of painting. This Buddhist art forms a glorious chapter in the history of Indian art and architecture. They fostered a new awareness in the field of culture. Buddhism established intimate contact between India and foreign countries. Indian monks and scholars carried the gospel of Buddhism to foreign countries from the 3rd century BC onwards and made it the prominent religion of Asia. These religious movements helped in carrying the message of Indian civilization to many distant countries of Asia. It also helped in assimilating foreign influence in Indian culture.
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**Religion Three: Islam**

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| **Key Beliefs of Islam**  | **Influence of Islam across the world/Middle East** |
| * Islam, is a monotheistic religion, is the second most popular religion in the world with over a billion followers. A Muslim is a follower of Islam. A man named Muhammad, born in 570 CE, believed he was the founder of Islam in Mecca, the capital of Saudi Arabia. The Koran is the Islamic holy book.
* The Muslims Believe in Five Pillars of Islam:

Five Pillars of Islam: 1. Shahadah--is a statement of belief in monotheism and accepting Muhammad as God's messenger.2. Salah--the requirement to pray 5 times a day at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and night.3. Zakat--is the practice of giving to charity; about 3 percent of your individual wealth.4. Sawm/Ramadan--Muslims must abstain from food and drink from dawn to dusk during the month of Ramadan. 5. Hajj--expectation to make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime if they can afford it.* The Muslim place of worship is called a mosque (mosk). Very often mosques have a domed roof and at least one tall tower called a minaret. Muslims are called to prayer from the minaret. There is also very little furniture inside a mosque because Muslims use “prayer mats” to kneel on when they pray. When people go into the mosque they take off their shoes. This is to keep it clean for prayer. Women do not usually pray in the same place as men.
 | * The Muslims built hospitals to care for the sick. In these hospitals, doctors studied why people got sick. Muslims became the first people to make a science of medicine. They studied it carefully and they trained their doctors carefully. From their study, they discovered that some sicknesses are contagious or can pass from one person to another.
* One Arab doctor named Al-Razi wrote books about two diseases - smallpox and measles. Al-Razi may have been the first doctor to sew up cuts and to put casts on broken arms and legs.
* Arab astronomers figured out that the earth is round. They correctly guessed that it was about 25,000 miles around. An Arab geographer was the first to put a map on a ball to show the right shape of the earth. Other Arab scientists studied light and were the first to learn that it travels in a straight line. They also learned that the curving of a lens makes things appear larger. The greatest Muslim scholar was an Arab named Jabir. His discoveries led to chemistry. Other Arab scientists invented much of the equipment we use today in chemistry.
* In mathematics, Muslim scholars expanded on what they learned from other people. From India, they borrowed the nine numbers that we still used today. We call these “Arabic numbers” even though they came from India. From the Hindus, the Arabs borrowed the decimal system and the idea of zero. Islamic artists never showed people or animals. They decorated mosques or Islamic houses of worship with beautiful designs and writing. Many Arab artists wrote poems about the beauty of nature and love. The best known Muslim poet was Omar Khayyam who wrote the Rubaiyat. Finally, Muslims rulers built beautiful palaces and mosques, richly decorated with mosaics, calligraphy, and geometrical designs.
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