Ancient Civilizations- Polytheistic Religion:
Early religion was based on the prehistoric beliefs. Many intentional burials, megaliths, and idol worships are the results of archeological speculations. Early religions developed with the rise of agriculture and specialization. Most early religions were based on environmental phenomena or animism. These early beliefs systems are polytheistic meaning they worshipped many gods or more than one. These beliefs actually led to a rise of a social class within early cities creating an elite group of people who protected/ communicated with and assisted the “gods”. These people were called priests. This class of people were often seen as the early political leaders of city-states. Over time polytheistic religions dissolved into the more formal monotheistic that are around today. Very few actual polytheistic systems are still practiced in industrialized societies today.

These early polytheistic religions were based on stories that taught lessons, usually creating a tragic event or struggle in the life of the protagonist. These early stories are called myths.

Early examples of mythology:
- Epic of Gilgamesh (Mesopotamia)
- Story of Re (Egypt)
- The Minotaur (Greece)
- Zoroastrianism (Persia)

Ancient Civilizations- Monotheistic Religion:
Some civilizations developed a belief system based on the worship of one god. Monotheistic beliefs (or the beliefs in one god) again helped create a rise of a social class within early cities creating an elite group of people who protected/ communicated with and assisted the god. These people were called priests. This class of people were often seen as the early political leaders of city-states.

The earliest monotheistic religions developed in India and Northern Mesopotamia. These religions will become the basis of civilization as they offer guidelines and rules for people of faith. All early monotheistic religions develop a series of sacred texts which dictate etiquette and rules for the community.

Early examples of sacred texts:
- The Vedas & Upanishads (India)
- The Torah (Canaan)
- The Four Noble Truths (India)
- The Qur'an (Arabian Peninsula)

Create an icon or picture that represents an environmental phenomena.

Why are priest considered to be elite?

What might be the opposite of polytheism?

Create a mini content poster for monotheistic religion.
Ancient Civilizations

Hinduism—India (3000 BCE)

Ancient India is known for its two main religions that endure today. These religions developed during a period of time when polytheism dominated the world, allowing India to develop differently. Hinduism and Buddhism today are major religions and practiced by millions of people worldwide.

Hinduism is one of the oldest religions of the world. Its origins are hard to trace as it does not have a founder like most other religions. (i.e. Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam...)

Basic Fundamental Beliefs:

- **Brahman** is the eternal being that created and preserves the world. Each person has an atman or soul. Brahmin is seen in many forms called devas.
- **Devas** are considered manifestations of Brahman and help keep order in nature. Many Hindus worship such devas as Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, Siva the destroyer. Hindus believe that the universe and everyone in it are part of a continual pattern of birth, death, and rebirth. This idea of **reincarnation** is based on his or her karma. The ultimate goal for Hindus is moksha, the atman is released from earthly concerns and reunites with the creator. To achieve moksha is to fulfill your spiritual duties and responsibilities called dharma.

Sacred Text and Practices of Hinduism

- **The Vedas** written in Sanskrit (3000BCE) said to not be written by humans but revealed by Brahmin the Creator. Hindus consider the Vedas to contain eternal knowledge and are considered the core of the Hindu religion.

- **The Upanishads** built upon the Vedas and were revealed not written by humans. Focused on philosophical ideas in the Vedas like the nature of the world and the meaning of life.

Judaism—Canaan (2000 BCE):

Judaism has its historical roots in Ancient Mesopotamia. This belief system developed in an area where most city-states were polytheistic with worship at ziggurats. The story of Judaism begins with a **covenant** (agreement) between God and a man named Abraham. In this agreement God told Abraham to leave Ur and give up his polytheistic beliefs. In return, God said he would grant Abraham and his descendants a Promised Land and to make his them a mighty people.
Judaism cont...

This covenant led Abraham and his people to an area called Canaan (near modern day Israel) where they lived for many years. Abraham’s grandson Jacob (also called Israel) had twelve children and develop a system of lineage based on the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Hebrews (followers of Abraham) became know as the Children of Israel or Israelites.

Sacred Texts of Judaism:
The Torah is a the most sacred text of the Hebrews. It includes the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. These books describe the history and events of Jews. Including their exodus from Egypt and the Ten Commandments. It also contains a series of laws that Jews are expected to follow called Kashrut. These laws dictate that food is prepared in a proper way for consumption.

Buddhism – India (500 BCE)
The teachings of Siddhartha Gautama are the basis for Buddhism which also developed in ancient India. Around 500 BCE Siddhartha Gautama was born a prince in northern India (today the country of Nepal), where he lived a very sheltered life. When he was thirty he realized that people grew old, get sick, and die. He gave up his possessions and left his palace resolved to find a path for people overcome these sufferings.

The Teachings of Buddhism
The Four Noble Truths are the core of the Buddhist teachings. The Four Noble Truths state:
- Suffering is part of life, no one can escape from suffering while alive
- Suffering comes from people’s desires for pleasure and material goods
- Overcoming these desires during the life eventually brings an end to suffering.
- Desire can be overcome by following the eightfold path.

The Eightfold Path is a series of steps that Buddhists believe lead to Enlightenment. The Buddha taught that those who follow this path could attain nirvana or a state of perfect peace. Nirvana can be attained by living the Middle Way. In other words by living life in moderation, avoiding extreme comforts and discomforts.

Buddhism in India reached its peak about 200 BCE under the Emperor Ashoka. However today very few Buddhist exist in India.
Islam - Arabian Peninsula (600 CE)
The city of Mecca was more than a large trading center; it was also an important religious center. The *Kaaba* was an ancient building that was considered sacred. This sacred site brought many pilgrims to the area. One of the gods was seen as supreme above the others of the Kaaba. They called this supreme god *Allah*.

**Muhammad the Messenger:**
Muhammad ibn Abd Allah was born in 570 CE and was raised by his uncle after his parent’s death. *Muhammad* was a successful merchant and traveled to areas outside the Arabian peninsula. Muhammad was a religious man who went on religious retreats, on one such trip in 610, he heard an angel command him to speak the messages of *Allah*. These words are the first Muhammad would in time bring to his followers. Muhammad reported many messages from this angel, among them was that *Allah* is the one and only true and all-powerful God. He was hesitant to preach these messages for several years. After he publically began preaching, he gained many followers.

Many Meccans did not accept this new teaching as truth. Many saw Muhammad as a threat to their livelihoods. After Muhammad’s uncle’s death, he and his followers were no longer safe in Mecca. He moved to the city of Yathrib (which was later renamed *Medina* (Prophet’s city)). This journey from Mecca to Yathrib was the *hegira*. The *hegira* is the first year of the Islamic calendar. In Medina, Muhammad built up a community of followers and named their faith *Islam* which means “achieving peace through submission to God.” The followers of Islam are called *Muslims*.

**The Basic teachings of Islam:**
From Muhammad’s revelations came the basic teachings of Islam. These revelations were seen as direct words from God and were collected in the sacred text of Islam called the *Qur’an*. Muslim’s read from the Qur’an to hear Allah’s words. They seek a religious experience in the rhythm and beauty of the words themselves. They believe that only in its original Arabic language can one know the full meaning and beauty of the text. The Qur’an has been translated into many other languages but is not considered to be true representations of this
Islam cont...

sacred text. The Qur’an lays out five basic acts of worship. These are called the Five Pillars of Islam.

The Five Pillars of Islam:
The basic tenets of the Islamic faith begin with the first pillar – Shahadah. “There is no god but God [Allah], and Muhammad is the messenger of God”. This signals a difference from other Arabic religions who were polytheistic and that Muhammad was a prophet and not a deity. The second pillar – Salah is the performance of five daily prayers. Worshippers always face Mecca to pray. The third pillar – Zakah is giving of alms to the poor. Fourth – Sawm is Fasting during the month of Ramadan. It was during Ramadan that Muhammad began to profess his messages that were written in the Qur’an. Muslims believe that fasting is a way to show that God is more important than one’s own body. The fifth pillar - Hajj is the pilgrimage (religious journey) to Mecca to circle the Kaaba.

The Qur’an also has guidelines for proper behavior like other religious texts. For example Muslims are forbidden from drinking alcohol and eating pork and they must wash themselves before praying to insure their purity before God. It also promotes moral laws in society through the prohibition of murder, stealing, and lying. Another requirement for a devout Muslim is jihad. Jihad is a word that can be translated to mean a “struggle for faith” which can mean to defend the Muslim community, to convert people to Islam, and some have translated it to mean “holy war”.

Other Sacred Texts of Islam:
The record of Muhammad’s daily life is known as the Sunna. The Sunna means “tradition” it contains hundreds of lessons on Muhammad’s actions. This provides Muslims with guidance in many areas including personal relationships, business dealings, and religious practices. The Sharia developed over time as a legal system to reflect various rules by which all Muslims should live.