

Is Waldorf Religious?

May the long time sun
Shine upon you
All love surround you
And the pure light within you
Guide your way on
Guide your way on



Is Waldorf Religious?

The short answer is... maybe. Not really. Okay sometimes. I am going to give you the longer answer.

Let's start by saying that Waldorf education is not secular. It is also not religion specific. Let me also start by saying that I get the very SAME objections from conservative Christians as I do from Pagans. The same. Look! There is something you already have in common!

Waldorf is a method of education that explores cultures through history as a means to connect children to this world and those that live in it. Waldorf explores many major religions at different times through a child's development. These religions are not explored to convert a child, they are taught to help children understand others and in turn understand themselves.

Let's take a brief walk through the literature aspects of the curriculum.

In grade 1, children learn through fairy tales. Some are happy, some are sad, all do an amazing amount of work on our children's souls. The child of **seven** is very much in a place of working through good and bad, they are seeing the world with different eyes than they did a year ago and they need stories that nourish this new place.

In grade 2, children learn through the stories of saints and animal stories. The child of **eight** is very much experiencing the world as a good place. The stories of saintly people are aimed at fostering this. While many will say "I don't want to teach my children the Catholic Church!" I recommend you step back and take a deep breath. It is not about the Catholic Church. Many people don't know that those saints were often treated very poorly by the Catholic Church of their time. They often served those that no one else wanted to look at. They gave hope to the sick and hungry. This is what comes through in the stories of the saints. I also encourage you to use some of your own saintly people. Maybe your church has leaders that lived amazing lives? Maybe you will want to put some focus to civic leaders that brought goodness to the world? Maybe you are more comfortable with the Hindu saint stories? All those things would be appropriate. Remember that we are showing them great people and it wouldn't be right to ignore ones just because they worship differently than we do.

In grade 3, children learn through the stories of the Hebrew people. This often has families nervous. "I don't want to teach about the Old Testament! Those stories are horrible! I don't want my children to have that view of God!" Breathe. The child of **nine** is in a very perplexing place. They are pushing boundaries in a whole new way. They very much want to know what is right and what is wrong and they want to make sure you know your stuff! The struggles and challenges of the Hebrew people in the Old Testament mirror the struggles and challenges of children during this stage of development. The stories are soul food for them, even if they are not Jewish or Christian.

In grade 4, children learn through the stories of the Norse people. The vast well of Norse mythology beautifully blesses the child of **10**. This child has a bit of trickster in them, they might be a little bit like Thor or Loki and sometimes both on the same day! Never a dull moment when you have a child of this age. They are very much looking for their next adventure.

In grade 5, children learn through Greek myths, legends and history. The child of **11** is beginning to see the world with a broader scope, they see the world of myth and history collide in the stories of the Greeks.

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In grade 6, children learn through the stories of the Romans as well as the lives of Jesus Christ and Mohammed. The child of **12** has crossed another Rubicon. They stand firmly in a place of seeing the world at their door but only being able to taste a small bit. They often become a bit more materialistic and our job is to keep them grounded. The stories of the Romans conquering land and moving across the world is a perfect antidote for them. The life of Jesus and Mohammed helps them to understand true reverence as they explore their lives. Many Christians find understanding with Islam that they never knew could exist and non-Christians see a side of Christianity that they perhaps had not considered.

In grade 7, children are still given story content but it continues to evolve into stronger, deeper history. The child of **13** is ready to explore! They seek to understand the world and how they came to be where they are. They learn through the Renaissance, through voyages of explorers and through the religious reform of the era. They are beginning to see that the faiths they studied in the past mold history the way we know it today – warts and all.

In grade 8, the child of **14** is learning that the world is truly vast as we seek to impart to them history from about 1700 to 1900. They are learning about the Industrial Revolution, about inventors and innovators as well as the tumultuous existence that the world can sometimes have.

In grade 9, the child of **15** explores history through present day. These children are often very conflicted. They are very independent in some ways yet still need the emotional comforts we afforded them as young children. They are seeking harmony in the world – both inner and outer.

The final high school years are peppered with understanding history in a new way. Now they are seeking to understand what motivates people to do what they do, how different historical periods shaped the world into what it is today.

Overall I hope this very brief trek through Waldorf history helped you to see that Waldorf is not a *religious* curriculum but very much so a *spiritual* one. There is so much more to it than this short piece can convey. Hopefully you are coming away with a better understanding and can understand the aim of Waldorf is to raise children that are of this world – but not worldly.

For more information on Waldorf education at home or to try our curriculum, please visit www.WaldorfEssentials.com