

Exploring the Sacred in RE

What do we mean by 'sacred'?

The word 'sacred' can mean different things to different people. For many people, 'sacred' is connected with religious belief or practice; for others, it might refer to valuing the natural world, for example. It can refer to something that is set apart or special, for example, a sacred text, object or ritual.

How might we explore the 'sacred' in RE?

By introducing pupils to special moments, places, objects, rituals or stories, for example, the arti ceremony (Hindu Dharma), the festival of Hanukkah (Jewish worldviews), the story of creation (religious worldviews)

By supporting pupils to understand that the opportunity to learn about other people's worldviews is a gift from those who live them out and therefore must be treated with respect



Key Questions to Consider

Why are we using / doing this? Where does it sit within our sequence of learning?

Do the pupils understand how it is viewed and used within the religious / non-religious worldview?

How might an adherent of the worldview feel about the way that we are using it?

Exploring the Sacred in RE:

Case Study

Year 2 are due to learn about Shabbat as part of their broader learning about Jewish worldviews. Mr Patel has been planning the lesson. He wants the pupils to understand how important the Shabbat meal is to many Jewish people. He decides to introduce the learning by teaching the pupils about the Jewish creation story. He wants pupils to make connections between the importance of the day of rest in this creation story and the Shabbat meal. Pupils have previously learned about the story of creation in Early Years.

Mr Patel is keen that pupils understand the lived reality of Jewish worldviews. He wants them to begin to understand that not every Jewish person will celebrate the Shabbat meal in exactly the same way. However, he also wants them to understand that there are some things about the Shabbat meal that make it distinctively Jewish and very special.

How might Mr Patel go about introducing pupils to Shabbat? What would the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches be? Are there any approaches he should avoid? Why might this be? Reflect on the options – not all would represent best practice!



Option 1: Buy a loaf of bread the day before the lesson and during the lesson, arrange the classroom so that all pupils are sat around one large table. During the lesson, pupils share the bread, and Mr Patel plays a kiddush prayer on the whiteboard via YouTube.

Option 2: Introduce some special objects, e.g. candlesticks and candles, challah bread, Kiddush cup, Havdalah, seder plate. Ask pupils to say how they think Jewish people might use these objects during the Shabbat meal. Show pupils a video of a Jewish family sharing the Shabbat meal and make connections with the objects. Ask pupils to draw a Shabbat table and label special objects. Ask pupils to discuss whether Shabbat is a special time for Jewish people

Option 3: Ask pupils to reflect on the idea of rest and how rest is part of their own lives. Explore the Jewish story of creation and discuss how different Jewish people might be inspired by the story of creation. Introduce pupils to at least one Jewish person and support them to ask questions to find out more about what the Shabbat meal looks like in their household. Support them to understand that it might look different in a different Jewish home, e.g. by watching a video clip and asking questions like, 'What is happening here? Who is this? Where is this? When is this? Does everyone do this in the same way? Which moments are special? How do we know that this meal is important to (many) Jewish people by watching this video? How do we know? What does this tell us about rest?'

Questions to Consider

1. Mr Patel wants his pupils to make connections between rest, Shabbat and Jewish worldviews – how does he know whether the option he chooses is the most authentic way of representing this aspect of Jewish worldviews?
2. How might the sequence of previous learning impact on the choices Mr Patel makes in this lesson?
3. How does Mr Patel know that the objects he is using in his lesson are a) authentic and b) appropriate?
4. How does each option support pupils to understand the significance of Shabbat to Jewish people and the different ways in which it might be celebrated by different Jewish people?
5. How might a Jewish person feel about the way Mr Patel is representing Shabbat in his classroom? Does this matter?

Top Tips

School Leaders

- Schools have a duty to promote British Values and work within the Equalities Act 2010; this includes having due regard for the right to freedom of religion and belief. It is important to be confident that the whole curriculum is in line with this legislation.
- Parents have the right to withdraw their children either partially or wholly from the RE curriculum. Schools should have a clear process that is accessible to parents. Part of this will include sharing information about the RE curriculum, including how different religious and non-religious worldviews are respectfully presented and engaged with
- Care should be taken to ensure that the context of the school is reflected in its approach to curriculum, teaching and learning

RE Subject Leader

- Regular monitoring and evaluation should provide confidence in the way in which the RE curriculum is being implemented. There are a variety of different pedagogical approaches that could be used in the context of the RE curriculum. Where pupils are engaging with the lived experience of religion and belief, care needs to be taken to avoid unintentionally presenting misconceptions and stereotypes. It is important to be sensitive to and show respect for religious and non-religious worldviews, considering when it may be appropriate or inappropriate to 'act out' sacred rituals, rites of passage, stories, etc.
- Regular monitoring and evaluation should provide evidence of teachers' confidence in teaching RE. Where necessary, staff should be supported through ongoing professional development and training to explore the sacred in the RE classroom effectively

Classroom Teacher

- Learning about religious and non-religious worldviews should not be superficial; pupils should have the opportunity to engage with key concepts, beliefs, practices, traditions, ways of thinking, etc., including the ways in which they connect with each other
- Pupils should engage with different ways in which people live out their religious and non-religious worldviews, asking questions about how this may be affected by their context
- Learning in RE should help pupils become more consciously aware of their own worldviews, including their own beliefs, values, ways of living, ways of thinking, etc.

