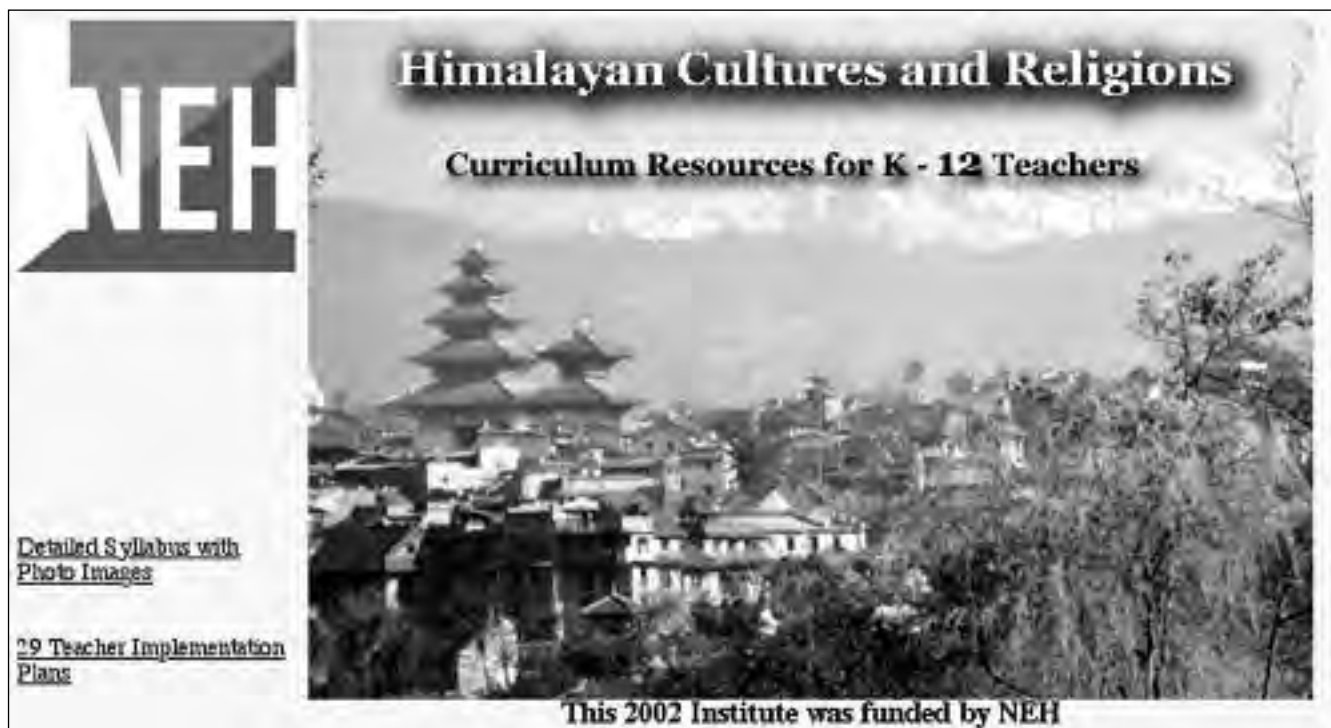


ESSAYS

Bringing the Himalayas into Your Classroom

On-Line Resources and Materials for Teaching about the Abode of Snow

By Amanda McClure and Kelly McKee



For most American teachers, getting to know the Himalayas necessitates a trip halfway around the globe. But in the summer of 2002, the Himalayas came to Massachusetts in the form of the NEH Institute's Cultures and Religions of the Himalayan Region. Led by prominent scholars Todd Lewis and Leonard van der Kuijp, this month-long program brought leading researchers from around the world to Holy Cross College in Worcester, Massachusetts. While the reading list was mountainous and the lectures intense, the intrepid participants came home with something to share with everyone.

A main objective of the Institute was for each participant to create a Web site on teaching the Himalayas. All participants were required to write an original Implementation Plan, and each was expected to prepare one curriculum unit for the Institute Web site. These plans take various forms though all are aimed at helping to bring information about the Himalayas into the classroom. The plans are accessible at http://college.holycross.edu/orgs/himalayan_cultures. They offer something for teachers of all disciplines and grade levels. Several are highlighted in this essay for the content and practicality they offer to teachers who want to explore the Himalayas in their curriculum.

Curricular Web Sites Designed by NEH Participants

Religion teacher Scott Poteet from Episcopal High School in Belaire, Texas, created an interactive Web site that enables his world religion students to learn more about the "Tibetan Wheel of Life" and play the "Tibet Game," a virtual tour through various regions of Tibet. Poteet's site also offers an excellent quiz called "What Do You Know About Tibet?" Structured in a simple true and false format, the content provides a solid overview of Tibetan Buddhist culture. It's a great way to begin or end a lesson, and detailed answers are provided.

English teacher Jeanne Paliataka of Nazareth Academy in LaGrange Park, Illinois, developed a Web site offering a sophisticated approach to the study of sacred art, text, music, and geography. Her group research project asks students to approach sacred texts from the perspective of a museum curator. She wants them to understand the basics of museology and recognize the difference between a book and a sacred text. The site also offers excellent lesson plans and ideas for teaching and learning terminology for analyzing sacred art.

Greg MacGalpin of Peck School in Basking Ridge, New Jersey, designed a creative, fun, easy-to-navigate, all-grade-level site

for students to learn more about Tibetan art. Students assume the role of a museum curator and go through an inquiry-based process of learning about various artifacts and art. Greg designed this site in conjunction with the fabulous Tibetan collection at the Newark Museum of Art.

Middle School teachers will enjoy Chris Bryant's site. A teacher at Antioch Upper Grade School, Antioch, Illinois, Bryant offers a fun approach to teach Himalayan geography by using the Big Map Activity. His Web Quest engages middle school students on a real journey of the Himalayas and the Silk Road.

Linda Behen, librarian at St. Ursula Academy in Cincinnati, provides a comprehensive list of Himalayan resource materials categorized by Books, Periodicals, Media, Current News, and Reference. Melanie Nash, librarian at Haverger College in Toronto, posted a digital library of all materials used at the NEH summer institute, including timelines, maps, and a multitude of resources on Buddhism and Hinduism. Both sites are invaluable for anyone wanting to teach and learn more about the Himalayas.

Assistant principal Barbara Diamond of Dawson Elementary School in Holden, Massachusetts, provides links for teaching elementary school students about Buddhism and Hinduism, and offers ways to teach yoga to young children.

Amanda McClure, religion teacher at St. Mark's School in Southborough, Massachusetts, designed a site that provides a historical context for the development of religious traditions. Her comprehensive timeline for the history of Tibet, Nepal, and Kashmir includes links to various people, places, maps, and events from each region. History and religion teachers can use this excellent site as a self-directed journey during which they'll learn more about the historical and religious development of the region.

Evanston Township High School history teacher Kelly McKee developed a site to provide students with a better understanding of current issues in the Himalayas. McKee's site is designed as a three-week, process-based research project. Students are exposed to current issues such as: political conflict in Kashmir, globalization in Bhutan, the Maoist uprising in Nepal, and cultural sustainability of Tibet. The site provides a simple, six-step process to teach both current issues and develop students' analytical reading and writing skills.

More Materials and Resources

Of the many Web sites explored at the NEH Institute, some of the most impressive were: *The Tibetan and Himalayan Digital Library* at www.thdl.org. Sponsored in part by the University of Virginia library, this site (still under construction) provides photos of Himalayan peoples and places, translations of Tibetan Buddhist texts, and geographical information for the Himalayan region. English translations of Buddhist texts can be found at www.accesstoin-sight.org. *Himalaya Art* (www.tibetart.org) is affiliated with the Rubin Museum in New York and offers a comprehensive research database of Himalayan and Tibetan art. It is an absolute must-see for educators. It even has an audio glossary to help students pronounce words correctly in both Tibetan and Sanskrit.

The Institute's extensive reading list, posted on the main Web site, cites a variety of subjects, including scholarly books from many disciplines. Two books are worth noting for the general reader: Melvyn C. Goldstein's *The Snow Lion and the Dragon: China, Tibet, and the Dalai Lama* (University of California Press) and David Zurick and P.P. Karan's *Himalaya: Life on the Edge of the World* (Johns Hopkins University Press). Both contain a wealth of information not readily available elsewhere. The Zurick and Karan book covers many topics—geography, geology, cultures and political history—in one text. The Goldstein book is a particularly useful condensed history of Tibet, excerpts of which could be read by advanced students.

Additional books circulated at the conference included the following four of note: *The Struggle for Modern Tibet: The Autobiography of Tashi Tsering* by Melvyn C. Goldstein, William R. Siebenschuh, and Tashi Tsering (M. E. Sharpe, 2000), *Prisoners of Shangri-LA: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* by Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (University of Chicago Press, 1998), *Stories of the Buddha: Being Selections from the Jataka* by Caroline A.F. Rhys Davids (Dover Publications, 1990), and *Tibetan Thangka Painting: Methods and Materials* by David and Janice Jackson (Snow Lion Publications, 1999). The Goldstein and Lopez books will be useful teacher references. Lopez provides a great service in this book by re-examining some of the misleading popular notions about Tibet. Tashi Tsering's autobiography is a depiction of the

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Assisted by scholars, K-12 teachers designed these curriculum plans during an NEH Institute entitled "Cultures and Religions of the Himalayan Region" held at The College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, MA, in the summer of 2002.

ESSAYS

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fascinating life of a Tibetan who lived on a traditional farm, joined a monastery, immigrated to the United States, returned to China, survived the Cultural Revolution in Chinese prisons, and now is back in Tibet. The sheer scope and events of this man's life provide illustrations for many topics, especially traditional Tibetan life and the impact of the Cultural Revolution on ordinary citizens. *Stories of the Buddha* is a collection of traditional tales used in teaching Buddhist values and morality. These engaging stories are great reading for students of many levels. The colorful and complex art of thangka painting is beautifully illustrated in *Tibetan Thangka Painting*, an excellent reference for sharing the important tradition of religious painting.

One final excellent reference and resource tool for teaching about the Himalayas at all grade levels is *The Himalayas: A Syllabus of the Region's History, Anthropology, and Religion* (Association for Asian Studies, 1995) by Todd T. Lewis and Theodore Riccardi, Jr. This text provides practical content outlines ranging from the history of Himalayan civilizations to descriptions of the ethno-geographic regions, and includes good maps for locating ethnic groups of the sub-montane, mid-montane, and Tibetan Highlands areas. A comprehensive list of recommended readings and references ends each chapter.

The movie *Himalaya* (1999) is well suited for use in the classroom. This fictional movie is based on typical life in the rural high Himalayas. There are no Hollywood actors, and the dialogue is subtitled in English throughout. Film director Eric Valli does an excellent job portraying the daily life of a traditional village and the villagers' struggle to cope with change.

As the participants of the Institute can attest, the Himalayan region inspires topics for every classroom: geography, culture, religion, biodiversity and politics, to name a few. We are all fortunate that the dedication of professors Lewis and van der Kuip is helping to make this fascinating area accessible to increasing numbers of students. While the Himalayas remain at a distance from America, they no longer have to be distant from the American classroom. ■

EDITOR'S NOTE:

The Himalayas: A Syllabus of the Region's History, Anthropology, and Religion, by Todd T. Lewis and Theodore Riccardi, Jr., may be ordered from The Association for Asian Studies, 1021 East Huron, Ann Arbor, MI 48104. Phone: 734-665-2490. Email: bookorder@aasianst.org.

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