

**Youth Culture Lesson**  
**Finding Teachable Moments in Culture**  
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**Pierced:** Girl Suspended Because of ‘Religious’ Nose Ring

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**What Happened:**

When 14-year-old Ariana Iacono arrived at school with an earring stud in her nose, she didn’t think she’d spark a national story; but this small piercing has stirred quite the large controversy about where freedom of religion begins and ends—and what makes for a religion at all.

Ariana and her mother are members of the Church of Body Modification, members of which believe piercings and tattoos help strengthen spirituality and create better synergy among the mind, body and soul. Ariana says the piercing is part of her faith.

Administrators at Clayton High School, the North Carolina school Ariana attends, think differently. The school has a policy against such piercings, and while it does make exceptions based on a person’s beliefs, school officials say Ariana didn’t do enough to demonstrate that her faith was not just real, but that her faith is having a mark on her life—not just her skin. Ariana’s not allowed back in school until the matter’s cleared up.

That said, the Church of Body Modification is recognized by the government, even if it has only 3,500 members and no places of worship. Ariana and her mother believe they’re victims of religious discrimination. “Nobody has to agree with us,” Nikki Iacono says. “We have the same rights as anybody else does.”

**Talk About It:**

Do you think the school was right to suspend Ariana? Why or why not? What sorts of things does a religion need to have before it can be taken seriously?

There have been other instances in which religious gear has been banned in schools: In some European countries, Muslims can’t cover their hair. Earlier this year, a boy was told he couldn’t bring a Catholic rosary to school because some local gangs had been using rosaries as a sign of affiliation. Lots of students have been sent home for wearing religious or political T-shirts that administrators thought might be offensive. Do you think schools are right to ban religious gear or messages?

Do you wear a cross necklace or a promise ring? Something else that labels you a Christian? If so, why is it important to you? How big a deal would it be for you if your school said you that you couldn’t wear it to school anymore?

**What the Bible Says:**

*Declare your faith ...*

“Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God” (John 12:42-43).

“...If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all” (Isa. 7:9).

*...but don't overdo it.*

“Everything they do is for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues” (Matt. 23:5-6).