

## **Introduction: The Bhagavad Gita**

- This unit is composed of lesson plans designed to study the Bhagavad Gita, and was inspired by my participation in the Fulbright-Hayes Scholarship Program to study abroad in India during the summer of 2022. The experience of being in India and visiting holy places of various faiths was personally quite profound. I was very touched by the devotion, kindness, and acceptance that radiated from the diverse groups of worshippers. India is a country of 1.4 billion people, and is projected to surpass China in the summer of 2023 as the most populated country in the world. Of that population, approximately 79% identify as Hindu. The influence of Hinduism on virtually all aspects of Indian culture is undeniable. The vast majority of “why” questions that I had for the tour guides and locals were answered by some form of response that related back to Hindu beliefs or traditions. Now that I have been home for several months, my interest in Indian spirituality has only increased, which led me to learn more about the Hindu religion, which in turn led me to study the Bhagavad Gita. This ancient poem is one of the major foundations of Hinduism, and explores the essence of humanity and divinity. It is part of a larger work called the Mahabharata, which is an ancient Indian epic detailing the Pandavas and the Kauravas; two warring families vying for control of the Hastinapura kingdom. This unit is intended as a study of the Bhagavad Gita for high school students.

### **Unit Topic**

Social Studies/Global Religion, Literature, Multiculturalism

### **Materials for Every Lesson**

- Promethean Board
- Laptop
- Downloaded copy or paperback copy of The Bhagavad Gita
- Optional: downloaded audiobook of the The Bhagavad Gita

### **Sources**

[India Population 2022 \(Demographics, Maps, Graphs\) \(worldpopulationreview.com\)](https://worldpopulationreview.com/india-population-2022-demographics-maps-graphs/)

[Indian Culture - Religion — Cultural Atlas \(sbs.com.au\)](https://www.sbs.com.au/cultural-atlas/indian-culture-religion)

[Religion and Indian Philosophy \(stanford.edu\)](https://stanford.edu/religion-and-indian-philosophy)

[A Summary of the Bhagavadgita \(hinduwebsite.com\)](https://hinduwebsite.com/a-summary-of-the-bhagavadgita)

## Lesson 1

**Standard: C.18A:35-4.36a Curriculum to include instruction on diversity and inclusion:**

Beginning in the 2021-2022 school year, each school district shall incorporate instruction on diversity and inclusion in an appropriate place in the curriculum of students in grades kindergarten through 12 as part of the district's implementation of the New Jersey Student Learning Standards.

**Objective:** The students will preview the Bhagavad Gita to activate prior knowledge and make predictions about its content.

**Essential Questions:**

- What holy or religious texts are you familiar with?
- What ancient epics are you familiar with?
- What prior knowledge do you have of the Bhagavad Gita?

**Introduction:** Introduce the Bhagavad Gita to the students through the covers of hardcopy versions, and through images of artwork inspired by the text on the Promethean board. Discuss the holy texts that the students are familiar with, such as the Bible, The Torah, or the Quran, and ancient epics that they may have read, such as the Iliad, the Odyssey, or Beowulf. Explain that the Bhagavad Gita is a foundational text for Hinduism; and can be considered as a holy book or as a literary epic.

**Guided Practice:** Play the 12 minute video [The Bhagavad Gita in Simple English](#) by Svayam Prakash Sharma:

[The Bhagavad Gita in Simple English Introduction - YouTube](#)

In small groups, have students discuss how this overview of the Bhagavad Gita connects with their prior knowledge of religion in general, Hinduism, and Christianity. Have students start online journals to record their responses to the discussion questions under the title: Introduction

**Independent Practice:** Students will begin reading the Bhagavad Gita

**Assignment**

- Read chapters 1-3
- Be prepared to discuss and then answer the following questions in their journals:
  1. Why is Arjuna upset?
  2. Why is Krishna significant?
  3. What is dharma?
  4. How is Krishna's advice to Arjun surprising?
  5. What does Krishna say about the soul?

6. How does Krishna lay the foundation for reincarnation?

## Lesson 2

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**Objective:** The students will participate in small and whole group discussions to answer comprehension questions to further their understanding of the Bhagavad Gita.

**Essential Questions:**

How can you summarize chapters 1-3 of the Bhagavad Gita?

What theme or themes were contained in chapters 1-3?

**Introduction:** In a whole group setting, discuss student responses to the essential questions. Students are likely to respond by summarizing Arjuna's situation, that he is a Pandava, and has been deprived of his kingdom by his cousins, the Kauravas. The setting of the story begins on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, with Arjuna reluctant to go to war, and ready to surrender without a fight. Arjuna is not afraid of death or of losing the war, but doesn't want to fight because of the carnage, death, and suffering he will bring to his extended family members, teachers, and friends fighting for the opposing side.

**Guided Practice:** Students will break into small discussion groups to discuss and further their understanding of their answers to lesson 1 assignment questions by citing textual evidence in all responses. Instruct students to share their responses that will be kept in their journals under the topic of lesson 1. Instruct students to add to, clarify, change, and alter their responses as their comprehension grows through group discussion, exploration, and research. Instruct students to cite resources that they use to further their comprehension of the text. The instructor will circulate among the groups, and provide assistance to groups that need clarification or insight.

While circulating, look for opportunities to ask students how they would feel if they were in Arjuna's situation, citing chapter 1, verses 31-42. Answers to the discussion questions should include responses about Arjuna's dilemma, the fact that Krishna, who is Arjuna's advisor, is the living incarnation of God, that the soul cannot be destroyed, and that dharma is the concept of doing one's duty (Chapter 1, verses 19-27). Krishna's advice for Arjuna to fight because it is his duty might be surprising, and discuss Krishna's reasoning in chapter 1, verses 31-36 (the soul cannot die so the self cannot be killed, and that doing one's dharma or duty righteously is a necessary path to enlightenment). Reincarnation is also referenced in the latter verses because Krishna refers to the fact that one can change bodies, but the self or soul cannot be killed.

**Independent Practice:** Provide students with approximately 10-15 minutes to finalize their responses to chapters 1-3 questions, ask any questions that they have, and preview chapters 4-8. To sum up the lesson, discuss possible themes, such as justice (Arjun's fight is righteous), immortality (the soul does not die), and liberation (in Chapter 3, verse 7, Krishna talks about detachment from material things as essential to the paths of freedom and enlightenment).

### **Assignment**

- Read Chapters 4-8
- Answer the following questions:
  1. Describe how Krishna lays the foundation for the caste system.
  2. Describe how one should work according to Krishna.
  3. How does one become elevated and self-actualized?
  4. What is a brahman?
  5. What is adhyatma?
  6. What is karma?

[Contents – Bhagavad Gita. The Song of God – Swami Mukundananda \(holy-bhagavad-gita.org\)](http://holy-bhagavad-gita.org)

[Bhagavadgita | Definition, Contents, & Significance | Britannica](#)

[Bhagavad Gita - World History Encyclopedia](#)

## **Lesson 3**

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**Objective:** The students will participate in small and whole group discussions to answer comprehension questions to further their understanding of the Bhagavad Gita.

**Essential Questions:**

1. How can you summarize chapters 4-8 of the Bhagavad Gita?
2. Can you identify and describe anything adopted into your culture that has its origin in the Bhagavad Gita?

**Introduction:** In a whole group setting, have students give a verbal general summary of chapters 4-8. Touch upon the concepts of how to gain enlightenment, how one should work in a way to fulfill dharma, how and why one should engage in meditation and yoga to achieve a purified state, and how to reach enlightenment to become a brahman. Discuss how Arjuna questions Krishna and why he has doubts.

**Guided Practice:** Students will break into small discussion groups to discuss and further their understanding of their answers to the lesson 2 assignment questions by citing textual evidence in all responses. Instruct students to share their responses that will be kept in their journals under the topic of lesson 2. Encourage students to add to, clarify, change, and alter their responses as their comprehension grows through group discussion, exploration, and research. Remind students to cite resources that they use to further their comprehension of the text. Circulate among the students to ensure that the assignment questions are comprehended and discussed.

The responses to the foundation of the caste system can be found in chapter 4, verse 13 where Krishna explains four castes or varnas of people which differ according to levels of knowledge and enlightenment. The students should discuss the way to reach enlightenment, which Krishna describes as a lack of attachments and control of one's mind and emotions in chapter 5, verses 19-23. Krishna further describes the virtue of work without an expectation of anything in return throughout chapters 6 and 7. In chapter 8, Krishna discusses the concept that a brahman is someone who has reached self-actualization or enlightenment through devotional works, and a lack of attachment that can be achieved through meditation and yoga. The adhyatma is the individual soul, and karma is the "work of fruitive actions" as stated in Chapter 8, verse 3.

**Independent Practice:** Give the students time to finish responses, and to reflect in their journal the essential question of how the Bhagavad Gita has directly influenced modern culture. Examples include detailed descriptions of how to perform yoga throughout chapter 6, and descriptions of how to meditate and breathe in chapter 7. The self-help industry in the United States talks extensively about following one's path, which Krishna tells Arjuna is vital for attaining knowledge in Chapter 4, verse 34.

**Assignment:**

- Read chapters 9-13
- Answer the following questions:
  1. What does Krishna say about demigods, ancestors, and spirits that some people worship?
  2. Describe Krishna's description of the supersoul to Arjuna.
  3. What does Krishna show Arjuna that is of great significance?
  4. In response to question 3, how does Arjuna react?
  5. What does Krishna reiterate about how to reach enlightenment?

**Sources**

[Chapter 11, Verse 1 – Bhagavad Gita, The Song of God – Swami Mukundananda \(holy-bhagavad-gita.org\)](http://holy-bhagavad-gita.org)

[Bhagavad Gita - World History Encyclopedia](#)

[Thematic Bhagavad Gita - Bhaktivedanta College](#)

## Lesson 4

### **Standard: C.18A:35-4.36a Curriculum to include instruction on diversity and inclusion:**

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**Objective:** The students will participate in small and whole group discussions to answer comprehension questions to further their understanding of the Bhagavad Gita.

### **Essential Questions:**

1. How can you summarize chapters 9-13 of the Bhagavad Gita?
2. What themes are described in chapters 9-13?

**Introduction:** In a whole group setting, ask students to verbally summarize chapters 9-13. Their responses should refer to the continued revelations that Krishna gives to Arjuna about divinity, enlightenment, knowledge, and wisdom. Krishna reveals more about his omnipresent nature by giving Arjuna special eyes so that he can see Krishna in his true form. The theme of divinity is described throughout chapter ten; notably in verses 8-21 as Krishna describes himself as the source of all worldly matters with no beginning and no end.

**Guided Practice:** Students will break into small discussion groups to discuss and further their understanding of their answers to lesson 3 assignment questions by citing textual evidence in all responses. Instruct students to share their responses that will be kept in their journals under the topic of lesson 3. Instruct students to add to, clarify, change, and alter their responses as their comprehension grows through group discussion, exploration, and research. Instruct students to cite resources that they use to further their comprehension of the text. The instructor will circulate among the groups, and provide assistance to groups that need clarification or insight.

Discussion of the assignment questions should center around the absolute divinity of Krishna, and that people who worship demigods, ghosts, spirits, or ancestors are actually worshiping him because he is the creator of everything (chapter 9, verses 23-24). In chapters 9-10, Krishna further elaborates that he is the "supersoul" because everything in existence comes from him. He describes himself as having no beginning and no end, and as being the source of everything that exists in both the physical and spiritual realms of the universe. In chapter 11, Krishna reveals his true divine appearance to Arjuna. He gives Arjuna divine eyes so that it is possible for Arjuna to truly see him. Arjuna reacts with amazement as he sees everything in the universe all at once in Krishna's true form. He pledges his love, loyalty, and obedience to Krishna, and apologizes for his past sins and infractions. In chapter 12, Arjuna begins to ask Krishna more questions now that he has seen his divine form. He asks about whether the best way to worship Krishna is in an abstract way or in a more personal and devotional way. Krishna tells Arjuna that both practices are good, but that devotional practices are better. Krishna goes on

to reiterate that yoga and meditation are essential to detachment from materialism, as well as good works and management of one's emotions. Good works should be done because they are part of one's duty or dharma, and not for money or accolades. In chapter 13, Krishna reiterates that the self consists of two parts. He calls the body "the field" and the true self "the knower of the field" in verses 1-4. In this way he distinguishes the body from the soul. He explains that the body is part of the material world, but the self is part of Krishna and can never be destroyed. The self can shed bodies through the cycle of birth and death, but it can never be destroyed (verses 13-26).

**Independent Practice:** Give the students approximately 10-15 minutes to finish any additions or revisions to their journal questions. Discuss any additional questions that students have, and encourage them to preview the next few chapters.

### **Assignment**

- Read chapters 14-18
- Answer the following questions:
  1. What is a guna in general, and what are the three gunas that Krishna describes?
  2. Describe how a person under the influence of each of the three gunas acts, and what these actions lead to.
  3. Describe what happens to the "Self" when it becomes liberated from the material world.
  4. According to Krishna, what are the three pathways to hell?
  5. What is the difference between sattvic, rajasic, and tamasic people?
  6. Describe the two types of renunciation, sannyasa and tyaga, that Krishna details, and how they are different from one another.

### **Sources**

[The Bhagavad Gita \(A Comprehensive Study\) | Mahavidya](#)

[Bhagavad Gita Summary \(Swami Tapasyananda\) | Practical Philosophy and Rational Religion](#)



## Lesson 5

**Standard: C.18A:35-4.36a Curriculum to include instruction on diversity and inclusion:**

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**Objective:** The students will participate in small and whole group discussions to answer comprehension questions to further their understanding of the Bhagavad Gita.

### Essential Questions

1. How can you summarize chapters 14-18?
2. What are your favorite verses and/ or chapters in the Bhagavad Gita?

**Introduction:** In a whole group setting, ask students to verbally summarize chapters 14-18. Their responses should reference the fact that these are the last four chapters, and that Krishna reiterates the pathways to enlightenment, and provides more detail about how to achieve this state. Students can share their favorite verses or chapters, and discuss their reasons for selecting these passages.

**Guided Practice:** Students will break into small discussion groups to discuss and further their understanding of their answers to lesson 4 assignment questions by citing textual evidence in all responses. Instruct students to share their responses that will be kept in their journals under the topic of lesson 4. Instruct students to add to, clarify, change, and alter their responses as their comprehension grows through group discussion, exploration, and research. Instruct students to cite resources that they use to further their comprehension of the text. The instructor will circulate among the groups, and provide assistance to groups that need clarification or insight.

Discussion of the assignment questions should begin with the discussion of the gunas, or attributes that an individual possesses. In chapter 14 verse 5, Krishna states that there are three states of guna that individuals exist in: sattva, rajas, or tamas. Sattva is essentially a state of

happiness brought about by selfless acts, detachment from materialism, and control of one's emotions. This level of self-control is achieved through devotional work, meditation, and yoga (chapter 14, verses 10-11). Rajas is a state of selfishness and greed that comes from being over-attached to material possessions. This state of being causes one to act in ways that glorify the self instead of in a way that promotes good works and deeds in tribute to Krishna (chapter 14, verse 12). Tamas is a state of ignorance brought upon by those whose actions are dominated by their egos. Individuals in this state are hypocrites, and only commit good works if they believe that they will impress others (chapter 14, verse 5). Krishna goes so far as to call them demons. When the "Self" becomes liberated from the material world, it finds true happiness, and becomes free from the cycle of birth and death (chapter 15, verses 16-18). The three pathways to hell are through living in states of lust, anger, or greed. These three states are rooted in materialism, and lead to cruelty and abuse (chapter 16, verses 17-19). Sattvic people do good works for the sake of the greater good and to honor Krishna, without expectations or desires for wealth or glory. Rajastic people are obsessed with work to obtain power and greed, and tamastic people worship spirits that are unworthy of praise and offerings (chapter 17, verses 2-6). Sannyasa is a state of renunciation of selfish acts, and tyaga is a state of renunciation of the rewards of good works. These renunciations lead to happiness because they bring individuals closer to their true paths, which in turn brings them closer to Krishna.

**Independent Practice:** Give the students approximately 10-15 minutes to finish any additions or revisions to their journal questions. Discuss any additional questions that students have.

**Sources:**

[A Summary of the Bhagavadgita \(hinduwebsite.com\)](http://hinduwebsite.com)

[The context of the Bhagavad Gita \(sabda.institute\)](http://sabda.institute)

[Bhagavad Gita in Context | Embodied Philosophy \(bestdevserver.com\)](http://bestdevserver.com)

[Bhagavad Gita - New World Encyclopedia](http://NewWorldEncyclopedia.com)

## Lesson 6

**Standard: C.18A:35-4.36a Curriculum to include instruction on diversity and inclusion:**

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**Objective:** The students will participate in small and whole group discussions to answer comprehension questions to further their understanding of the Bhagavad Gita.

### Essential Questions

1. How can we add to our understanding of how the Bhagavad Gita influenced modern western culture?
2. What are the overriding themes in the Bhagavad Gita?
3. What symbolism occurs in the Bhagavad Gita

**Introduction:** In a whole group setting, discuss both essential questions. Discussion about the way that the Bhagavad Gita has influenced modern western culture include beliefs in reincarnation, yoga practice, and the popularity of meditation and mindfulness. The concept of following one's own path is a theme presented in the Bhagavad Gita that has been adopted by western pop culture in the forms of books, television shows, and self-help professionals.

**Guided Practice:** Students will break into small discussion groups to discuss and further their understanding of their answers to the themes of the Bhagavad Gita. Instruct students to share

their responses that will be kept in their journals under the topic of Themes. Instruct students to add to, clarify, change, and alter their responses as their comprehension grows through group discussion, exploration, and research. Instruct students to cite resources that they use to further their comprehension of the text. The instructor will circulate among the groups, and provide assistance to groups that need clarification or insight.

The discussion about themes should include the concept of dharma, or doing good works along one's own path to honor Krishna and promote the greater good. The theme of austerity to purify the body and mind and avoid attachments to materialism is another theme repeated throughout the text. In terms of symbolism, the battlefield that Arjuna is fighting upon is symbolic of the self. The Pandavas are the parts of the self that promote happiness and enlightenment. The Kauravas are the parts of the self that cause pain and unhappiness.

**Independent Practice:** Give the students approximately 10-15 minutes to finish any additions or revisions to their journal questions. Discuss any additional questions that students have.

**Assignment:** Final Project: Choose one of the following::

1. Visit a yoga studio or do yoga using a virtual instructor for 5 days. In 3-4 written pages, reflect upon your experience. How did the classes make you feel both physically and mentally? Did the yoga sessions deepen your understanding or make you feel more connected to the Bhagavad Gita in any way?
2. Visit a meditation class for 5 days, either in person or virtually. In 3-4 written pages, reflect upon your experience. How did the classes make you feel both physically and mentally? Did the meditation classes deepen your understanding or make you feel more connected to the Bhagavad Gita in any way?
3. Create a piece of artwork, such as a sculpture, painting, or drawing inspired by the Bhagavad Gita. In 1-2 written pages, describe your artwork and how it is connected to the Bhagavad Gita.
4. Create a slideshow that summarizes the Bhagavad Gita.

**Sources:**

[What Does the Bhagavad Gita Teach Us about Mental Well-being \(sanfranciscocomoms.com\)](http://sanfranciscocomoms.com)

[What Bhagavad Gita Teaches Us? \(mukund Kapoor.com\)](http://mukund Kapoor.com)

[What is The Importance Of Bhagavad Gita in Today's Life \(harekrishnamandir.org\)](http://harekrishnamandir.org)