Aim: What are the major beliefs and practices of Hinduism?

HW: Write paragraph on p. 49
What are the major beliefs and practices of Hinduism?

Objective: Identify and describe the major beliefs, practices, and sacred texts of Hinduism.

Introduction
Directions: Examine the images below and complete the See-Think-Wonder Activity that follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>See</th>
<th>Think</th>
<th>Wonder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List three things you notice about these images related to Hinduism that interest you.</td>
<td>Based on your observations, predict two things you think you will learn about Hinduism.</td>
<td>Write one question about these images.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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What Is Hinduism?

Hinduism is a belief system that originated in the Indus River Valley. There is no single founder or date of the belief system’s creation because it is based on the beliefs and practices of a diverse group of people who added to the religion over thousands of years.

Hinduism’s sacred text is the Vedas, a collection of hymns and ritual texts that were compiled over a long period of time from different authors.

Hinduism is followed by the majority of people in India and Nepal, but it also exists among significant populations outside of the subcontinent and has over 900 million followers worldwide.

Since Hinduism has been compiled from so many different belief systems throughout its history, some people refer to it as ‘a way of life’ or ‘a family of religions’ rather than a single religion. There are, however, some unifying concepts:

- Brahman
- Reincarnation
- Caste
- Dharma
- Karma

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Polytheism</th>
<th>Monotheism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prefix and Root</td>
<td>Poly + theism</td>
<td>Mono + theism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning of Prefix and Root</td>
<td>“having to do with god”</td>
<td>“having to do with god”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning of Word</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Moral Code of Ethical Conduct**

In your own words, what is a moral code of ethical conduct?

Hint: The Ten Commandments is an example of a moral code of ethical conduct from your study of Judaism.

Watch an excerpt from Hinduism Today’s “Introduction to Hinduism” (5:31-8:40)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBZRTzXARWM
### What are the major beliefs and practices of Hinduism?

#### The Sacred Books of Hinduism

Watch an excerpt from *Hinduism Today’s “Introduction to Hinduism”* (5:31-8:40) and read the descriptions of Hindu sacred texts below, then answer the questions that follow.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rig Veda</th>
<th>The Upanishads</th>
<th>Mahabharata and Bhagavad Gita</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[Image of Rig Veda]</td>
<td>[Image of Upanishads cover]</td>
<td>[Image of Mahabharata and Bhagavad Gita]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Vedas are the most sacred texts in Hinduism. The Rig Veda is the oldest of the Vedas. It was written in Sanskrit at least 6,000 years ago. Vedic hymns (religious songs written in a Veda) praise God, gods, and goddesses and describe a powerful and spiritual people, their clans, kings and emperors, fights, battles, and way of life.

Originally, these thousands of hymns were not written down but memorized. Even today there are priests who can chant from memory as many as 10,500 verses which takes 50 hours.

1. When was the Rig Veda written?
2. Before the Rig Veda was written down, how were the stories in it passed from generation to generation?
3. As a source, why might a historian question the reliability of the Rig Veda as a historical document?
4. The Rig Veda, Mahabharata, Bhagavad Gita and sacred texts from many other belief systems tell stories about gods and their interactions with each other and humans. What do you think the purpose of these types of stories are?
Core Beliefs and Practices of Hinduism

Directions: Read the notes below and answer the questions that follow.

1. Hindu Concept of God(s)

- Hinduism is considered a polytheistic religion, but it is more complex than that.
- It is estimated that Hinduism includes more than 33,000 deities (gods).
- Each god has its own story, personality, and responsibilities.

For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vishnu</th>
<th>Shiva</th>
<th>Ganesha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Preserver or Protector</td>
<td>The Destroyer</td>
<td>The God of Good Fortune</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Vishnu, seated in the lotus position on a lotus.
- Shiva as the Lord of Dance.
- Four-armed Ganesha.

- Though there are many gods, they are seen by many Hindus as different forms of the same god, called the “ultimate reality,” or Brahman. Because of this, some people consider Hinduism to be a monotheistic religion.

Statue of the God Vishnu showing his “universal form” in the Bhagavad Gita, demonstrating that Hinduism can be viewed as both polytheistic and monotheistic.

Why do some consider Hinduism a polytheistic belief system?

Why do some consider Hinduism a monotheistic belief system?

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2. Reincarnation, Caste, Dharma, and Karma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reincarnation</th>
<th>Caste</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reincarnation</strong> is the idea that the individual soul (<em>atman</em>) is <strong>reborn in a different form after death</strong> and continues to be reborn until the soul achieves “union with Brahman,” also known as <em>moksha</em>.</td>
<td><strong>A caste</strong> is a <strong>social class</strong> in Hinduism that is determined by one’s actions in their previous life that one can only move out of through the process of <strong>reincarnation</strong>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The four major castes in Hinduism are in the chart below. Not listed is a group called the **Dalits**, or “Untouchables.” Who are considered the lowest in society and required to do “unclean work.”

An illustration of the passage of one soul from one cycle of death and rebirth to another. **[Image](https://example.com/image)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dharma</th>
<th>Karma</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dharma</strong> is one’s <strong>duty</strong> according to their caste. Each caste has jobs they are supposed to perform and rules they are supposed to follow. One is not supposed to do the duty of another’s caste.</td>
<td><strong>Karma</strong> is the <strong>sum of one’s good and bad actions during life</strong>. If one follows their dharma (duty), then they will have <strong>good karma</strong>. If one does not follow their dharma, they will have <strong>bad karma</strong>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Directions: Using the notes on the previous page and the word bank provided, fill in the blanks in the paragraph below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Untouchables</th>
<th>Brahmins</th>
<th>Vaisyas</th>
<th>Kshatriyas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>merchants</td>
<td>caste(s)</td>
<td>Sudras</td>
<td>priests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unclean</td>
<td>dharma</td>
<td>karma</td>
<td>lower</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For most of Indian history, Hindu society has been divided into **castes**. The four major social classes in Hindu society were **Brahmins**, **Kshatriyas**, **Vaisyas**, and **Sudras**. The Brahmins are at the top of the caste system. Their job is to be **priests**. **Kshatriyas** were warriors. Vaisyas were herders, farmers, merchants, and craftspeople. **Sudras** were farm workers, servants, and laborers. The lowest group in Hindu society is not an official part of the caste system. They are called **ununtouchables**, also known as Dalits. They are responsible for “_________ work.”

Each person in Hindu society is supposed to follow their **dharma**, or duties, determined by their caste. This ensures that all jobs are done in the society. If a person follows the **dharma** of their caste, then they will have good **karma**. If they do not complete their duties, then they will have **bad karma**. Karma is important because Hindus believe that when they die, they go through the process of **reincarnation**. If someone has good karma when they die, they will be reborn into a higher **caste**. If they do not follow their dharma, and as a result, have bad karma, then they will be reborn into a **lower** caste. They might even be born as an animal.

Hindus believe that the goal of life is to escape the cycle of death and rebirth. They can do this by achieving “union with Brahma,” also known as **___________.** To reach that goal, a person needs to climb the caste ladder until they are Brahmins, then they have to fulfill the Brahmin’s dharma so they have good **karma** at the end of their life.
SQ 7: What are the major beliefs and practices of Hinduism?

Directions: Use the information you learned about Hinduism to complete the tasks below by filling them in on the Belief Systems Chart to keep track of this information.

Identify and describe Hinduism's
- Major beliefs and practices
- Sacred texts