

Stuff to Know When Cults Come Knocking: Leader's Guide

by Mary Boerman Lagerwey. Faith Alive,
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Why should we teach a seven-session course on sects and cults to high school students? Despite the onslaught of secularism, there is a strong yearning for spirituality. Since we are religious by nature, no one can live "on bread alone." In search for meaning in life, many people, especially the youth, dabble in the world of cults and sects, seeking release from drug enslavement or the inability to control their sexual behaviour or to sustain loving relationships at home or with school friends.

Mary Boerman Lagerwey, who has taught about sects and cults for more than fifteen years, is a Bible teacher and drama director at Illiana Christian High School in Lansing, Illinois. Her well-laid out course focusses on what cults and sects are and how they attract new members. It meets an often-overlooked need. It gives the students a greater awareness of the spiritual, social, and physical dangers, which many of the sects and cults create. It also helps students to understand their own beliefs so they're better equipped to evaluate the belief systems of others. Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, occults groups such as Wicca, Astrology, Satanism, and some of the recent destructive cults such as People's Temple and Branch Davidians, are used to introduce students to the subject matter. Each student receives six newspapers, which offer a brief introduction to the groups they will study. A novel and attractive way of getting the students interested! The leader's guide provides direction for reading and discussing the articles in the newspapers, as well as a variety of additional learning activities. The author also has an excellent list of resources for research. She also tries to "pack in" a great deal of materials for each session. That's why I suggest that the leader be selective due to time restraints. Since each course session is only between 50-60 minutes long, some of the suggestions to facilitate teaching are impractical such as providing refreshments or visiting a Kingdom Hall or a Christian Science Reading Room. I don't want to quibble about definitions, but I wish the author would have been more specific in differentiating between sects and cults. All in all, an excellent course to help students to discern the spirits of our times.

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