

# **Teaching Abstract and Philosophical Concepts**

Using Active, Multisensory and Experiential Learning

**Sue Phillips**

**Winner of the Shap award for 2004 for making an outstanding contribution to the teaching of world religions**

**With grateful thank to Veronica Voiels, sometime PGCE coordinator for RE at MMU and senior examiner for AQA for her help with this handbook which has been updated and revised from an original published by SfE in 2005**

**A theatre of learning production**

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**I enjoyed writing this book more than any other because here I indulged myself by writing about so much of what I find fascinating about religion - all the things that happened *before* the establishment of the living traditions we recognise today.**

**The book is in eight sections which cover the ultimate questions that children ask about , Who made God? How do we know what is real?,**

**The origin of the Universe, Life after death, Can the mind exist without the body? NDEs Religious Experience and verification, miracles and teaching about loss and death in the classroom.**

**The second section contains work on the origin of religion which I think is not only fascinating but enables children to make sense of it .**

**My discovery of much of this work, came after I left university and in my first post had to write an RE component to a humanities programme which began in year seven with a study of early humans .**

**Here, I discovered to my amazement burials by Neanderthals of their dead indicating it seems a belief in the afterlife going back 50,000 years, their development of the first ceremonies in hunting magic and the first religious leaders possibly shown in the cave paintings .**

**I discovered The importance of myth in understanding religion and the power of early belief in Life after death as shown by the ancient burials at UR and Egypt.**

**The children absolutely adore the stories, some of it they study in primary school at a more descriptive level , but actually getting involved in higher level thinking alongside them is very rewarding and a great way into RE after the Island.**

**It is rarely taught because of the emphasis on living religion within a packed curriculum. If you cannot fit it in at least read it for your own interest and professional development . It will help you I am sure, as it did me, Make RE Make sense , which is the theme of the whole of Theatre of Learning.**

**Sue Phillips July 15<sup>th</sup> 2016.**

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## Section 1: Introduction

This book is written very much with the non specialist, NQT and trainee in mind. Like the other resource files in this series , It will assume no previous knowledge and will unpack the teaching process as we go along.

Each section contains a **lesson recipe** which will tell you what equipment you need and how to use it to deliver an active, multi sensory, experiential lesson in numbered steps which will make RE sense to your pupils.

What it will also do is develop their own spirituality ,and through this, enable them to empathise with the spirituality of others.

It does this through the **five techniques of the Theatre of Learning** which are described in the first book of the series **Making RE Make Sense. These are**

- 1) **Working in circles** created through trust building and listening exercises
- 2) **A multi sensory environment** using music, plants, artefacts, candles and scent
- 3) **Religion neutral exercises** which parallel the ceremonies and rituals in the traditions being studied.
- 4) **Participatory symbols** which are actions which enable us to experience that ritual and liturgy are very powerful because they enable the believers who take part in them to feel changed. These are all combined in re enactment
- 5) **Hitting the spiritual target** in which all lessons are planned to link the pupils' own spirituality with the universal spirituality in the tradition being studied and enable them to empathise with people whose way of life is very different from their own.

This book is all about the sixth technique

### 6) **Creating a concrete platform from which to teach Abstract concepts.**

The material in this book is the most difficult material we have to teach and the most difficult for us to understand, ourselves, let alone teach it ! If we create a concrete platform in the form of multi sensory displays and sets, concept building stories and role plays, allegories and reflective exercises we will help pupils of all abilities remember, understand and be able to think about and question the material. It is one thing to present it to a class ,quite another to stimulate and motivate them sufficiently to want to raise a hand and ask a question or think about the issues deeply enough to respond in class or written work, in an individual and perhaps, unique way ,showing that they have actually changed the way they perceive the world.

**It is designed to be used with text books .**

These supply the information that pupils will need to follow up their work.

Each lesson is followed by vocabulary lists which can be printed off to put in pupil's books, used for tests and or made into flash cards. There are levelled tasks in simple language that all children can understand. These are built into cloze passages which are also writing frames for the low to average degree of literacy. Most, tasks enable pupils to write from level four to level six depending on their ability. Some enable them to write to level eight. There are levelled essays for the most able and suggestions for research. These levels are designed to be simple enough for pupils and teacher to carry in their head so that a meaningful conversation can take place in the classroom and pupils know very clearly what they should be aiming for and how to get there.

"Making RE Make Sense" has a detailed section on writing and assessment, but briefly, what I recommend to motivate pupils to improve and pay attention to your comments as well as their grade is this.

- Give each pupil a target level or GCSE Grade
- Put that in the front cover of their exercise books
- Give each pupil a level descriptor and make sure they understand them
- Put the level they reach in the front cover of their exercise book so that it appears as a list, together with a comment as to what they need to do to reach the next level

This will motivate pupils to improve and to look at the detailed formative assessment in their books.

Here are the level descriptors I am working to.

**Level Three: Facts**

**Level Four :Why, Because**

**Level Five :The effects of belief upon an individual, family or community.**

**Level Six : The variety of belief within a tradition.**

**Level Seven :Critical analysis**

**Level Eight :Comparison with other traditions. Development of religion through history**

**Each essay has a mark scheme allowing you to mark the essay out of twenty and equate it to a GCSE grade.** You will need to establish the grade boundaries according to your own examination board . For some Grade C is 45% ie 8/9 out of twenty . Others, where the earlier part of the essay questions are devoted to vocabulary and factual knowledge and marks can be gained comparatively easily set the C grade boundary at 60% ie 12 out of twenty.

The A grade boundary moves similarly between 70% and 80%. It is helpful if your pupils know, not only know their target grade, but also how many marks they need to get in an essay in order to reach that.

**What this book will also do is show you how to teach an interesting lesson which will engage your pupils and make them think.**

That is the biggest challenge, especially if you are inexperienced, that an RE teacher faces. How do you convey the information that you have worked so hard to acquire in a way that will motivate the pupils?. That is the part that takes years of practice and a great deal of thought. If you have RE once a week – and it might not have been your choice to do this - then you are going to find it very difficult to acquire the expertise that you need to motivate pupils, in a subject that they might not see the relevance of in the first place.

Finally, the text will also explain why a subject is being tackled in a certain way so that it will also help you to understand the process of teaching and learning. It reflects the three part lesson, together with the literacy strategy . Each section is followed by vocabulary /flash card lists , a cloze procedure/writing frame which enables pupils to work up to level six and a levelled essay enabling them to work up to level eight.

I hope that after you have begun to use Theatre of Learning materials that you will not only find you enjoy teaching RE much more but that you feel much more confident about understanding the process.

If you are a specialist I hope you will bear with me in those parts that teach grandmothers to suck eggs and will enjoy the ideas for teaching the material you know so well in a new way. I hope you will also find the resource files a useful tool for the non specialist, NQTs and trainees you may have in your department

This resource file is different from the others in lots of ways . In the other files you might follow most of the lessons in the file through, in order, as you teach one particular tradition.

This file is an amalgamation of all the important concepts that you would teach in between each unit of religion .You will fit these topics in as they arise, interspersed among the stories of the traditions.

These concepts, which I have listed below, in the order in which I think they need to be taught, form the conceptual framework upon which the *understanding* of religion is based. These are the concepts which make the study of the traditions make sense. They are

- Early religion
- Myth
- Life after death and how we cope with death
- Ideas about God – children need to understand infinity to be able to understand that
- Arguments about the existence of God
- Science and religion - understanding the nature of reality, that everything is not still and solid as it seems but is in fact mostly empty space and energy
- Verification – how we know things , including the verification of religious experience

If we have a syllabus which deals *only* with the features of religious traditions, there is a grave danger that pupils will never really understand the concepts that underlie them all.

If they have not unpicked and explored symbols, myth, infinity, and spirit, *they will never really engage with ultimate questions on a personal level*. Religion will remain something that is about *other* people and their rather quaint but perhaps quite interesting customs.

**There is no right or wrong order or particular place to teach these.** We use them as concept builders to enable pupils to understand the nature of religion as a whole. I thought very carefully about where I would put each section for a number of reasons as follows

- What luggage do pupils bring with them into secondary school regarding religion so what should I teach first to enable them to put it down. ?
- What would it enable pupils to understand and how would it build on their knowledge and understanding from the previous year.?
- Ideas needed to be re visited as pupils' understanding matures. These concepts are taught as a spiral, in a cyclic rather than a linear way
- **It is also different in that some lessons, especially in philosophy, are hard to do in a multi sensory way. These lessons often have information which you can print off and turn into study booklets for your pupils.**

### **Using study booklets to aid assessment for learning**

- In my department in my school we create A5 study booklets to go with every part of our RE course from year seven upwards.
- These can be read together as a class to summarise the learning and also be used as a basis for the written work.
- We teach between three and six active lessons, pupils then spend a lesson where we set up an extensive **literacy task with levels**.
- We may go over the material to reinforce the understanding .
- We will look in detail at examples of answers so that pupils are very clear about how to reach each level.
- They may practice some **self assessment** or mark some examples on the projector together.
- We may ask everyone to pick out the level six sentences, for example.
- We may ask them to decide how many marks they would give the work and take answers in a circle
- We might look closely together at how a teacher or examiner would allocate marks.
- (There is a detailed chapter on writing and assessment in **Making RE Make Sense**)

**What elements go into constructing an RE course ? What should you do when ?**

Before we look at how our course is put together, let us consider what elements go into the construction of an entire RE course from years seven to thirteen. It is important to think first about *skills*. The quality of RE in primary schools has improved considerably since I entered the profession thirty years ago, but it is still variable, depending on how confident a school feels about delivering the subject. It may be that quite a lot of *content* has been delivered but that there has been little opportunity for in depth discussion and *understanding*. It is one thing to describe what we see in religion - festivals and rites of passage but quite another to study the *reason* for it all – that which you cannot see or describe !

- By the time a child has reached ten it is beginning to question the rational basis of religion. If important concept building is not being put in place pupils may cease to take religion seriously.

- It became very clear to me that when I talked to year seven about what they thought God was like that the old man on a cloud prevailed. He was either a figure they had a relationship with, that they imagined was taking care of them, watching over them listening to their prayers, or, most commonly, was what they assumed religious people believed in. This confirmed them in their view that religion was not something that could be taken seriously on an intellectual level.

- Pupils of that age also tended to see science as something that had answer and that matter was what it seemed.

- Science was to be taken seriously, religion was not .

- Religion was only of value to those who believed.

- I tried to imagine what it was like for a pupil encountering God, worship and religion through their experience of school. I suspected that these were concepts that did not get unpacked very often and so children pass through school from four years old to eighteen without possibly having an opportunity to explore these ideas and develop a more mature way of regarding them. In other words the concept of God as a spirit, as immanent , transcendent , the inner voice was almost as it were, unawakened.

- When I first began to put a whole syllabus together, considering what to teach when, I started by imagining what a young person entering secondary school might *think* people believed and worshipped.

- I assumed that they all thought religion was like believing the moon is made of green cheese and that religion was not a serious matter for thought and discussion. I worked from this assumption, not because it was *true*, but because it was *helpful*. It enabled me to see what I was presenting from their point of view. What I saw was *nonsense*, something that made *no sense*, so my life long struggle became about, making RE make sense.

The other files are about the religious traditions. They enable pupils to make sense of religion through **feelings**. This file is about concepts, it enables religion to make sense through the **intellect**. It is only through the combination of the two that successful RE takes place.

So what things did I bear in mind when I decided what to teach when.? This is how our course in my school is put together

### **Making a class symbolically literate**

The first thing youngsters want to know is ,is it true? And there is of course no answer ,not in the scientific sense that they are asking for, so I show them that religion is like so many kinds of knowledge we encounter . They realise this through a study of **symbols**. We learn that there are lots of things we assume are true but cannot see, touch or describe like love, wind power and most importantly our feelings.

- I ask my class “How many of you have a nice clean glass jar at home, one with a tight fitting lid?”. Then I ask “Who believes somebody loves them, a person or a pet?”. Then I ask my enthusiastic class to put some of that love in a jar and bring it in to show me ! There is a shocked silence and then the penny drops!

This point is reinforced in many different ways as we discover the limitations of language. For example:

- I offer a child a single red rose and ask it what it means when a man gives one to his partner. We talk about how it is different from a bunch of flowers. We talk about what he has “said” without words - is it because his love is not real ? no, it is because it cannot be described.

- We talk about body language, looking at pictures, playing with gestures. We play a game where pupils take out of their pencil cases objects which they keep on their laps .They take turns to describe it without naming it, seeing how long it takes for the class to guess what it is, a lot of words are used. At the end it is held up for the briefest second . In an instant all that we had tried to describe in words became apparent .We look at the limitations of words over and over again and the power of images and symbols -the point?

*We use symbols not because something is not true, or real, but because words are limited and because we cannot always see and touch what is very real to us all.*

- Religion uses symbols all the time .Most buildings exist for functional reasons and their design reflect this. All religious buildings are designed to be symbolic, to express the beliefs of the people who worship there.

- Religion is full of symbols which point towards a meaning beyond them. In communicating like this, religion is like all sorts of other areas of life,

### **Starting with the Island**

We start in year seven with the Island and so this point is even more powerful. (See **Making RE Make Sense**) Pupils in a fantasy story find themselves shipwrecked on a island where their community has to be built afresh. They instinctively invent rites of passage, a special story about the shipwreck and a special place for the objects that survive from the ship. In other words, they *instinctively* operate symbolically because it is an essential way for us to communicate the richness of our thoughts and experience.

We are human beings who constantly *interpret* what we experience and we need symbols to do that. Religion is an *interpretation* of life which some people experience. We do not doubt a person who says they are loved because we *all* recognise that experience. We *do* doubt a person who responds to a religious experience because it is not something which we *all* recognise or value.

This leads us naturally into **how do we know things?** A very simple version of Descarte's questions about whether the senses can be trusted (see chapter...) begins to shake the pupil's belief that seeing is believing.

Next we look at God. With prompting, pupils ask triumphantly, exactly what I wanted them to..."If God made everything, who made God?" We can then explore the concept of **infinity** which is essential for pupils to be able to understand the concept of an eternal spirit – theirs, or a divine being.

The final piece of concept building is to look at **myth**. Pupils need to be able to look at religious texts, able to ask not, is it *true*? but what does it *mean*? The appendix on myth helps you consider this topic. We look at myths as stories that arose from historical events such as Theseus and the Minotaur and Troy, these non Biblical stories are baggage free in that the children look at them with an open mind, rather than dismissing them as total fantasy just because they are in the Bible. Then we look at Noah and Jericho. We relate these stores to their versions of their shipwreck. Pupils are now getting a sense of how one might interpret a story from a holy book. We finish this section by looking at myths that might be written to explain a universal truth. We explore Adam and Eve and Creation and Evolution as examples of these, being careful to acknowledge that to some people these are not myths at all but the literal words of God.

**Now, I consider that my pupils are armed with the skills concepts and attitudes to study the traditions**

We begin with **Christian symbols**, looking at the church, baptism, the cross and the Eucharist. The pupils are decoding the symbolism and looking at the meaning behind it all, using their new skills. It is all so much more than mere information about other people. Lesson recipes for these lessons can be found in **Teaching Christianity**.

In **year eight** our pupils study Judaism, Islam and Sikhism using the skills gained in year seven, experiential multi sensory lessons, developing their own spirituality and enabling them to empathise with members of those traditions.

In **year nine** our pupils study the philosophy of Hinduism and Buddhism and abstract concepts are reinforced and built upon.

In the autumn term they examine religious experience through a course called "belief and journey". The journey is their own, and others', in this life and the next. They begin with looking at the ultimate questions they would most like to know the answers to, The most common ones, even in my secular classes are, does God exist?, is there life after death?, is there life on other planets?, what is the meaning and purpose of our existence? – all questions that will be addressed during the year.

We begin with life after death (see chapters ... )we look at religious experience through a study of Lourdes. Descartes is looked at in greater detail, together with the verification of religious experience and the term ends with a look at science and religion, revisiting infinity and the nature of matter and consciousness (see the theory of the pulsating universe and the case of the disappearing table). Pupils now approach Hinduism, Buddhism and the philosophy of religion with a much more sophisticated view of knowledge, belief and reality. They understand that nothing is created or destroyed, it only changes, so God and life after death become intellectually viable. They understand that all things are one and reality is an illusion through seeing that the universe is ultimately space and energy. They understand that time is relative, like everything else in our world .

In **years ten and eleven** our pupils look at the classical arguments for the existence of God , The verification of religious experience, miracles and life after death. They look in **core RE** ( non examination) at eschatological beliefs right across all the traditions as they consider what kind of world they want to create and what they can do to bring that about .They consider practical action and the inner resources from their own spirituality which inspires it. Throughout the course they are learning that “The Kingdom of heaven is within you”

Most of the abstract concepts in this book will be revisited as part of a **concept spiral**. We teach God, life after death and verification three times, during the course of their time in

secondary school as pupils’ ability to understand abstract concepts matures. Because of this the lesson recipes in this book are intended for pupils at different key stages. Each chapter tells you what key stage or year group it is designed for. The more difficult chapters, for the older pupils have the study booklet first so you, as teacher, particularly if you are a non specialist or teaching an area of philosophy for the first time, can read it and grasp the ideas in your own mind. You can then print it off to use with your pupils. What follows is the lesson recipe for teaching it actively.

## Section 2: The Origin of Religion

This is a great topic to teach pupils near the beginning of their RE. **Like the Island, It helps to make everything that follows make sense**. Its value is largely unrecognised, however, because of the importance of teaching living traditions.so few schools address it and in my work with trainees I find that few young teachers know very much about it ..

This section contains a series of lessons on the beginning of religion. **The Theatre of Learning session based on the story of “The Cave” is the highlight and pivotal point.** The story of the cave helps children understand the possible origin of religion in early societies. While it was written for year seven, this story has been used by teachers to teach sixth formers and upper primary school.

The ideas can be adapted to teach pupils at any age who are embarking on a study of religion.

This series of lessons enables pupils to understand the development of **the belief that humans have a spirit that continued after death**, to **animism**, believing that everything around them, especially the animals they depended on for food had a spirit that they could control, through **hunting magic**.

It helps them to understand how they moved from **animism to polytheism**, belief in many gods, which comes as they settle in one place to grow crops and farm animals, depending now on the sky and the earth which they **personify** as gods and goddesses.

Finally, all over the world different cultures come to **monotheism**, belief in one abstract spirit, creator of the universe, that cannot be seen or described.

**The cave** is a concept building activity. It enables students to use their imagination to enter into the experience of early humans and to work out how and why they might have come to an awareness of, and belief in God.

They engage with the story through identifying with the character, **Solon** who is around their age and undergoing initiation. They consider how *they* might feel if this was really happening and that they themselves faced this experience.

Having entered the story, they are able to react to a series of natural disasters as early humans might, We do this in order to help the children understand how early humans moved from **animism**, and the belief that everything around them had spirits, which they could try to control, to **fertility** and **polytheism**, a belief that there were gods of the sky and earth who made the crops grow and whom they should worship.

**Of course this is all speculation and this realisation in itself is a useful learning point. We do not know how religion began because there was no writing.**

- This unit of work provides a basis, over a number of lessons, from which to consider the existence and nature of **God**, the emergence of **monotheism**, the message of the **founders** of the traditions and the problem of **suffering**.
- It provides a basis for extended writing using the highest levels and a rich specialist vocabulary. While it could be done at any age, it is particularly helpful early on. It could be particularly useful in primary school, enabling pupils to make sense of some of their studies of ancient history – making RE make sense

**If you ask a group of eleven year olds where religion came from you may get some very confused answers to do with God or Jesus.** They simply don't know and usually do not seem to have thought about it. Their contact, thus far, is largely to do with living religions. **They have given little thought to how the religions came to be and do not have a conceptual framework in which to make sense of the question.** If pushed they will ask, If there is a god, who made him? which is a question we will look at in another section.

**The Cave** takes the children one step back before **The Island**, (See **Making RE Make Sense** ) where as modern humans put in a non technological situation they instinctively develop rites of passage, holy books, special places and pilgrimages

**The Island** does not mention the existence of God. It is largely concerned with the rituals and ceremonies that are possibly instinctive to us. Its purpose is to show that ritual and ceremony are natural and part of the universal spirituality. Students no longer find the symbolic expression of religion odd when they see how it parallels their own thoughts and reactions on the Island

**The Cave** allows us to explore how early humans reacted to their surroundings. On **the Island**, everyone is perfectly safe and does not have to worry about how they will survive. In **the cave** it is the survival of the group that is fundamental to the way they interpreted the events that happen to them. The **cave** enables students to explore belief in an after life, the belief that everything around them has a spirit, or anima ,that they could control with ritual, liturgy and ceremony. It helps them explore how ,as they became farmers, early humans came to see the pattern of life and death reflected in themselves, the animals and the plants around them and came to believe in the gods of the sky and the earth

The pupils can discover, through role play, how early humans created stories, **myths** to explain the apparently inexplicable, random acts of fate and nature and how these were passed down through oral tradition.

**At the end of this sequence of lessons students can put into context the polytheistic and mythological religions they have come across in history, stories and the media.**

Most eleven year olds have learned stories about the Greek, Roman, Norse and Egyptian gods.

- After the cave they can understand the **anthropomorphic** way of describing God in the past.
- They can understand the idea of **personification** and the development of myth to convey a truth that may not be literal.
- This lays the foundation for understanding the **living traditions** that they see around them today.
- It will enable them to explore from a firmer conceptual base the stories in **the Jewish Bible, Abraham, Moses, Samson and David, the concept of Brahman and Atman** and the worship of **images in Puja**.
- It will enable them to understand the lives of the **founders** of the traditions as they take the understanding of God toward a more abstract **monotheism** or **impermanence**
- The cave enables pupils to use their imagination to understand the beginning of human kind.
- The cave is an excellent basis for literacy work. It provides useful **cross curricular** and **literacy links**. The story stimulates the imagination, encourages thinking skills and uses multi sensory techniques.
- It provides the basis for understanding important concepts and vocabulary in the study of religion.

**Initiation, ritual, personification, fertility, polytheism, sympathetic magic, mana, anima, animism, prayer, worship, sacrifice**

- Students can be invited to write imaginative stories showing evidence of **RE levels**. Their work can incorporate **knowledge, understanding** and **evaluation** and using **specialist vocabulary**. This work can incorporate **research using IT**.

## **The Beginning of Religion - Beliefs about Life After Death**

Around 40,000 BCE we get the first possible evidence of religious belief. A truly extraordinary phenomenon occurs. Neanderthal humans begin to *bury their dead!*

Why is this extraordinary ? - because these humans are not even fully evolved.

They lived a nomadic existence following the herds they hunted . They lived in caves. We think since they lived in communities and co operated in hunting that they had language and they used fire and tools.

Their lives were very precarious. They depended on meat that was caught in life threatening situations. They must often have suffered horrific injuries and been killed as they tried to trap and kill their prey with simple weapons made of sharpened wood and flint. They had no metal.

**At some point they instinctively begin to bury their dead in pebble lined graves** , sometimes in the floor of the caves where they lived, near the fire to keep the bodies warm perhaps? They must have struggled to carry home their dead they wasted time and energy burying them and occasionally left them with precious artefacts. What a waste, why not eat them or leave them where they were as discarded rubbish? Perhaps they might want to dispose of the body ritually out of sentiment for what it once was, but to place them in a home more elaborate than the one they lived in when alive is extraordinary, but more so is the curled up position, the foetal position that might indicate that they believed they might be reborn.

**How did they come to believe that humans had a spirit that did not die the death of the body?** We will never know, **neither will we know if they did believe what we think they did. It is only speculation but it makes so much sense of everything else about them.**

This is a great topic to teach pupils near the beginning of their RE. It helps to make everything that follows make sense.

**In our school we tackle this topic straight after the island in year seven.** The first lesson is called **Fred and Elsie**. It involves presenting the pupils with two pictures of burials which are much later than Neanderthal humans because we need some artefacts and intriguing aspects in the picture to engage the pupils and give them something to think about. Later we can show them the early burials which are just skeletons curled up. You will find similar pictures on google image. The important thing is to find pictures of skeletons curled up and possibly with artefacts. Show the children and let them work out what happened.

**Lesson Recipe on Life After Death - Fred and Elsie**  
**This is what you need**

- Pictures from the internet of early burials, Neanderthal humans. Some have two skeletons . Most are in a curled up position.. Scenes of hunting
- Music : Native American Indian music is very atmospheric. African tribal music, Aboriginal work or something that is mystical would be appropriate.

### **This is what you do**

1. Class come into a horseshoe This will be a very inter active lesson and so I prefer not to have desks in the way.
2. Fade the music and tell the class that you are not going to tell them what the lesson is about today you are going to present them with a puzzle which they have to solve. You are going to show them a picture of something very, very old. It was found in the ground with no handy labels like you would see in a museum and so we are going to have to work out what it is, how it got there and what it means.
3. Show your pictures. We had two and we named them which gave us the title of the lesson . This is Fred and this is Elsie. We have no idea if they are male or female but giving them names helps us to identify which one we are talking about
4. Let us begin with Fred. What do you think this is a picture of ? pupils speculate, not everyone realises that it is a skeleton. Some think it is a starving person. We establish that the person is dead.

**What happened to him? How did he come to be in this picture that we are looking at today? We have to work it out from the clues in the picture. What is this ? pupils work out it is a cup, We notice he is wearing some kind of hat but nothing else and he is curled up so this is my idea . He got up one morning . put on his hat and picked up his morning cup of tea. Unfortunately it was poisoned and so he tucked his cup under his arm and curled up in a ball fell over and died. Is that what happened ?**

5. Pupils are very amused and begin to look at evidence and argument and the whole issue of how things found by archaeologists have to be guessed at. Why does my theory not work ? He wouldn't tuck his cup under his arm before dying .how did it get there? someone put it there. Why does he have a hat and no other clothing ? Perhaps that did not survive the hat seems to be made of something solid that might not rot. Did this happen recently? We think not , we do not know how long ago the person lived. But why are the hat and the cup there. These were difficult to make so why waste them on a dead body? The pupils conclude this is a burial.
6. This is a very strange thing to do with a body. Here is one of the oldest we have found . Put up picture of two curled up skeletons. How far back do you think this might go ? Since first writing this book .Some burials have been conformed at 50,000 years old. ( National Geographic 16.12.13.)
7. Put up picture of Neanderthal human. It was done by him! It was done 40,000 years ago! Why is this amazing ? Wouldn't it have made sense to have eaten the body ?

8. Put up picture of hunting scene .Look at how hard he had to work to get his food. How long did it take to dig the pit, sharpen the stakes and bang them in ,find the Mammoth and drive it into the pit. Look at what is happening to some of the people in the picture. Why did they do all this ? If they didn't the tribe would die. Why not either leave the body there or bring it home and eat it?

**What they did was bring the body home and bury it in a grave carefully lined with pebbles . A better home for the dead body than they had themselves. Their homes were caves already formed. Sometimes they buried precious artefacts with them and sometimes the bodies were sprinkled with red powder .Look at the position of all the bodies. Can any one work out why they did that ? It was not to save room, there was plenty. What does that tightly curled up position remind you of ? A baby in its mothers' womb. So what do we think they believed was going to happen to the body ? It would be reborn into another life.**

11. Why did they think that ? we do not know perhaps they saw their ancestors in their dreams and believed they were speaking to them from another place.

**Conclusion** ; We think that this was the very first evidence of the beginning of religious belief 40, 000 years ago - the belief that humans had a soul or spirit that did not die when the body died but continued to exist in another world.

**Note: Vocabulary/flash cards, cloze procedure/ writing frame and a piece of creative writing for this lesson appear after the lesson on hunting magic on page....**

**You may wish to use the stories which follow about Queen Shub Ad's tomb and Egyptian belief in life after death at this point, or, after you have completed the whole section on early religion following the cave. They are not essential in an RE course , but fascinate pupils and give them an opportunity to learn to work at level seven and eight as they apply critical analysis and show development through history and comparison with other traditions. It may allow you to make cross curricular links and build on work done in primary school. An opportunity to write about these stories is given at the end of Shub-Ad's tomb and in the essay following the lesson on Hunting Magic**

## **Queen Shub – Ad's Tomb - a story about belief in the after life**

I am not sure that I had even started teaching when I came across this story in an old second hand book shop. I had picked up a tattered copy of Sir Leonard Woolley's "**Ur of the Chaldees**" . published by Penguin. As it happened the page fell open as he began his account of a strange discovery in a field. I leant against the book case, totally absorbed, as I followed his account to its incredible conclusion.

I have read the story to my classes, just as Sir Leonard describes it , inviting the pupils to work out what it is he is unearthing. They are totally engaged by this account . We collect a number of suggestions and using our skills about using evidence to work out what archaeological finds mean, the pupils work out for themselves how the people at the end of the story came to be where they were.

This story enables pupils to use their **thinking skills**, to use **evidence** to reach a conclusion, it provides a framework from which one can study **faith** and **belief** and **religious experience**. It's a starting point for looking at the city of **Ur** that **Abraham** left with his father, around 2,000 BCE. While what I have just said in justifying the telling of this story is true, it is basically a cracking story!

Leonard was working in the great age of archaeology .He was excavating Ur which at the time was regarded as the oldest walled city in the world ,one of the cradles of civilisation in ancient **Mesopotamia** and the seat of the ancient **Sumerian** civilisation. He was working in 1923 soon after the discovery of the tomb of **Tutankhamen** had rocked the world.

The following is my re telling, for children, of Sir Leonard's own account from "**Ur of the Chaldees**" by **Sir Leonard Woolley. The edition I had was an early Penguin** . You could print the following off for the pupils to read in class or to use for homework.

### **The Discovery at Ur**

"Soon after the discovery of the Royal graves we came across something which was very odd, five bodies lying near the surface of the field with no proper grave furnishings. They were soldiers lying in a row, there was no sign of them having been properly buried at all. They had knives and spears beside them. As we continued to dig we discovered that they were lying on some matting.

Very carefully, we followed the matting down to see where it led . It appeared to be laid over some kind of ramp that led downwards, deeper into the earth, below the surface of the field .

We slowly unearthed more and more of the ramp until we came to the remains of a cart, or chariot. Beside it lay the skeletons of the animals who had pulled the cart and lying nearby was the body of the charioteer.

### **All this was most strange. What had we discovered?**

Carefully clearing away the cart, the animals and their driver, we realised that they were lying at the entrance to a room.

Very carefully, we continued to dig and found that the room was filled with all kinds of artefacts, the roof had fallen in so that it was difficult to make sense of it all. We dug for a long time, clearing away the artefacts for later examination, treating them with great care for they would be able to tell us much about the way of life of these ancient people.

On the other side of the room. we came to the entrance to what appeared to be a corridor. It was filled with bodies of men and women, they lying everywhere. We made our way carefully down the corridor and came to a stone chamber. Again, it was filled with bodies, scattered chaotically. Finally, we came to the body of a King".

### **Activity**

- **What do you think Sir Leonard has discovered ?**

- **Take suggestions and list them on the board.**
- **Take evidence and argument for each one**
- **My class suggested they were at a feast and a disaster had struck, a sandstorm perhaps or an invasion .**
- **Some suggest that there has been a plague.**

## **What do they think the building is ?**

- **A palace**
- **Some suggest it is a grave.**

**You may wish to use the pictures on overhead to help the pupils picture the scene**

**Read on !**

“Clearly, I thought, when a King or Queen died, they were accompanied to their deaths by all their soldiers and servants, murdered in a ghastly ritual. The horror and violence seemed evident from the chaotic positions of the bodies.

But then, in another part of the field, I found something else which changed my mind.....

We found the entrance to another tomb ,but this was in a far better state of preservation. In this tomb the roof had not fallen in and the layout of the tomb with its grave furnishings was vividly clear... and so was the position and number of the bodies. The corridor to the burial chamber was lined with soldiers. Each was sitting in an upright position, their weapons by their side. It was as though they were asleep.

When we came to the burial chamber we found the body of the Queen, her name, Shub –Ad was given to us by a cylinder seal thrown into the chamber before it was sealed. She lay upon a bier ,in a cloak of Lapis Lazuli, deep blue beads hanging to her feet. Upon her head was a wig of black hair, crowned with a head dress of pure gold, delicate flowers, bending as though in the wind.

Round the bier sat her maidens ,each in magnificent court dress, wearing similar head dress, delicate but less elaborate than that of the Queen. Upon the floor, in rows, lay more women, each one lying on her left side, her head resting on the feet of the woman above. Each one had formed her hands into a pillow for her cheeks.

Here was apparent, what had not been the case in the first tomb, a complete absence of violence or horror shown by the neatness of the unmarked bodies and delicate head dresses, all intact”.

**Activity :**

- **How do we explain this ?.How had they died ?**
- **Pupils come up with all sorts of suggestions.**
- **Strangulation**
- **Stabbing**
- **Suffocation**

**All are shown to be unlikely. There are no marks on the bodies, how were the head dresses undamaged. Why had the women chosen to put on their best clothes if they had been dragged screaming from their homes ?. Were they too frightened to disobey? What were they frightened of, if they were going to die anyway?**

**Here is Sir Leonard Woolley's incredible conclusion. We can never know if he was right or not .Do you think it fits the evidence ? Does it make sense?**

**Sir Leonard's conclusion**

"The complete absence of violence and horror and the neatness with which the bodies were arranged, led me to only one conclusion.

***The men and women must have put themselves in that position of their own free will .***

It seemed to me that the *only* explanation for this remarkable phenomenon was that the soldiers and servants *had taken poison* and laid down in their allotted position to die with their King or queen, They were confident, one assumes, that they would wake to feast with their ruler in paradise later that day.

And how did they feel about that?. With what emotions did they greet the news of the death of their King or queen?, one clue lies in the pocket of a young girl.

One maiden, about thirteen or fourteen years of age, was found to have a silver hair ribbon in her pocket. It was carefully rolled up to keep it smooth. It was as though she had been in so much of a hurry to join the procession that she had no time to put it on. She had rushed out, hoping to find a moment to complete her toilet later. It seems that she had forgotten it - in her *excitement* to be included".

**Levelled Creative writing task on Queen Shub- Ad up to level five with additional task on Egypt up to level eight.**

The thirteen year old girl is called **Imona**. Her older brother **Imu** was the charioteer .Choose to write about one or the other or imagine you are one or the other of them. Describe how they felt when they learned that the Queen was close to death. How they hoped to be included in the funeral procession, how they believed they would be in paradise with her that day, continuing to serve her as they had on earth. **Level three: facts.**

Describe what you believe about the after life and why you believe you will continue to live after you die. How does it affect your attitude to life **Level four : why, because. Level five :the effect of belief on a person, individual or community.**

**Levelled task on the Egyptian belief in the afterlife (to follow the next chapter )**

Describe the Egyptian belief in the after life and how it comes from the story of Osiris **Level three: facts. Level four :why**

How did this affect the lives of the Egyptians, especially the Kings and Queens?

**Level Five :the effect of belief on an individual family or community. Level Six: the variety of belief within a community**

How did belief in life after death develop In the ancient world? Was it just an antidote to fear of death in a dangerous world ? **Level Seven :critical analysis; Level Eight :development through history, comparison with other traditions**

**Ideas for research and presentations on life after death using ICT**

The tasks above could be adapted to form a project being developed throughout the period of time that work on the ancient world is being studied. Individuals or groups could research and prepare work on the **Sumerians**, the **Egyptians**, the **Ancient Greeks**, the **Hindus** and the **Norse** belief in the after life.

These could be delivered through power point presentations, enabling younger pupils to develop their key skills ready for accreditation in key stages four and five.

This work would provide a stimulating introduction to modern **mind /body /brain** research discussed in the later chapters on life after death. Pupils would be able to answer the final question using modern research on the possible existence of a **soul, reincarnation** and **NDEs**. In my school we look at life after death in the ancient world in year seven and re visit the topic in our topic on science and religion in year nine again in year eleven and for our synoptic paper in year thirteen

## **The Egyptian belief in the after life - the story of the missing mummies, Ahkenaten, the Heretic Pharoah and the discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb.**

Most children will have studied ancient Egypt in primary school. But it is the Egyptian's overwhelming belief that the next life was more important than this one that makes their history make sense. These stories, like the last one, are a good place to begin a study of belief in the after life. They contain many ideas which help us make sense of the traditions today. Behind it all lies the universal spirituality.

These stories can usefully be accompanied by pictures to illustrate them on overhead. An excellent source for these would be the discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb by Howard Carter. This contains wonderful black and white photographs showing the tomb as they found it. Very atmospheric and exciting. The stories need no "Theatre" to sugar the pill, they are fascinating in themselves. The stories can be printed off to be read in class, or used for homework.

### **The puzzle of the pyramids**

The pyramids have fascinated westerners for hundreds of years.

The **Great Pyramid of Cheops** is big , Its base , a perfect square, is large enough to contain five cathedrals. It took twenty years to build. Each block of stone, weighing several tons had to be rolled on wooden rollers to the site and then hauled bodily up the side of the pyramid until it could be slotted into place. Each piece of stone fitted beautifully, the Egyptians were masterpieces of design. The top of the pyramids were painted gold to shine in the sun from **Amen Ra**, their chief god and source of life.

For hundreds of year no one knew what they were for. They were places for the burial of Kings and Queens, but why was it so important to go to so much trouble to hide the bodies from robbers?. They had failed . They were almost always empty, plundered centuries before by robbers after the grave goods.

Some of the tombs were booby trapped . Legend told that the builders had their tongues cut out so that the whereabouts of the Kings' chamber could not be discovered.

There are records of trials of robbers who were caught and suffered the most frightful punishments. Powerful curses were placed upon the tombs to deter the robbers. Still they failed to keep the tombs safe.

Finally, the **Pharaohs** hit upon another plan and they began to build their tombs out in the valley, in a place called the **Valley of the Kings**. To stand in the valley is to look at walls of cliff face, bare rock. How could one find the entrance to a tomb? **Queen Hatshepsut** built hers high up with a tiny entrance in a cleft, surely they would be safe here - no! Everyone was empty.

There were two things that puzzled and frustrated **archaeologists**. The first was, why did the Pharaohs go to all this trouble?

The answer, they guessed, lay on the walls of the tombs. They were covered with **hieroglyphics**, but no one could read them.

Finally in 1872 (check date) the puzzle was solved. A stone had been found which contained an inscription in three different languages. It was called the **Rosetta stone**. It had Greek and modern Egyptian which everyone could read and **hieroglyphics** which they could not. The Greek and modern Egyptian were the same, it was assumed that the hieroglyphics must also be the same and so the key was found. Now archaeologists were able to read the walls of the tomb and the secret of the tombs was found.

The Egyptian religion was a **fertility cult** like the one that Targarna establishes in **Targon's decision**. (see pag...) Central to it was this story

## **Osiris, Lord of the Underworld**

**Ra**, the sun god had several children. **Isis**, his daughter, **Osiris** and **Seth** who were his sons. Seth was jealous of his brother and so one day he resolved to trick him so that he could become chief son. He persuaded his greedy friends to play along. He ordered a chest to be made. It was extremely beautiful and inlaid with many precious stones. It was made to **very** precise measurements.

Seth planned a feast. To it, he invited all his friends and his brother, Osiris. Suddenly, he produced the chest. Everyone admired it. Seth announced that he would give it to whoever could fit inside it and of course there was only one!

As soon as Osiris was inside the chest Seth slammed down the lid and locked the chest. When he was dead he cut up the body and scattered it over all the earth. Osiris had simply disappeared!

His grieving sister knew otherwise. She searched the earth recovering every little bit of her brother, except his penis, it had been swallowed by a fish! She took him to Ra.

"Oh, father, creator of the universe" she said "Restore my brother, your son, to life"

Ra did so, but declared that because Osiris could no longer create life that he should be the Lord of the underworld. And so Osiris became the god of the dead.

Osiris sits in judgement in the underworld where those who have died are brought to him have their hearts weighed to see if they are worthy of eternal life.

**Here was the answer - the pyramids were not to protect the grave goods - but the body! why?, because the Egyptians believed that they could only share in the after life if their *physical bodies were intact*. If their bodies were damaged or destroyed, then their body would also be destroyed in the spirit world.**

This is why the bodies were carefully preserved in a special process that took ninety days - if you were a king and could afford it.

The Greek historian ,**Herodotus** tells us how it was done.

First, they pulled the brain out through the nose. Then oil was poured in to the body through the anus and a plug put in place after a while the contents were poured out. The organs were stored in special **canopic jars** and buried with the body to be replaced in the next life.

The body was soaked in **natron** a special preservative for almost three months and then tightly wrapped linen bandages to preserve the body.

Now this the important bit, the clue to the whole thing. In order for the king to be recognised when he got to the next world where his body would be unwrapped and his heart weighed, all sorts of precious objects and amulets would be wrapped into the bandages, explaining who he was. *It was these the robbers were after.* There were the small ,portable,things that could be easily smuggled out of a tomb and fenced - how were you going to get out with an enormous throne on your back !

What the archaeologists also discovered was that to the Egyptians **writing was magic**. Writing something down made it come true. *It was just like hunting magic!*.(see page ..) The funeral was an acting out, complete with written records on the walls, of the successful journey of the body and soul, **Ka**, to the underworld. The paintings showed the Pharaoh's heart being weighted against the feather of truth by **Anubis**, the Jackal headed god of the dead – and passing the test.

Now, not only was the preservation of the physical, earthly body essential for the Ka to stay in the underworld, so was the writing. **The Egyptians believed that if the King's name was erased from the records so would his soul be erased from the afterlife.** This was done by the priests to only two Pharaohs. It was done as a terrible punishment for their crimes. The first was **Hatshepsut** because she was a woman! And the second was to **Akhenaten** whose story appears later on.

So... that was why they went to all that trouble, but it had obviously failed **-every tomb was empty**, however hard the priests tried to guard their masters' body, they failed, or so it was thought until this happened...

## **The story of the missing mummies.**

In the closing years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a curious artefact was placed in the hands of the keeper of the Cairo museum. He looked at it in astonishment.

"There are many other things like this creeping onto the market said his assistant."

" This can mean only one thing!" said the curator to his assistant"

"I know, sir." he replied. I had exactly the same thought. Another tomb has been discovered! A tomb that has not been plundered."

Can you imagine how excited they were ?

They traced the new artefacts to a young Arab boy and soon he was apprehended. Realising that his secret was out the boy agreed to take them to what he had found.

He led them out into the desert, not far from the Valley of the Kings. He explained that he had been looking after his sheep one day when suddenly he had felt the earth give way. He was terrified. Climbing to his feet and dusting himself down. He discovered that he had fallen into an underground chamber. Being a quick witted boy he had quickly realised that if could keep his find a secret he could make himself a very rich man. He began to shout to his friends "Help!.Help! I have fallen down a hole there is an evil spirit down here!"

He was soon hauled to safety, frightening his friends with his state of obvious terror.

Later that night, during the hours of darkness, he made his way to the hole, with a donkey, he killed the animal and threw it down the hole so that the dreadful smell would keep any of his friends who might be curious away. A terrible smell was a sure sign of the presence of an evil spirit.

Slowly, bit by bit, the boy began to steal the treasure he had found. That is, until he was discovered by those who thought Egypt's treasure was more precious than money!

As the curator of the museum was lowered into the hole he was beside himself with excitement,..... but nothing prepared him for the sight which met his eyes!

Carefully he struck a match and found himself to be not in a tomb at all. There piled up in the chamber, one on top of the other, were the **sarcophagi**, coffins of all the missing Kings and Queens of Egypt, that archaeologists had assumed had been stolen and destroyed by robbers thousands of years ago. He read their names. Dazed by the significance of the find. We can only guess what happened three thousand years ago. We think it must have been something like this.

The priests in charge of the Valley of the Kings must have despaired of their task of protecting the mummies of their masters. With a secrecy that had been preserved until this day, they had constructed this underground tomb. The mummies had been lifted from their tombs, loaded onto boats and floated down the Nile. There they had been carried overland and placed in this underground chamber, all presumably at dead of night. ***Not a breath of what they had done was passed down through history . Their secret had survived for three thousand years***

Now at last the mummies could be studied and people could gaze on the faces of the kings, perfectly preserved, so that one could look upon their faces and imagine them walking down the street today.

**Just one more puzzle remained ..**

The king lists spoke of one king whose tomb had never been found. That of the boy King, **Tutankhamen**.

## **The story of the discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb**

**Howard Carter** was a British Archaeologist who was certain that somewhere in the valley of the Kings this tomb was to be found. He was so determined to find it because he believed it was likely that if archaeologists couldn't find it then the robbers had not been able to, either.

Howard found generous sponsorship in a British nobleman, **Lord Carnarvon**, who agreed to pay for the expensive dig he would need. His one condition was that Carter was not to open the tomb without him.

Carter got a permit from the Egyptian government to dig for six months of the year before it grew too hot. He failed .He tried again the following year . Lord Carnarvon agreed to pay for a third and final dig. It was 1922. In the last week before the permit ran out, **one of the workmen felt his spade strike a stone. He brushed away the sand and revealed a step!**

More steps were uncovered leading down to a door. It was indeed a tomb, but what would they find, had it been disturbed and was it **Tutankhamen's**?

Carter telegraphed Lord Carnarvon and the world's press. It took ten days for The nobleman to arrive in a series of bi planes, hopping from country to country.

**Finally, the two men stood in front of the door together.** Huge electric lamps pointed at what was to be the opening. The first thing they found was that **the seal placed there by the priests was broken.** The tomb had been opened and hastily re sealed at some point in the past. Anxiety mounted.

Finally the outer door was opened and a whoosh of hot air hit the men in the face, air that had last been breathed three thousand years ago. It revealed a passage way lined with oars, a symbol of the boat that would ferry the King to the underworld.

Ahead, lit up by the lamps, was a grille, a network of metal bars sealing the main chamber, through it Carter could just make out the grave goods

**“I can see things” he passed back to the waiting crowd, “wonderful things!”**

When they removed the grille and entered the chamber, an amazing sight met their eyes, a sight that explained the broken seal. There, on the floor, stiff with age, was the remains of a turban, lying where it had been dropped. In its folds and scattered nearby were rings. The cloth belonged to the thieves who had broken in. They were disturbed by guards and ran for their lives, dropping their booty behind. The priests had hastily piled all the grave goods back into place and sealed the tomb. The chances were that the burial chamber would be intact. They had two years to wait before they could find out!

That was how long it took to carefully label, number and photograph every item in the tomb and pack and ship it safely to the museum in Cairo.

When finally they came to the inner chamber there was great excitement. This was the first time a sarcophagus had been found, undisturbed.

It lay inside a huge chest of stone, guarded by **Anubis** the jackal headed god of the dead.

When the lid was removed, the **sarcophagus** had to be raised. It weighed several tons. It was composed of three coffins of solid gold. It is beyond price.

It was inlaid with lapis lazuli. The sarcophagus contained three images of the young King's face, including the famous mask that lay on top of the mummy to identify him.

At first sight they appear identical but as you look carefully you can see that they actually portray the king's return to life. The first has no eyes, he appears dead. The second has eyes that are yellow, showing great strain. Underneath is the mask showing the king alive, the faintest smile, playing about his lips. As his body was revealed, the archaeologists were, in a way, playing the role of the spirits of the underworld, unwrapping him and welcoming him to eternal life. No human being was ever intended to see the re enactment of resurrection that the faces were intended to show.

But why had the young king who came to the throne at the age of nine and died, possibly murdered, at the age of seventeen, been given such a lavish burial? The answer lies in his predecessor, his uncle, one of the two Pharaohs to have his name erased.

## **The story of Akhenaten, The Heretic Pharaoh**

**Akhenaten** was an extraordinary man. He was married to the beautiful queen **Nefertiti**, whose head is shown on many souvenirs and items of jewellery, her perfect profile surmounted by a strange sloping head dress.

**Akhenaten did an astonishing thing and we do not know why ! He deserted the worship of Amen Ra the sun god and established his own religion. It was the worship of the Aten.**

The Aten was a spirit, that could not be drawn or described. He represented it as a sun whose rays ended in tiny hands clutching the **ankh**, symbol of life and offering it to the lips of Akhenaten and his family.

Akhenaten moved away from Thebes the capital and built his own city **Tel El Armana** where he ruled in peaceful bliss, composing hymns to the Aten for 22 years until he died. Akhenaten was a **monotheist** believing in the abstract concept of one God who could not be drawn or carved in stone.

Why? We do not know, some have suggested that he was the Pharaoh of the exodus, converted by the preaching of Moses, but the dates make it unlikely.

Some scholars think he is fascinating because he is a man before his time, who appears like a brief flame, before being blown out. Others, like the priests of the time, think he was a deluded madman who neglected the proper rule of his people to pursue a fantasy.

The priests were furious because he had removed their power and had also entered a dream world in his perfect city, ignoring politics and the needs of the kingdom.

He died childless and because of his innovative ideas we have a clue as to why.

One of the things he insisted on in Tel El Armana was that **art should be naturalistic**. Instead of the formal statues and paintings we see of people, stiff and two dimensional, he commanded that he and his family should be shown as they really were. We see him embracing Nefertiti affectionately and bouncing his children on his knee. We see Nefertiti and himself weeping over the bodies of their children, all of whom died in infancy. Why? If we look at the sculptures we see that he and Nefertiti and the children, all had huge deformed heads. They seem to have suffered from encephalitis. It is also possible that they could not bear healthy children because until then the kings had believed they were divine. They could not marry outside their own family, mere mortals, and so they had inbred genetic problems and intensified them. Some were sterile.

I have often wondered if that was why the princess in the story of Moses chose to bathe daily in the dirty waters of the Nile. These waters gave the land and the crops life, perhaps she hoped they would give her a child and that this was why when the waters gave her this baby boy she chose to save its life..

When Akhenaten died there was only his nine year old nephew **Tutankhaten** to take over. The little boy was married to his cousin **Meritaten**, who is shown anointing him lovingly, on the back of his famous throne. The mummy of their still born child was found in his tomb.

The priests quickly changed the boy's name to **Tutankhamen**. Under their guidance, too young to protest, the boy king restored the religion to the worship of the old gods and returned to rule from Thebes. When he died everything from that hateful period was buried to remove it from sight and memory.. and, as his punishment, the heretics King's name was erased.

## **The Beginning of Religion 2: Hunting Magic – The First Religious Ceremonies?**

Here are two anecdotes which help us make sense of the following lesson. You will have examples of your own which will help you make sense of the lesson to the pupils and show them that early man was not simple, but highly intelligent, he just lacked scientific knowledge. He saw the world differently, like a four year old, in fact.

Four year olds are very intelligent ,as clever as they ever will be, they have speech and movement but very little *knowledge* of the way the world works. They see the world differently from adults.

They live in a world where everything around them is alive . If a toddler bumps into a table it will smack the table and say “naughty table”. Its toys are projections of its own imagination and desires. It lives in a world surrounded by beneficent beings, stuffed animals and dolls who are its friends and protectors.

When my brother in law was four years old he had two teddies . One was called Big Ted and the other Little Ted. One day he was told off by his father and sent to his room. A little while later his father saw him through the door which was slightly ajar, .he was kneeling by his bed with a Ted in either hand. Little Ted was knocking six bells out of big Ted!

When my sister was four she was asked to be a bridesmaid. For weeks beforehand she could be found at the bottom of the garden, under a piece of lace curtain, clutching a bunch of dandelions. She was acting out what she wanted to come true.

Our pupils all did things like this. At primary school they may have acted out games in the playground and drew pictures of things they wanted .They felt like heroes, like mothers, princesses ,Kings and Queens. They would love it if their pictures could come alive and they could become part of the adventure, that lies in their imagination.

Accessing these memories will help our pupils make sense of Hunting Magic

The story in the middle of this lesson is very dramatic if you tell it in a blacked out room with just the screen on. Ask the children to close their eyes or put their heads on their desks with eyes closed. Have a box of matches and a match ready on the desk. At the appropriate point in the story, strike the match say “and this is what he saw” they will instinctively open their eyes and on the screen will be a picture of the cave paintings from the caves at Lascaux, their vivid colours preserved by the lack of light. Easily available from the internet .

I remember reading the version I have retold here some years ago, but another version , probably correct, is that of some men who were out shooting game. Their terrier disappeared down the hole. The men’s story is not believed until a priest confirms their tale. I prefer the version I have told as pupils will identify with the boy.

All of what we will study in this lesson is speculation but we can create a link with the children’s own experience.

Tell the students that having explored what may be the first stage of religious belief that now we will explore the next. It is called **animism**. The secret lies in the paintings on the walls of the caves, just like the last lesson, it is a puzzle that we have to work out.

## Lesson Recipe for teaching about Hunting Magic

### What you will need

**Pictures** of cave paintings from the internet. You will find ones of animals with no heads, some covered in dots . we think they are nets. Upright figures on two legs. We think they are humans wearing antelope skins and acting out the hunt. You will see that some pictures are covered in handprints.

**Music, as before.**

### Box of matches

#### This is what you do

1. Class come into music and sit in a horseshoe round the projector
2. Recap on previous lesson? Do we know if what we discovered last lesson is in fact true? No, it is a theory. We cannot have proof, why ? Today's lesson is similar .Today's lesson is all about cave paintings and what they mean let us see if we can work this out
3. Put up a number of pictures as examples.

Ask the class what they think they were for ?

**Decoration ?** If they were for decoration what would we expect to see ? Patterns, flowers, plants. We have no examples of this .

**Diaries ?** They don't seem to be detailed enough for this. Everything concentrates on animals. There are no other pictures of their lives, cooking making things , babies being born.

**Messages?** Again, there isn't the variety we would expect and the paintings are often rather fine for a message.

Let us look at the evidence - what we see is that the pictures are almost always of **animals** or people **hunting animals** or people **dressed up** as animals.

The pictures of the animals sometimes have **no heads**. This is very strange it would be rather like the school photographer coming and taking pictures of your tummies and expecting your parents to buy those. The lack of heads would indicate that the animal itself was not important ., more what it represented and the final very surprising fact is where some of the caves were. Let me tell you a story and this is best if you have your eyes closed...

## The story of the discovery of the caves at Lascaux

One day in 1941 in the middle of the second world war. There was a boy in the country side in France out playing with his dog. The dog ran here and there sniffing everything it came across, when suddenly it smelled rabbit. It was off! At that very moment the boy heard the low, tell - tale hum of war planes. He was terrified. He called his dog. There was no response . Panicking as the planes grew nearer and nearer, darkening the skies, he raced into the undergrowth where the dog had disappeared. Suppose the planes began to unload their bombs to speed their journey back home and save fuel?.

He called the dog frantically .He was answered by a bark. Muffled, and sounding as though it came from below the ground.

He scrambled through the thick ferns towards the noise and suddenly found himself tumbling down a hole. It had been completely masked by undergrowth. It was not where a person would normally walk ,a way back from the edge of the road - unless they were searching for a runaway dog.

The boy did not fall far. He slid down the damp sides of the hole. And bumped onto a hard surface. It was dark, very little light came from the hole above. He had fallen perhaps twelve feet. He felt his dog licking his face, joyously. He could smell the damp earth. But he could see nothing. Suddenly, he remembered the matches in his pocket. His father had asked him to buy some on the way home .He took out the box and carefully struck a match ...

### **Ask class to open their eyes**

.and this is what he saw! these paintings, beautifully preserved because of the lack of light . What is surprising about where they were ?

Out of sight, underground. Hidden, perhaps and not where people lived . These were not their homes. There is no evidence of fire or cooking. The caves are very large. They are large enough for the whole community to gather. Is that what happened ?

4.Now let us look at the next part of our puzzle about what the paintings were for.

- Let us look at the pictures of the **animals with no heads** and see what we can see.
- The animals have **hand prints** on them. What do you think that might mean?
- They are not a signature because there is nothing individual about the prints they are just the outline of a human hand. Look where the prints are placed around the feet of the animal.
- Look at this **spotted animal** here ? Look closely at the spots what do you see ? The spots are running off the animal! They are not spots but a **net**. Headless animals with heads around the feet and a net .What do we think they are saying? I want this. This is mine ! Why would this be ?
- To understand it, let us think about the pictures that are important to you. What posters do you have on your walls in your room? Why are these important? How do they make you feel ?

• Do you have pictures of your favourite food ? no, why not ? food doesn't concern you it is there when you want it. These people couldn't pop into the freezer for a Mammoth burger when they were hungry.

5.This is how they got their food, remember ? Show **picture of the hunt** page...

• How would you feel if you were going to take part in that ?

Having dug the pit and put in the stakes how were you going to get an animal? you had to wait for one to happen by and then chase it to the pit. ....unless you could try to control it in some way...

6.Look at these pictures .Show pictures of **people wearing deerskins**.

What do you think these are ? People wearing animal skins and dancing.

**Now let us put it all together and see what we have got .**

**Caves which only have paintings of animals and hunting.**

**Pictures of animals with no heads covered in hand prints and a net.**

**Pictures of humans dancing with animal skins on**

**A picture of lots of animals like a dream or a vision with a Shaman dancing in the middle.**

**These are often in large caves where no one ever lived in darkness so that they could only be lit by torch light**

**What suggestions do you have ?**

**Conclusion ;** It seems that early man might have believed not only that humans had spirits that lived on after the body but that the animals did also. These could be controlled by acting out the hunt. Wearing the skins of the animals and taking on the characteristics of the animal ,the swiftness of the antelope. The strength of the buffalo and also being able to summon it near to be hunted. We call this Hunting Magic , the first ceremonies or rituals presided over by Shamans who were the first priestly figures.

The paintings were the dramatic backdrop to these ceremonies . People painted what they wanted to come true just as young children act out stories and fantasies that they imagine themselves part of.

## **Vocabulary / flash cards**

<b>Neanderthal Humans</b>	people who lived 40,000years ago, not yet fully evolved.
<b>Anima</b>	The spirit or soul, which <i>animates</i> us
<b>Animism</b>	The belief that everything around us is alive
<b>Mana</b>	Another name for spirit

**Foetal position**

Position of the baby in the mother's womb

**Hunting Magic**

Ceremonies to create a successful hunt

**Cave paintings**

Paintings of hunting on caves. Believed to make what they described

come true

### **Cloze procedure/writing frame on Hunting Magic**

We think that the first stage of religion was a belief that humans had a spirit that lived on after death. It would seem from the curled up bodies in the early burials that *N* - - - - - humans believed that the body would be *r* - - - - - , too. This belief is called *r* - - - - - . *A* - - - - - is another name for the life force or spirit. This happened around *40,000* BCE.

Gradually we think that the society of early humans became more complex. We have found skeletons that show signs of *h* - - - - - . This shows that early humans cared for each other, bringing the wounded food instead of leaving them to die.

Around 25,000 BCE amazing paintings appear in caves These continued to be made until around 10,000 BCE. What are they for ? They are not

*d* - - - - - or signs because they are always of *a* - - - - - and *h* - - - - - and appear in caves where there is no *l* - - - - - or *f* - - - - - and the cave itself might be a *s* - - - - - .

We think that this was the beginning of *A* - - - - - the belief that every living thing had a life force or anima that could be controlled . The paintings were made for this reason....

Describe the answer in your own words. This will take you to **level four:why,because**

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**reborn reanimation decoration animals healing**  
**Neanderthal hunting secret**  
**Anima fire light Animism**

**Levelled creative writing task on hunting magic and life after death.**

1.Describe what your tribe believes about hunting magic. **Level three :facts. Level four :why, because. 5 marks**

2.Describe a hunt, using the pictures you saw in class to inspire you. Have a ceremony to fill you with courage and bring the animals near. Dig a pit and fill it with sharpened sticks. Drive an animal towards it. Kill the animal and bring it home for the tribe. How will you and they feel? **Level four to level six .How belief affects a person,family or community.Variety of belief within a tradition. 5 marks**

3.Describe a funeral. One of your friends is killed in the hunt. Describe how he is brought home and buried.describe the beliefs of the tribe and their feelings to achieve **level five to level six .5 marks**

4.Describe believe in life after death in Ur and or ancient Egypt three thousand years BCE. Showing how it is similar and different from Neanderthal man will give you **Level Seven; Critical analysis**. .Showing how belief has developed and become more complex will give you **Level Eight: Development through history and comparision with other religions. 5 marks**

## **Theatre of Learning Activity :The Cave:Part One.**

### **Solon's story**

#### **Creating a cave**

Black out the classroom. move the desks and chairs to the side so that the children can sit on the floor. A simple set, if you are on the move, can be created by making something to represent a fire in the middle. A torch under paper or fabric creates a nice effect. A piece of net draped over it suggests smoke. Light the room with the overhead projector, projecting a cave painting across the ceiling or over a wall.

I make mine from several pieces of coloured muslin. These are in the colours of the cave paintings .They vaguely suggest the earth floor of the cave while providing some colour. They are brown, green, russet and gold. In the centre I put a mineral lamp. Over that I pile some sticks to create the fire. Around that in a circle I put leaves and flowers

Somewhere on the floor near where I will sit will be a fur coat piled up with the sleeves and neck out of sight to suggest a cloak. I will also have a knife and a necklace which suggests teeth.

You will hold the children's attention best if you tell the story but it can be read if you prefer.

### **Lesson Recipe for the cave**

#### **This is what you will need**

Overhead projector

Picture of a cave on screen

Music with drum rhythms

Fire

Fabric for the floor

Piece of fur/fur fabric

Knife

Necklace

A bongo drum will add atmosphere during the story.

### **This is what you do**

1. Class come into darkened cave with music and sit on the floor in a circle

Fade the music

2. **Put class into role**

We are going to take a journey in our imagination way back in time to a period when early humans were beginning to move out of caves into huts. They were beginning to farm.

You are all approaching your fourteenth summer. The summer when you will become full hunters in the tribe - if you survive the initiation.

We are a group of humans living together in a close knit tribe. We live in **shelters** that we have made ourselves from mud smeared onto sticks in the ground and covered with turves to keep the rain and the wind out. We have learned to keep some animals in pens so that **hunting is not so important to us now**. We have noticed that the nuts, berries and seeds that we gathered and stored on the earth floors of our shelters sometimes sent out shoots so **we have learned to grow things**.

Planting crops meant that **we are now dependant on the earth and sky for our survival** but we still use the old religion which centred round the hunt. Our tribal gathering place is the great cave where our families have met to act out the hunt to feast to pass down stories for generations.

Let us begin....

### **The story**

I am **Targon**, the **Shaman** of the tribe. It is my job to explain to you why all the strange things happen, good and bad, to teach you how to protect yourselves with **rituals** to ensure the survival of the tribe. This is our great cave where we meet for all **ceremonial occasions**. This is where our ancestors have met for generations to dance and sing before the spirits of the animals painted on the walls. Today is one of those occasions

Today, we must see if **Solon**, the chief's son is still alive. Twenty seven risings of the moon ago, we took Solon to the great rock half a day's journey from here at the edge of the dark forest. We left him there with no cloak, no weapons and no food to see if he could survive from one full moon to the other. We are especially anxious about Solon because he is the chief's son and all the girl's hope he will choose one of them to be his wife.

We are also worried because Solon was born with a twisted foot. Last year he endured great pain when his father broke his foot and I bound it in wood for three full moons to make it straight. It is much better, but he still limps, he will not be able to run fast. He climbs like a cat so we must hope that he can escape those who wish to hunt him.

Each one of you boys and girls must undergo this test when you reach your fourteenth summer. This is why you have already spent time in the forest at night with the older ones, learning how to survive alone.

Today, when the sun reaches mid heaven we will set out for the great rock to see if he is there. He must arrive before the sun dips down below the horizon and it becomes quite dark. If he is there, we will light the torches we have brought with us, from my pot of fire.

We will carry him home in triumph, singing for a **great feast** here in this cave where he will tell of his adventures.

The **singer** of the tribe will remember them and they will become part of the stories of the **ancestors**. If when he grows to manhood, he has performed many acts of courage and heroism, Solon will become one of our great ancestors, whose stories we will sing forever.

If he is not there, we will return in darkness. It will be like the darkness of our hearts without him. We will be guided by the light of the moon and the stars. The women will hear our song of mourning and see the darkness and they will know he is dead. We will gather in the great cave and burn his cloak and spear to send them to his **spirit** in the next life so that he will be warm and safe there, even though he was not so in this life.

Come, it is time for us to go to the rock . collect your torches and be ready to leave.

Turn the music up for a moment a two and then fade ready for the next part of the story.

### **The Rock**

It is still light, the sky is fiery; the sun is beginning to set. He is not here. We will wait until the sun sinks and is completely gone, but it will not be long now. We will sit here and sing, beating a rhythm on the drums to summon him to us.

*Pause for music*

It is nearly dark, the sky is streaked with flames of red and gold, there is a sudden chill in the air. The rock is completely black now; we can just make out its outline against the orange sky. As the sun sinks so do our hearts. The singing grows quieter, the drum beats softer...

*Fade the music*

Suddenly, there is a noise! It is howl like a great wolf. It pierces through the air, filling the children's hearts with terror. It is far louder and more shrill than any wolf. With a terrible cry, a lone figure drops from the tallest tree onto the great rock, its body outlined against the fading sun, pounding the air triumphantly with its spear as the sun disappears and the world is in darkness.

The torches burst into life, one by one, until a blazing trail is lit to the rock.

Solon jumps down and runs to his weeping mother. He turns to his father and presents him with a wolf skin cloak he wears and the necklace of bear teeth around his neck. From out of a pouch around his waist he takes a gleaming stone that he has polished for many hours and threaded with animal sinew. He gives it to his mother.

The feasting and the stories will be great this night.

### **De brief/plenary**

Students are invited to write up Solon's adventures in preparation for next lesson when they will be describing them to the rest of the tribe

### **How did he feel when he was left alone.**

How did he kill the wolf and the bear ?

### **How did he find the stone which he polished and pierced for his mother?**

### **How did he feel as the night of the full moon approached and he knew he had passed the test to become a full member of the tribe, a hunter, an adult?**

### **Preparation for next lesson**

Next lesson, fifty years will have passed. The pupils will be sixty four years old. **Targon** will be ninety. Solon's son is chief of the tribe. **Solon** is too old to hunt now. He was a very great hunter. It is the anniversary of Solon's initiation and the tribe will gather in the great cave to honour him.

The students will be in role as the Singer telling the stories of Solon's adventures, when he was young . They may be based on the time when he was in the woods, or other times when he was older , leading the tribe on hunting parties and fighting wild animals with great courage.

Every pupil could be invited to contribute an "I remember when .." just a sentence will do. Those who would like to read their stories may do so.

If you decide to hold the feast suggested at the beginning of next lesson ask pupils to bring a container to drink from that would be appropriate, if they can, and something to eat from , a wooden dish would be best or a large leaf. Check how many think they could bring something.

### **Theatre of Learning activity: The Cave. Part Two Targon's decision (with optional feast ! )**

For many years I would simply *tell* the children what happened when early humans gradually changed from animism and hunting magic, how as they learned to grow crops they settled in one place and the focus of their religion changed.

It was always an awkward link , no stories , no puzzles just information. Once the Theatre of Learning began to evolve in teaching the traditions I wondered if I could apply its principles to our course on early religion. I used the principle of the Island where pupils respond to the situation they are placed in instinctively. I decided to try to do it here. The problem is that the development from animism to polytheism was very gradual. To make the story work and keep the children identifying with the characters I make it happen in a single lifetime. I simply explain afterwards what really happened!

The children are presented with a series of disasters and **Targon** suggests that now that they are growing crops that perhaps that needs be the focus of their worship .He introduces the tribe to their new Shaman, **Targarna**, Solon's grand daughter, what she will become is a **priestess** . He asks the pupils what they should do. They instinctively decide to replace the cave with a temple. They make it huge to reach the sky that they are now honouring. They make an image to put inside it and they offer it gifts on a special place.

I think they respond instinctively because that was what early humans were doing. They saw the world differently, like our four year olds. It seemed logical to **personify** the earth as a great mother with a womb and the sky as a father sending the rain to fertilize it and to offer them gifts.

I finish the lesson by silently putting onto the projector a picture of stone henge, an Inca temple, a pyramid, a Hindu temple and finish with a ziggurat I don't need to say anything - they get it . We have made RE make sense.

The children enter the cave set up as before .Targon who is now very old welcomes them to the special feast to honour Solon. After the storytelling and the feast he tells them he has something very serious to say to them.

Giving pupils squares of burger or vege burger served on wooden bread or chopping boards would be fun. Pupils could have some bread roughly torn up and possibly dishes of ketchup to dip the bread and burger in. – well they might have had stewed tomatoes back then! It could all be washed down with ginger beer .The feast could be held during the story telling ,or at the end.

## **Lesson Recipe for Targon's decision**

### **What you need**

Cave set as before

Music

pictures of the cave painting.

Cut up burgers enough for each child

Wooden boards to put it on.

A bowl of ketchup

Torn up bread

Ginger beer

Spare plates and cups

Bin bag for rubbish

Allow half the lesson for story telling and feasting.

### **This is what you do**

Children enter the cave to music and bring their homework, cups and plates to the circle, leaving their bags to the side.

## **Introduce the lesson and tell pupils what time the storytelling and feasting will end. Targon has an announcement to make after everyone has eaten.**

Distribute the food

## **Conduct a round where children share their stories or “I remember when...” or pass.**

### **1. Targon's decision**

Now that we have celebrated Solon's achievements I have grave matters to put to you. There is something wrong. I have been thinking about it for many years. But I am not the one who can solve it I have no years left now.

I am very old, my bones ache in the winter cold . My sight grows dim. I do not believe I will survive the next snow.

Today, I present to you Solon's granddaughter. She is to be your Shaman now. Henceforth you will call her **Targana**. She has great wisdom .Her knowledge of plants and herbs for medicine is already greater than mine. She has great feeling for the earth and all that grows in her. She tells me that great changes are coming. Listen to her and she will solve our problems.

For three years now the rains have not come at the right time. The earth is parched and the seeds will not grow. When the rains do come the river bursts its banks and washes the seeds away or the crops grow mouldy and die.

The river is sometimes a strange colour, full of red mud from the stream. Some of the younger ones are getting sick from drinking the water. We struggle sometimes to find enough to drink.

And then there were the twins . Last summer when the chiefs wife gave birth to two sons we felt very blessed. You all know what happened. When she was gathering the harvest she left the babies at the edge of the field asleep in their basket. A bear came out of the forest and carried one of them off. When the hunters followed the bears' tracks it went into the river so the trail was lost. We never knew what happened to the child.

I have discussed all this with Targana she tells me that the paintings have lost their power to protect us.

The bear was our friend. Now it has turned against us. Targana says we must **honour the spirits of the sky and the earth**. It is they that give us our food now. This is why the rains do not come at the right time and the crops grow mouldy.

Targana says we must move away from the cave and go to build a new village on the plain. **We will need to make a new place to honour the spirits of the earth and the sky**. What do you think we should make ?

Pupils will decide to build a **temple**. Targon's questions will guide them to making it very tall to reach the sky. It will be made out of carved stone. Some classes make it open to the sky. With prompting they may decide to make an **image** of the sky and earth, they discuss what these might look like. They may bring the earth and the sky gifts, **sacrifices**, what might these be? crops. where will they put them? on an **altar**.

Pupils could go on to design the temple. Labelling it with structured guidance could make this a levelled activity, enabling pupils to express their knowledge other than by writing but not with the occupational therapy associated with many drawing and colouring activities.

**At this point you can move into a study of Abraham and Moses.**

With this background about early religion the stories will make sense.

Some ideas for doing this can be found in the appendix.

## **Teaching the story of Abraham**

### **Show some pictures of Ur to feed the imagination of the pupils**

With their eyes closed I conduct a **visualisation** of life in Ur with its two storied houses and beautiful artefacts. Why would anyone want to leave? Was it to escape the religion and the possible human sacrifice, I created a picture of Abraham wondering to himself "If the people of Ur worshipped the moon and the stars, who made them? (See Hajj in **Teaching Islam and Sikhism**)

1. I read God's covenant with Abraham from Genesis 17

**Back in the classroom I read the story of Abraham from my book "Moses and Other Stories" published by Longman but now out of print. We discuss what the story of Isaac might mean. (Muslims tell of the sacrifice of Ismail) and how it expresses moving away from that type of worship towards believing in one God.**

### **Teaching the story of Moses**

**The students enter a darkened classroom with a picture of a pyramid projected on the wall or across the ceiling. The pupils sit on sheets on the floor in a circle round a fire of twigs illuminated with the mineral lamp.**

**I ask them to close their eyes and imagine a god of war, a goddess of the spring, a sun god etc. We will use this later in the lesson.**

I tell them I am going to read them a story about one man who came to believe in one God.

I turn the projector to the wall and show them some pictures of Egypt. I talk about the importance of the Nile flooding regularly to give them water to grow crops, I show them images of the gods. The Egyptian fertility cult makes sense because of all the work that has gone before

4.I introduce **Moses** briefly. Most pupils are familiar with the story, if they are not it is important to set the scene only briefly and not get bogged down in the details and get him into the desert for the story of **the burning bush**.

I read the story of the burning bush re told by David Kossoff from his "Bible Stories" It is very witty if read slowly and with expression, different voices and a stammer in appropriate places. Pupils will be very entertained. At the end of the story I read briefly from Exodus chapter three

**Moses said to God "I am nobody. How can I go to the king and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"**

**God answered "I will be with you and when you bring the people out of Egypt, you will worship me on this mountain. That will be the proof that I have sent you"**

**But Moses replied "When I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors sent me to you ' they will ask me 'What is his name ?' so what can I tell them ?"**

**God said "I am who I am. This is what you must say to them: The one who is called I AM has sent me to you Tell the Israelites that I, the Lord, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, have sent you to them. This is my name for ever; this is what all future generations are to call me."**

Discuss "I am that I am" . What does I am mean?

5.Close eyes and picture the three gods /goddesses earlier in the lesson now picture "I am" It simply means, I exist.

This introduces the idea of God as a spirit.

### **Vocabulary/ flash cards**

<b>Personify</b>	To think of something as a person
<b>God</b>	Male divine being
<b>Goddess</b>	Female divine being
<b>Polytheism</b>	Belief in many gods
<b>Fertility religion</b>	Worship of sky gods an earth Mothers
<b>Temple</b>	Building where divine Beings were worshipped
<b>Worship</b>	Worthship – giving value and respect to the divine being
<b>Sacrifice</b>	Giving something precious up to the divine being
<b>Priest</b>	a go between, between god and Humans

## Cloze procedure/ writing frame on belief in Gods and Goddesses

Early humans may have believed in *life after death*. They may have believed that animals had spirits that could be controlled by *hunting magic*. As humans developed their lifestyle changed. They discovered two very important things. They discovered that they need not hunt animals .There were some that could be *tamed* and kept in pens. They also discovered that they could plant seeds in the ground and grow them for food. They discovered *farming*. Because of this they stayed in *one* place. They no longer had to follow animals to hunt. They began to build *homes* instead of living in different caves as they moved around. Different members of the community could develop the skills they were good at for the benefit of the whole community. *Technology* and *art* flourished.

This caused a development in religion. People realised that their whole existence depended on the unseen forces of *nature* – they needed daylight, *sun, rain*, plants, crops and animals for food clothing, warmth and shelter.

Humans noticed that the pattern of life, growth and death in the plants and animals was reflected in *themselves*. They noticed that it was the *female* who gave birth and so they began to see the earth as a *mother* giving life to the plants. They began to see the earth as a female *deity* or *goddess*.The male created *life* and so the sky which sent the sun and the rain to make the crops grow was seen as a *father* .The sky was seen as a *God*. These religions are described as *fertility* cults.

They *personified* these forces as males and females. They saw other aspects of life and the world as their *children*. The sun, moon, stars, the seasons , even great emotions like *love* and *aggression* were personified. Belief in many gods and goddesses is known as *polytheism*.

Describe a fertility religion that you know of from the ancient world. This is an opportunity to write up to **level five** if you can show how people were affected by this belief and **level six** if you can show the variety of belief.....  
.....

People began to *worship* these gods and goddesses .This means giving worth, value,respect. They did this because .....

When things went wrong they thought the gods were *angry* and when things went well they thought they were pleased so they gave them *sacrifices*.

They built special places to honour the gods , called *temples* .Just as the community had gathered in large *caves* to perform the first *rituals* and *ceremonies* so the community would gather in these large buildings made of stone to offer gifts to the gods.

### **Levelled essay /design task**

Using the discussion from your lesson on Targon and Targana,design a temple to worship the Gods of the earth and the sky. **Level three: facts**

Saying why your temple has these features will give you **Level Four:Why,because**

Saying how the change in religion affected people will give you **Level five** and describing the variety of belief will give you **level six**

Comparing different religions with each other and showing how religion developed through history will give you **Level Seven and Eight.**

You could improve your work by incorporating some research into an area of religion that you have not studied in class .you could look at African religion, Native American religion and Aboriginal and Maori religion. Animism is still an important aspect of religion today. Can you recognise it and can you see why ?

### **The Beginning of Religion 3: Myth**

## Using Myths as concept builders

### The Midwinter festival - a way into Myth

Here is a story that **Targana** could tell the tribe after the temple has been built and the worship of the gods and goddesses of the sky and earth are established. This has the added benefit of helping students understand why Christmas is celebrated on December 25<sup>th</sup>. It also offers a way into studying myth. This is a kind of myth that I call an **explaining myth**. It is not one that has arisen out of a real historical event but is an attempt to explain and make sense of the world in a pre scientific age.

#### Telling the story

Long , long ago in the cold land of the north, people struggled very hard to stay alive in the winter. The ground was cold and hard as iron, nothing grew. There was no grass for the animals so many of them had to be killed. The meat was dried or smoked to provide for the winter. Nuts and fruit had to be stored and eked out carefully to make them last. Food had to be carefully rationed so that there was enough to last until spring. It was a struggle to stay warm. The northern people told this story to explain the suffering of winter.

Every year the seasons change from winter to summer to autumn to spring always the same , it happens because two of the gods do constant battle with each other, every year, all year and have done so since the beginning of time. Since the beginning of all things and on into eternity they wrestle, grunting and struggling. First, one gets the upper hand and then the other. They are the winter god and the summer god. When the days begin to get shorter the summer god is getting tired after all his efforts in providing warmth, heat and light for the earth. He becomes weaker and weaker. As the days grow shorter and shorter the winter god seems to win the battle. Sometimes the winter is especially hard, the old and the very young die in the cold. Every year we know the summer god will gain his strength, recover and beat the winter again.

All through the autumn we save our food and do our best waiting for him to rest and regain his strength. The shortest day is a time of great anxiety for us all, will the summer god finally be defeated or will he get stronger ?

All through the next day we wait to see if perhaps the day is a little longer ..and the next ... By the 24<sup>th</sup> December we can tell there is more light and the summer god has won.

He has defeated the winter god, spring, summer and new life will come again. that is why on December 25<sup>th</sup> we celebrate with a feast. For one day we eat to our hearts content, slaughter a precious animal so that we can have fresh meat and comfort ourselves in the middle of a harsh winter. This gives us strength for we know that the harshest weather is still to come but every day is longer and longer. We fill our homes with evergreens as a reminder that even in the middle of the harshest winter there is still life in the forest and the fields and spring will come again.

#### Myths as concept builders

As I said in the introduction, understanding Myth is a very important in the process of concept . It is important that pupils learn to look beyond the literal truth to the meaning behind them and not dismiss myths as nonsense. Myths are interpretations of human experience I divide them into two types which is something that will make academic toes curl but will help them make sense to children and provide **a concrete platform from which they can dive into diverse meaning in the stories .**

The first type I describe as **explaining stories**. These are stories ,like the one above that do not appear to be based on an actual historical event but explain something about the world and human nature .I would put the story of **creation** and **Adam** and **Eve** into this category. For some pupils from certain religious backgrounds these are important pieces of revelation that are regarded as literal truth .I explain this to pupils but suggest that asking whether they are true or not is not helpful. Let us look at what they *mean*. Teaching the story of Adam and Eve as an **allegory** with every part having a symbolic meaning makes a powerful story with something to teach everyone, whatever tradition, or none, they come .

The second type of myth I believe we have is where it appears that a myth has arisen from **a real historical event or series of events**. I start with Theseus and the Minotaur and Schliemann's, discovery of Troy .They are not within any of the six traditions and so the pupils have no baggage and can just enjoy them. I then go onto look at some examples in the Bible.

**Once they have learned not to dismiss the stories out of hand, but to see them as something much more complex than they appear at face value, the pupils will be better able to approach all scripture for meaning scr, not literal truth. They will also be able to approach biblical criticism early on, and with interest and enthusiasm.**

There is no "Theatre" for these stories they are theatre in themselves! Once the children are seated in the circle and the storytelling begins we really have gone back to the fire to pass on the oral tradition. If you wish, you can dim the lights, put on background music and let their imagination do the rest . The research and writing this will inspire certainly justifies such a simple lesson. ....and it must have worked with at least one of my pupils, as the following story shows....

A couple of Christmasses ago A young man ran after me in the street while I was out Christmas shopping in a nearby town. I had no idea who he was. He was thirty three years old. He introduced himself as a young boy who I clearly remembered teaching. I remembered him because his father was the leader of the Mormon Church in the South. He was a charming man who had no objection to my teaching his son. I enjoyed meeting him at parents evening and teaching his cheerful and enthusiastic son. This was long before Theatre of Learning but I guess in my flamboyant storytelling the seeds were already there.

"I just wanted to thank you" he said, "I never forgot the lessons you used to teach on myth. I have left the Mormon Church now and I am studying mythology at university". I hope you and your classes enjoy them as much as he did !

What follows is the midwinter festival which is an appropriate way to introduce the topic as part of a section on beginning religion . You will find other important and interesting myths in the appendix should you wish to explore the topic more fully in order to provide your pupils with an insight into looking for meaning in stories

### **Theseus and the Minotaur**

We are going back thousands of years ago to the land of Greece. Greece was not a country then, but a collection of cities each with its own king. One day **Aegeus**, the king of Athens fell in love with a beautiful woman called **Aethra**.

Soon she was expecting his child. When the time came for him to return to Athens he made her a promise . He took her to a huge hollow rock. He heaved with all his might until he had moved it sufficiently to slide under it his sword and sandals. "If our child is a boy and he is strong enough to retrieve my sword and sandals from under this rock and brave enough to make the journey to Athens to find me I will make him my heir.

And it was so.

Time passed and the boy, **Theseus** came to his father's palace. He was shown into the entrance hall and gazed around him in surprise .Everywhere was draped in black silk. While he waited he saw maidens going to and fro. No one smiled. The faces of everyone were sad .

He was dirty and hungry and tired . everyone ignored him. He did not look like a nobleman, the son of a King, their King. He told the reluctant servant, who greeted him, to take the dusty leather bag he had carried so far, and through so many trials to his Lord.

The servant did not wish to touch it .It was damp, torn and smelled. "This bag contains that which your Lord has wanted so much to see" said the young man "I am told he will find its contents more precious than gold".

The servant took the bag, unconvinced, and carried it to the King. The King sat by the fire, alone, staring into the flames, brooding. He did not look up when the servant entered . He did not move as the man gave his message. He did not appear even to have heard.

The servant waited,holding out the musty bag. Slowly, the King turned his dark eyes toward the bag ,realisation dawned, he started, he took it ,wonderingly. .... "Eighteen years" he said, almost to himself "eighteen years, the time is right , could it be ? Can I be given this by the gods to gladden my sad heart ?"

The King opened the bag and wept. "Fetch him" was all he managed to say.

Through the palace, Theseus went ,every window was draped in black. Every ray of sun was shut out, the corridors were lit by torch light, the flames flickering creating shadows on the walls. At last they came to the King's chamber.

The servant withdrew leaving Theseus to enter alone.

The old man held out his arms, holding the boy to him and weeping.

The two sat facing each other either side of the fire ,the only light in the darkened room.

mu"This is deep mourning, Sire" commented the boy "Who is it , that has died ?, he st be most noble, indeed, to provoke such grief."

"The youth of Athens " replied the King, staring into the fire "all the best ones, the most beautiful and the brave"

The King explained to his new found son that some years before Athens had been conquered by the Cretans, along with several other cities on the coast. They had not wanted a tribute of money, as was the usual custom, but to be paid in *human flesh*.

This flesh was to be food for the King's monstrous son, the Minotaur, half man and half bull. It had been born many years ago to the King's beautiful wife . **Pasiphae**. He could not kill his own son, even if it was a half crazed monster and so It was kept in a labyrinth, a maze under the palace constructed by the great engineer, **Daedalus**.

“Of course he will not feed the creature on Cretan flesh so we have to take it in turns to send seven young men and seven young women to be fed to him. The ship leaves tomorrow”

When the ship sailed the next morning it carried Theseus, determined to free the city he would one day rule, or die in the process.

The old King told the boy that he would watch every day for his return and that if he succeeded, he should change the black sails for white, so that the old man should know he was safe.

It was three days journey to Crete. There was someone waiting eagerly on the hilltop for sight of the ship.

**Ariadne**, the King's daughter was bored. A ship was excitement, new silks perfumes and jewels. She ran with her women to watch it dock. She saw the young men and women disembark and remembered why it had come...

“What a waste!” she thought, sadly.

Then she saw him. Theseus was the last to leave the ship. Ariadne saw him and fell in love. Theseus' eyes met hers. He took in her royal garments, he guessed she was important , a person of influence and power. He thought it best to return her smile.

He was not surprised that night ,in prison, to hear the rustle of silk and smell he perfume as she crept towards his cell. She handed him a sword and twine . ”I will wait for you by the dock “she said. “Promise you will take me with you “

Theseus released the others and sent them with Ariadne to the dock.

By noon the next day they were all far away. It was hot . They stopped at an Island to get fresh water and rest. Ariadne fell asleep under a tree. When she awoke, the ship was far away. Not only had Theseus “forgotten” the woman who was hoping to be his Queen but he also “forgot” to change the sails.

Aegeus looked out every day for his son, there was the ship with the sails still trimmed in black, broken hearted the king threw himself from the cliff and Theseus returned to Athens, a hero and its King and free to choose his own wife.

What a strange and improbable tale !

Now listen to this one.

## **Sir Arthur Evans and the palace of Knossos**

At the end of the nineteenth century, a rich Englishman called **Arthur Evans** went to dig on the island **Crete** .He unearthed a magnificent palace at **knossos**, its capital city. He spent the next thirty years rebuilding it . He discovered many remarkable things,.The palace walls which had been burnt down suddenly, were surmounted by bulls' horns. He found a huge bronze head of a bull. The walls were covered in paintings of ceremonies in which young men and women grasped the horns of charging bulls and leaped onto their backs after somersaulting into the air. A moment later they leapt to the ground, supported by a companion. Could there be a more dangerous sport than that ?! How long would these athletes survive ?

Sir Arthur was intrigued. Bulls were obviously significant to the Cretans but why?

Under the palace he found a network of pipes which were part of a complicated water carrying and heating system. Very advanced for its time. It looked like a maze or labyrinth.

One day Sir Athur was lying on his camp bed when one of the earth tremors the island is subject to, took place. As he lay there listening to the rumblings he realised that it sounded like the roaring of a mad bull.

Have you worked out the origins of the story of the Minotaur ?

Perhaps the Cretans worshipped the bull that lived under the ground and roared terrifyingly .shaking their buildings from time to time. Perhaps the bull leaping ceremonies were a kind of sacrifice – how many of the bull leapers survived do you think?

Was the head worn by the priest or even the King in ceremonies where the bull was worshipped.? Was he wearing it, praying to the bull to protect the island when the invaders who burned the palace down arrived?

We know from history that Crete conquered Athens and then Athens conquered Crete. Did Athens have to send young men and women to train in the ring to leap over the bull. Did the Athenians one day invade and burn the palace down did they carry half understood tales back of a man with a bulls head and an underground maze where he lived? Who knows ?

## **The Discovery of Troy**

At the end of the nineteenth century in Germany a little boy was being read a story by his father. His name was **Heinrich Schliemann**. His father was reading the story of the **Trojan war**. He heard how **Menelaus**, King of **Sparta** and other Kings of surrounding states together with their armies, had laid siege to the city for ten long years. They did this because **Paris** son of **Priam** king of Troy had stolen away **Helen**, Menelaus' beautiful wife.

One day the Trojans woke up to find the beach outside their city was empty, the armies had gone ! Delighted, they poured out of the city for the first time in a decade, free at last.

There, on the beach, they found a huge **wooden horse**. Assuming that it was gift to **Poseidon**, the god of the sea, for a safe journey home, they dragged the horse inside their city.

That night the celebrations were great. As the city lay asleep, in the early hours of the morning, the belly of the great horse opened . Out crept fifty Spartan soldiers .They crept to the gates of Troy and opened them. The armies had sailed back under cover of darkness. They poured through the city ,sacked it and burned it to the ground.

As little Heinrich looked at the hand coloured picture in the expensive book he said "When I grow up I am going to find that city!" His father laughed and tucked him up. "Troy does not exist " said his father "it is just a story"

As I am sure you all know, its just the sort of thing little children say - .well, in this case we are wrong!

Little Heinrich never forgot his dream. At fifteen he set out to achieve his ambition to become a great archaeologist - by becoming a delivery boy !

Heinrich began his working life working for a trading company, delivering their goods on his bicycle, but at once he set about gaining the expertise he needed. In evening class he studied European languages in order to progress in the company, helping it to trade all around Europe.

At the same time he mastered ancient Greek so that he could read the source of the story of Troy, Homer's ancient poem, the Iliad, in the original Greek. By the time he was forty, Heinrich was *head* of the trading company and a millionaire. Now he had the time and the money to find Troy.

He hired a boat and searched every cranny of the coastline of Greece and her islands, finding the spot that fitted the description in Homer's poem. Finally he found what he was looking for, not only that there was a huge grassy mound, the sort that forms over ancient ruins. His workmen set to work and before long he believed he found the walls of Troy. As a matter of fact there were several layers of walls and the walls that burnt down in the famous war were several layers further down, but he had found the site of Troy!

Whilst the details of the story will never be known, Schliemann, like others before and since, has shown that what we think of as myths are often based on some kind of historical event, so that instead of dismissing them as just pretty stories we should constantly ask ourselves what are they trying to tell us. Why has this story been passed down.?

### **Noah's Ark**

This story takes us back to the city of Ur where Abraham came from and where Sir Leonard Woolley found the tomb of Queen Shub Ad.

After he had finished his excavations of the royal graves, Sir Leonard wanted to find out how old the city was - how long people had lived on that site and so he ordered a hole to be dug deep into the earth. The hole was being dug through layers of rubbish left by the people who lived there. Pottery analysed at every layer would give information about how far back they were going. Finally, word came up that they had reached the bottom. It was around 4,000 BCE and there was no pottery left, just empty mud.

The great archaeologist was puzzled. There should not be heavy clay-like soil in that area. He ordered his men to keep digging, they did so for another eight to twelve feet until they came to more pottery, but this pottery was very different. It was not made on a wheel. Sir Leonard was even more puzzled by this band of clay. He wondered how far it stretched across the area. He discovered that the band of clay was eight to twelve feet thick and stretched for a radius of about fifty miles around the city, before it petered out.

**The clay could have been brought by only one thing, water, so much water that after it had gone it left a layer of sludge, even compressed over many centuries, it was still eight to twelve feet thick.**

This flood, as he felt sure it was, was so devastating that it wiped out the people who lived there, people who made their pottery by hand. Much later the area was settled by incoming settlers who knew how to use a wheel. He sent a telegram to England, it read "I have found the flood". Fifty miles was hardly the whole world, but to the people who lived there and who may never have travelled much beyond their towns and villages, it was.

Is this the story that made its way into the Jewish Bible thousands of years later?

In 1872 ( check date ) the ruins of a great library was found at **Nineveh**, capital city of the ancient Assyrian empire. The **Assyrians** were the people who had conquered the **Sumerians** who lived at Ur. In the library at Nineveh written, on clay tablets, a great epic poem was found giving the **creation myth** of the people of that area. It was no doubt hundreds of years old before it was ever written down. Passed down through what we call oral tradition. It was called the **Epic of Gilgamesh**.

In one part of the story we are told that the gods are annoyed that there are so many humans that they are disturbing the heavens with their noise. The gods decide to destroy human kind. One of them takes pity on a good man called **Utnapishtim**. He tells him to build a box to put his villagers and their animals in. He is told to make it water proof with pitch. All the villagers help and it is ready just in time. It is not a boat, it doesn't need to go anywhere, just keep everyone away from the water. It rains for **seven days and nights** and when it stops and the box settles, **all mankind had turned to clay**.

**What is the connection of this story with the Jewish Bible ?is there a connection at all?**

.Was this the story that came from the great flood at Ur 6,000 – 4,000 BCE ? Was it passed down among the civilisations of the Mesopotamian area. ? Did Abraham's family take a version of it with them when they left Ur around 2,000 BCE, passing it down for hundreds of years until it was written down in the book of Genesis around 800BCE, in its Jewish form? We shall never know.

It is another example of an ancient story that may have some connection with events that really took place. Another example of a story where we should ask Not did it happen but why did someone want to tell us this ?

## **Sodom and Gomorrah and the fall of the city of Jericho**

In the book of Genesis we hear that Abraham had a nephew called Lot, a good man. He lived with his wife and daughter in one of two towns by the edge of the Dead Sea. These towns were known for the wickedness and the cruelty of the people who lived there. God, says the story, sent two angels to sort them out.

Angel simply means *messenger*. The angels looked like ordinary people. It was much later in the tradition that they were described as spiritual, heavenly beings, filled with light

Lot , not knowing who they were, welcomed the men with great courtesy and kindness, which shows his good character. The people of the town surrounded the house wishing to harm the visitors because they were strangers. Lot was horrified and pleaded with them not to do this .This was the confirmation the two angels needed that something drastic had to be done.

They told Lot that God had decided to destroy the city and so Lot must escape with his wife family as quickly as they could. Lot was so frightened that they took pity on him and led the family out of the city by the hand. The angels warned them that must run for their lives as fast as they could towards the hills and not look back whatever they heard .Here is an extract from the book of **Genesis19: 18-27**

**“The hills are too far away; the disaster will overtake me, and I will die before I get there. Do you see that little town ? It is near enough. Let me go over there – you can see it is just a small place – and I will be safe.**

**He answered “all right, I agree. I won’t destroy that town. Hurry, run! I can’t do anything until you get there. Because Lot called it small the town was named Zoar**

**The sun was rising when Lot reached Zoar. Suddenly the Lord rained burning sulphur on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and destroyed them along with the whole valley, along with all the people there and everything that grew on the land. But Lot’s wife looked back and she was turned into a pillar of salt.**

**Early the next morning Abraham hurried to the place where he had stood in the presence of the lord. He looked down at Sodom and Gomorrah and the whole valley and saw smoke rising from the land like smoke from a huge furnace.**

What we need to do is to ask not “did it happen?” the answer can only ever be “we don’t know” but “what might have given rise to the story ?” .Archaeology again gives some clues. At the edge of the Dead Sea to this day there lies a little town called **Zoar** and under the water there appears to be a petrified forest preserved by the heavy salt content of the water. How come there is a forest under the water ? and how come Zoar is so close to the water ? Hold that thought until we come to the end of the next story

### **The fall of Jericho.**

We need to jump forward in time a little .We have looked at the story of the flood ,we have looked at stories about Abraham and we have looked at Moses being told to lead the people out of Egypt to the mountain where he had met God in the story of the burning bush.

He was told to bring the people back to the mountain to meet him. He did and the people were given the ten commandments. Moses led the people towards the promised land they had left some time ago in the time of Joseph.

The people were too scared to enter. Moses led them back into the desert where they lived for forty years .After Moses’ death, a new leader called Joshua led the new generation into the promised land. They had grown up following God and trusted him to get them in safely.

The book of Joshua tells us that they had to get past the city of Jericho. A great walled city. Conquering this would show the people who lived there that the Hebrew people and their God must be respected. Joshua 6 1-5

**“The gates of Jericho were kept shut and guarded to keep the Israelites out. No one could enter or leave the city. The Lord said to Joshua “I am putting into your hands Jericho with its king and all its brave soldiers. You and your soldiers are to march round the city once a day for six days. Seven priests, each carrying a trumpet are to go in front of the Ark. On the seventh day you and your soldiers are to march round the city seven times while the priests blow the trumpets. Then they are to sound one long note. As soon as you hear it, all the men are to give a loud shout, and the whole city will collapse. Then the whole army will go straight into the city”.**

The account adds that everything in the city was to be destroyed and all the gold and silver was to be taken out and put in the treasury for the Lord

**“Then they set fire to the city and burned it to the ground” verse 24**

After this Joshua issued a solemn warning

**“Anyone who tries to rebuild Jericho will be under the Lord’s curse” verse 26**

Archaeology tells us some very interesting things about this city, too. The walls show signs of having collapsed suddenly in one event, rather than having crumbled over time. The walls have fallen outward and show signs of being burnt with fire. It has been hard to date this because there are no artefacts on the site that could be used to date the time of the collapse.

Remember, I suggested that it is not helpful to ask “did these ancient stories happen exactly as their earliest accounts say?” because we can never know the answer, but we can ask “what might have caused the story?”

Remember the thought I asked you to hold ?

Well, it appears that the Dead Sea, where the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah were said to be, and the site of Jericho all lie on a fault line in the earth’s surface. **These places are subject to earth tremors**, minor earth quakes.

Have you some suggestions as to what might have happened to give rise to these stories?

And the final piece of the puzzle - this same fault line stretches right under the sea out underneath the island of Crete!

The really important insight for us about all these ancient stories and their possible connection with history is *interpretation*. If you have re enacted the story of **the island** you will remember how the story of the ship wreck was interpreted by the descendants to give the original event *meaning* and *purpose*. This is what myths do. Some people believed the shipwreck in the story of the Island had happened for a purpose, some believed it was just an accident - and some people believed it never happened at all – it was just a myth. I hope by now you have realised that myths are not quite that simple!

**Vocabulary/ flash cards**

- Deity**                      Another name for divine being
- Polytheism**              Belief in many gods
- Myth**                      A story to explain or interpret something
- Allegory**                  A story where every part has a symbolic meaning

**Cloze procedure/writing frame on myth**

Early humans found nature to be full of mysteries and believed that forces or *spirits* governed everything that happened. They began to ask questions about the forces or spirits that controlled *nature* – they wanted to be able to explain them so that people would understand what was going on in the world and why things happened as they do. They told *stories* which we call *myths* to explain *why* things happen. These were stories about how the world and human beings came to be, why *disasters* happened, why humans chose to do things that were *wrong* and cause *suffering* to others. These are *explaining* myths. Can you think of some examples ?

Describe some examples and say what you think these myths were trying to explain. **Level five: why, because**

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Other myths grew up around *real* historical *events* and *personalities*. Can you think of some examples of these?

Describe some examples of these kind of myths and say why you think a myth grew up around the event or person. **Level four: facts to level seven critical analysis**

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**Section 3: Teaching about**

**God**

**Part One: Who made God ? (suitability: year seven upwards)**

This section is all about teaching ideas about God. It builds on the previous section about early religion, animism and polytheism.

The question in the title is a very important for young people. Thoughtful children are going to ask it from about eight years old.

It goes along the lines of “well, if God created everything, who created him? ”This leads to the obvious question,” and who created the person who created God ?” and so on.

When a person asks this question – usually with a triumphant expression on their face saying “Now, I’ve got you !” It is really a question about two fundamental issues,

## **how that person perceives God -ie as a personification of a human being, an old man in the sky and, understanding infinity.**

In my experience the question usually comes from **year seven** pupils who have rejected, or are in the process of rejecting, the idea of a divine being as a serious, intellectual proposition..

It is a very big question to deal with if it comes up *spontaneously* in a lesson so, as it is so crucial to their ability to make sense of religion, I usually *create* a situation where their question will arise, and then, overheads and script at the ready, we address it seriously.

It is essential that children at the top end of primary school and the lower end of secondary are helped to move from an **anthropomorphic** picture of god to being able to think of god as a **spirit** at the point at which they are encountering science, and beginning to feel that God is a fairy story.

This is not about inviting pupils to *believe* in God, but an invitation to take the fact of religious belief in the traditions seriously, and not dismiss believers as people who are deluded wish fulfillers.

It is about what they think believers are actually believing *in* that matters. If it is a *person*, a kind of super hero, then many will dismiss all religion as without value, a delusion.

It is these children who ask” why do I have to learn about this ? I don’t believe in it.” Some youngsters however, *do* picture God as a person who looks after them and to whom they can speak through prayer. It is important not to knock that .

This concept is re visited throughout RE, keeping step with the pupils growing maturity. One lesson, however skilful, which says “Okay, that is what you think/ believe (old man on a cloud) how about looking at it like this ?(God as a spirit without beginning and without end)” is not going to lead to a permanent shift in the way an eleven year old sees the idea of God. Our pupils look at the idea of God in year seven, where the following lesson is taught, year nine, where they will study the Atman see the lesson on the Atman in this book , year eleven where they will look at the traditional arguments for the existence of God and the concept of the numinous which appear later in this section and year thirteen, where those arguments will be accompanied by extensive reading(see recommended list ) Each programme of study builds on the work they have done before.

I find that a major shift occurs when they encounter the concept of the **Atman** in year nine. Their writing after the series of lessons on the Hindu idea of God (See Teaching Hinduism and Buddhism with the Theatre of Learning) shows a real pleasure and excitement in finding a way of looking at God which fits in with their scientific picture of the world. It is a way of making sense of life that makes sense to them.

**It is also where religion and science meet . This whole issue is reinforced by looking at the pulsating universe and the disappearing table The Atman and reincarnation which all appear in this resource file.**

## **Lesson recipe for “Who made God?”**

### **This is what you need**

- Overhead projector
- Picture of God on a cloud ,make a cartoon drawing
- Picture of god making god, making god, make a cartoon drawing
- Dramatic music to come into such as the beginning of 2001 space odyssey
- CD Player
- A picture of an extended family – a Victorian photograph might be helpful, something that shows a number of generations.
- Picture of an animal eating another animal
- Picture of animals or people eating

### **This is what you do**

Class come into music, fade and settle

1. Put the picture of God on a cloud on the screen and ask who is this ?

How do you know ?

Pupils will begin to explore issues about what God looks like. As the discussion progresses they realise that thinking about God as a human being is causing all sorts of problems .Where does he live ? How does listen to every ones' prayers at once? How can he be everywhere at once.

It raises the issue of creation. It is hard to grasp when one thinks of making something with ones' hands.

Relate this to the idea of God from the time of the fertility cults when people thought of gods and goddesses as rather like themselves, a family of super heroes but who did not always behave with the same sense of morality!

2. Put up a blank slide and say that it might be more helpful to think of God like this.

There is simply a blank screen with just the light from the projector

This is a picture ,as much as the first one is .It is a way of showing how humans today think of God as a spirit that cannot be pictured or described. Relate it to other things you may have discussed, such as love, wind, time, thoughts and feelings .Bringing in love in a jar.(see introduction and the section on teaching symbols)

Why ,in pictures of God is he shown as an old man ?

How old is God ?

God is eternal. He has existed always. There was not a time when God did not exist.

Pupils may start to struggle at this point, and it is here that someone might ask "Who made God ?"

If you can get someone to draw one , put up the picture of God making God, making God, and ask the pupils what problem we have encountered here?

This is about beginnings and endings

### **3.Exploring infinity**

Does everything have a beginning and an ending ?

Pupils may well think that they do. In a sense they do not

Where do they begin ?

As you explore this, you show them how although they begin at conception, there is a sense that they go back, through genetic material, to the beginning of evolution and right back to the creation of stars and therefore before that (see lesson on the pulsating universe )

Where will they end ?

As you explore what happens to dead bodies, the class will come to see how everything actually *changes* into something else .

Imagine a lion eating an antelope. What does the antelope become ?, the lion. When the lion dies , what happens to its body ?. Let us imagine that it dies, lying under a tree. It decomposes, feeding the tree and the grass. An antelope comes by and grazes on the grass under the tree, the lion becomes part of the antelope – we could even imagine the antelope was a descendent of the one that the lion ate some years before!

3. Hold up a pencil. Ask where it came from , a tree, where did the tree come from? – and so on .

Take any object the children can think of ,including gas and heat, and ask them to explore where it came from and what will happen to it. They come to realise what Einstein taught, that nothing is created or destroyed, it only changes – even the universe itself ! (see the pulsating universe)

**Conclusion:** God seen as an old man in the sky, or having any kind of body causes us all sorts of problems. Islam and Hinduism make it quite clear that this is not so and could not be so. Thinking about God as a spirit, without beginning or end creates fewer problems and fits in with what we know about the world from science . Does this mean that God exists ? No, but it makes this belief a valid point of view.

This is where I stop in year seven. I will be able to build on this talking about God in Christianity, Islam and Sikhism. In year nine we pick up the point about infinity again with the case of the disappearing table and the pulsating universe. All this equips the pupils to look at the concept of God in Hinduism and the concept of the **numinous** the **holy spirit** and the inner voice in year eleven.

**The idea of God as a spirit, without shape, form, beginning or end is so fundamental to the study of religion that the earlier it is introduced the better. Re visiting it in its different forms as the pupils' ability to think abstractly develops is very helpful and more effective than looking at the idea of God in one topic and that's it**

### **Vocabulary/Flash cards**

**Infinity** Without beginning or end

**Anthropomorphic** To think of an object or an idea as a human

## **Cloze procedure writing frame on who made God ?**

- **Completing the cloze passage takes you to level three; facts**
- **Completing the section that follows could take you through level four ;why and because to level five; the affect of belief on a person, individual or community and level six; the variety of belief within a tradition**
- **Completing the research task allows you to use these levels and progress to level seven; critical analysis and level eight; development through history and comparison with other religions.**

Is there a God ? what is God like ? Is God male or *female* ,What *colour* is God ? How can God live for *ever* . How can God be *everywhere* at once ? where does he *live* ? Where did God come from ? Who made God ?

When we ask these questions we realise that we only have to ask another -*who made the person who made God ?*

This kind of question arises if we picture God as a *person* with a *body* like *ours* a kind of *superman*. If we think of God like this then He has all the limitations of our bodies and it creates lots of questions.

We quickly realise that God *cannot* have a human body like ours. God cannot be *male* or female, *black* or *white*. God cannot be *pictured* at all. God has to be *beyond* human understanding. If we could *understand* him then he wouldn't be God, there would always be the possibility of someone or *something greater* and that would be God.

Instead it is more helpful to think of God as a *spirit*, without *form*, and without a beginning or an end . We call this *infinity*.

How can this be ?everything has a beginning and an ending, doesn't it

*Explain the answer to this question in your own words using examples, you could use people, antelope and pencils or any other that you can think of - even the universe itself!*

.....  
.....  
.....

**Research How do Hindus and Muslims describe God ? How do their beliefs and ways of describing god fit in with what we have been learning ?Use the internet or books to find out .You could include some pictures in this work. Writing about this well could take you to level eight**

**Part Two: What do we mean when we talk about God ? (suitable for GCSE, A level and sixth form general RE)**

I wrote this for year eleven and was fascinated to find, coming after years of experiential lessons that pupils view of God had been influenced by these . There were those who saw God as a lofty being outside the universe but the majority described god as a spirit, something inside themselves, They were influenced by the notion of **immanence**, of the **Atman** and the **numinous** . They were influenced by their experiences of awareness in the religion neutral exercises on prayer. One pupil commented that he did not believe in God but lessons like this helped him to understand where believers were coming from.

**Lesson recipe on what do we mean when we talk about God ?**

**This is what you need**

- Music: Moby: "God moving over the face of the waters"
- Candle
- Matches
- Paper for each pupil
- Pens
- Container for pupil's confidential work such as an empty tissue box
- Cards saying yes, no ,don't know

**This is what you do:**

Class come into music. Sit in the circle, fade the music and go straight into a reflective exercise

Close eyes and watch the breath

**1. Visualisation**

Close your eyes or find a point on the floor to look at where you will not be disturbed by others. Relax and concentrate on your breathing, pushing all other thoughts away.

I would like you to imagine that you are high above the earth. You are sitting on a cloud. It is warm and comfortable. You are watching history unfold. It is like a movie on fast forward that suddenly stops for a moment, allowing you to glimpse a moment of the lives of the people in it.

Let us go back to the beginning.....

It is 40,000 years ago. Here is **early man**. He is covered in hair and wrapped in a cloak of deerskin. In his hand he carries a sharp spear with which to hunt. It is growing dark and cold. He is making his way towards a great cave in the hillside. He is hungry.

He believes there is a spirit within the animals he hunts. He calls this the **anima** or **mana**. He believes he can take these qualities into himself by wearing the skins and acting out the hunt. He believes this will make him brave enough to risk his life and make his wish for food come true.

He painted the scenes of successful hunts on the walls of this great cave where the whole tribe has gathered to chant and dance in the flickering torch light, guided by the **shaman**. These are the first rituals.

When man settled down and began to grow crops he worshipped the Gods of the sky and the earth. **The sky was a father** sending the rain to the **mother** enabling her to grow the food they needed in her womb. He worshipped the God in huge **temples, sacrificing** first his children and then his flocks to persuade the gods to send rain and good fortune.

Now we are on the other side of the world. Here is a **Hindu** meditating. He is surrounded by **images of the Gods**. There is **Shiva** the destroyer, dancing the dance of perpetual change. And there is **Ganesha**, the elephant God who reminds us not to be like the greedy rat at his feet and whose round belly tells us that we can digest all experiences if we listen to the teachings of the scriptures. He believes that God cannot be described or pictured, these images are just stepping stones to help people understand. **God is the great life force of the universe**, the **Atman**, within all living things.

Deep in **meditation** he feels part of the oneness of the universe. He looks on all life as sacred and precious. He does not eat meat and teaches the villagers to control the desires of the body and reach out to God.

Here is shepherd high on a mountain watching the sheep. He is thinking about his people enslaved in Egypt. He thinks about the God of his ancestors and the Gods of Egypt. He has an overwhelming sense of the presence of that God telling him to go back and rescue his people. **This is a God who cannot be seen or described or represented in human form** He is known simply as **"I am"** Did he imagine this? All he knows is that his life has changed forever because of what happened on the mountain, because of it he found the courage to do the impossible.

Here is an **Egyptian woman**. She is entering a sacred grove of trees to take part in the mysteries of **Osiris**, the god of the dead. No one knows what will happen there, but she believes that as a result of these rituals that she will become **one with him after death, and live for ever**.

Now we are in **Rome**. It is thirty years after the death of Jesus. Here is a **Roman warrior**. He is bathing himself in the blood of a bull sacrificed to the God, **Mithras**. He is afraid. He does this to give himself courage in battle. This will be the last time he does this. He has only a few more months to live. This afternoon he will meet a stranger who will tell him about Jesus. Taking the body and blood of Jesus in the Eucharist will give him the courage to face the lions in the arena

The movie has finished now. Lie down on the cloud and close your eyes and imagine what you think people in your time see and feel when they pray to God. - What do **YOU** think God is like?

When you are ready, open your eyes and come back into the classroom.

2. Under your seats is a piece of paper. Using pictures or words, represent what you think people mean when they speak of God today.

When you have finished put your work in this box here.

3. The other thing that I would like you to do is to take a piece of card saying yes, no, don't know from the piles you see there and put one of those in the other box representing what you yourself believe about the existence of God

What we now have is a class representation of what people think God is like and whether they think there is a divine force or power in the universe. In a while we will use this to see if peoples' views have changed.

4. Make a thought shower on the board giving reasons why people believe in God

These are the sorts of things people might say

*Miracles, religious experience, worship, prayer, nature, design and order*

5. Make a thought shower of reasons why people do not believe in God

*suffering, disaster, unanswered prayer, natural evil moral evil*

6. Make a thought shower of the qualities of God with an example from the class of each

The following are examples

**omnipotent** = creation

**loving** = personal relationship through prayer courage guidance and inspiration - maybe it puts you in touch with your higher impulses the ones that encourage us to evolve in to more caring socially minded beings.

**omniscient** - sees the big picture which we cant, like we can see what our younger siblings cant

**omnipresent** - nature and within all people **immanence**

### **Plenary /debrief**

Read out the comments from the box about what people think God is like and discuss – what picture of God is emerging.

Some see god as **anthropomorphic**

Some as a **spirit** and some as the **inner voice**

Record the figures for "yes", "no" "don't know" and see if they change after the classical arguments for the existence of God have been taught. Introduce the terms **Atheist, theist and agnostic**

Discuss with the pupils whether it is rational argument or experience which most affects their beliefs about God. It is important that this work is done anonymously and because it is interesting, not because there is any set of beliefs that pupils should have. Pupils should be under no pressure to share.

**Tasks for this topic are included in those that follow the next lesson.**

## **Part Three: Arguments for the existence of God - is the world an accident or designed? ( suitable for GCSE, A level and sixth form general RE)**

This lesson is most successful when taught following the lesson on the pulsating universe.

Here is a piece of text which I use with my year eleven class for their GCSE module on the existence of God and with the sixth form for their A2 unit on the same subject. Reading it will give you the subject knowledge you need to teach this subject. You can print it off to use with your classes. We read it together in the circle. It will form a neat A5 booklet. This is based on Peter Vardy's "The puzzle of God" which will prove useful reading for the most able.

## Study Booklet on arguments for the existence of God

### The Argument from Design

The Argument from Design is simply this :

- ⊖ Because the world exists it must have been created
- ⊖ A designed object (The universe) implies a designer (God)

It is neither new, Christian or finished

This argument was first written about by a Greek philosopher called **Xenophon in 390 BCE** but who knows how old the discussion really is? Modern science with all its knowledge about the origin of the universe, particularly with the **Big Bang theory** in which the universe appears to be without beginning or end, has caused it to be discussed at great length again,

The most famous versions of the argument from design are put forward by

- ⊖ **Aquinas 1224/5 - 1274**
- ⊖ **Paley 1743 -1805**
- ⊖ **Swinburne - 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

Let's get started!

#### "Surely the world can't be by chance?"

*"The intricacies of the natural world and the way the whole system fitted together seemed clearly to point to the need for a great designer who had adapted everything to fit together as a self sustaining whole."*

#### Peter Vardy page 67 "The Puzzle of God"

This was first put forward by Xenophon in 390 BCE when he quoted Socrates who said

*"With such signs of fore thought in the design of living creatures, can you doubt they are the work of choice or design?"*

The next important contribution was by **St Anselm in the 11<sup>th</sup> century**. He was an important Christian Theologian. At that time it was not acceptable to doubt the existence of God. During the Medieval period there were a number of Theologians who thought it was important to demonstrate that belief in God did not need to exist by faith alone. It was also based on logic and argument. It is self evidently obvious, they were saying, that there is a God, there can be no reason for doubt

If God exists, what must God be like ?

#### The supreme being

#### the ultimate reality

#### The other

God is described in the following ways. ( Write in the definitions of the words.)

- ⊖ **Omnipotent**.....
- ⊖ **Omnipresent**.....
- ⊖ **Omniscient**.....

- ⊗ **Benevolent**.....
- ⊗ **Prescient** .....
- ⊗ **Infinite**.....
- ⊗ **Ineffable** .....
- ⊗ **noetic** .....

**write round these words the qualities of God from above associated with them**

*Transcendent*

*Immanent*

*The numinous*

**If God did not have these qualities then he would be less than perfect and so leaving the possibility of a being who did have these qualities and who would be God. Therefore God must have these qualities!**

**The Ontological Argument**

The most famous argument by reason alone is the Ontological Argument (Ontology is talking about Being) put forward by St Anselm who was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1093 -1109

**Anselm said**

- ⊗ **God must be the most perfect being imaginable**
- ⊗ **To exist is better than to be imagined**
- ⊗ **Therefore God exists!**

Despite its neatness, it is an argument with enormous flaws. Can you think of some?

This kind of approach to discussion about the Existence of God justified the belief that doubt was the work of the devil and should be punished by death.

After the Reformation with the rise of science and the spread of education, people began to show that belief in God was not *necessarily* reasonable and in the wake of the new physics and modern science the debate goes on!

- ⊗ People who believe in God are called **theists**



## 15. God is an idea that we have made up to comfort us and deal with our fear of death

### The cosmological argument

This argument was put forward by Thomas Aquinas in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Aquinas put forward the Cosmological or Teleological Argument

From **cosmos** meaning ,everything, the world or universe

and **Teleos** meaning the end or purpose It is a way of saying the world , or the end result proves there must have been a cause

In a nutshell it says

**Because the world exists, it was created.**

His version is mainly found in what is known as

### Aquinas' Five Ways

There could not be a world with these characteristics unless there was an ultimate reality which we call God

**1.The fact of motion means there is a Prime Mover**

**2. the fact of causation means there must be a First Cause**

**3.The fact of contingent beings ( all beings come from other beings ) means there must be a Necessary Being(that did not come from another being )**

**4.The fact that there are degrees of value (good ,better best) means there must be an Absolute Value**

**5.The evidence of Purposiveness in nature means there must be a Divine Designer**

**Memorize it this way**

⊞ **Motion**

⊞ **Causation**

⊞ **Contingency**

⊞ **Value**

⊞ **Purpose**

⊞ = **MCCVP!**

### Some criticisms of the cosmological argument

**It depends on a willingness to ask why is the universe here?**

**Leibniz** in 1710 called this **the principle of sufficient reason**. By sufficient reason Leibniz means a complete explanation for the existence of something - He thought God was sufficient reason for the existence of the universe

This has now been disproved because scientists now know that if you go back to the beginning of the universe time ceases to exist. The universe and time start with the Big Bang. If we grant a beginning to the Universe - does this mean that beginning this has to be God?

So what caused the Big Bang? Scientists need to explain that but does that still mean that it has to be an uncaused God?

The principle of sufficient reason was reformulated by **Father Copleston** in a famous debate with **Bertrand Russell** a modern philosopher on the radio in 1947

Peter Vardy in "The puzzle of God" says that If you accept that everything in the universe is contingent and dependent then the argument becomes much more persuasive - Russell did not. He said

### **"The universe is just there and that is all"**

He declared it to be a pseudo problem, an argument about words and terminology and Copleston replied that if one refused to sit down at the chessboard and play then of course one cannot be checkmated!

Russell also said that the argument from contingency fails because it is like saying that because all humans have a mother then humankind has a mother

The atheist philosopher **David Hume** in the 18<sup>th</sup> century ,also criticised the argument. He said there is no need to consider that the universe has a cause just because everything in it has , but he also admitted in a letter that he didn't seriously believe that anything existed without a cause!

C.D.Broad 1887-1971 said you cannot seriously believe anything beginning to exist without being caused. This in essence is what is called the **Kalaam argument** - believing something that exists to have a cause.

### **Summary:**

- ⊗ Is it as Russell says merely about words and their definition?
- ⊗ Is it a matter of personality?
- ⊗ You either want to believe that the universe is caused by a divine being or you don't, which is what the Russell /Copleston debate seems like.

## **The Argument from Design - Paley's Watch**

Put forward by William Paley - Archdeacon of Carlisle – 1743 –1805

⊗ He said if someone were walking across a heath and were to come across a watch and examine its workings, he or she would be strongly disposed to infer that there was a watchmaker

## **The modern philosopher Richard Swinburne has a similar argument**

He said imagine that you were walking in a great jungle where it was obvious no one had been before and you suddenly came across a beautiful garden. You would assume there was a gardener even if you watched and watched and never saw one.

Another argument is that to believe that the world came about by accident is like assuming that given enough time a monkey tapping randomly on a typewriter would eventually type the whole Bible.

Peter **Vardy** quotes a criticism of this by saying that

*Order is discovered not imposed, because, for example, we would not say that all biological analysis ceased to be true if the human race were suddenly wiped out*

**The 18<sup>th</sup> century Philosopher , Immanuel Kant** criticises it because he says we do not know that there is an order in the universe we merely *assume* there is because we would naturally impose order on any universe we were in ,for only so can we think and reason as we do. - we naturally order things and impose categories on them.

**David Hume in "Dialogues concerning Natural Religion" 1719 Criticises Paley thus.**

He uses some imaginary characters Cleanthes ,Demea and Philo to portray different positions

Philo ,who is closest to Hume criticises the design argument like this

1.Who created the complex mind that created the universe?

2.The problem of evil makes it seem that God is not wholly good or powerful enough

3.Why one creator and not many? - also it is like all the people involved in building a ship - once a man makes something , he may leave it

*Hume said " The world for aught the user of the Design argument knows is very faulty and imperfect compared to a superior standard and was only the first rude effort of some infant deity who later abandoned it"*

He goes on to say that it might equally be the product of some deity in his dotage laughed at by his superiors. Philo sums up Hume's view by saying

*"All religious systems are subject to difficulties and absurdities ,barbarities and pernicious tenets but say it is right - they all prepare a triumph for the sceptic"*

## **Vocabulary Flash/cards**

<b>Transcendent</b>	Above and beyond the universe
<b>Immanent</b>	God inside us, the inner voice
<b>Omnipotent</b>	All powerful
<b>Benevolent</b>	Well meaning
<b>Omniscient</b>	All knowing
<b>Omnipresent</b>	all present - everywhere!
<b>Theist</b>	someone who believes in God
<b>Atheist</b>	someone who does not believe in God
<b>Agnostic</b>	a person who is unsure whether there is a god or not

## **Cloze procedure/writing frame on the existence of God**

**(This exercise allows you to write from level five :why,because , to level seven :critical analysis )**

Christians say that if there is a God he must be the most powerful being that exists and so he must have limitless powers . They describe him as

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

People who do not believe in God are called *Atheists* people who are not sure are called *Agnostics* They say that God does not exist because

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

When *Atheists* and *Agnostics* say that the existence of evil, suffering and natural disasters proves there is no God and certainly not a *benevolent* and *omnipotent* one what argument do Christians put forward to defend themselves?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Christians believe that God created the Universe. They argue that it cannot have come about by accident . There are three famous arguments in favour of the world being designed these are

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....

Describe one of them in detail

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Some philosophers have criticised the argument from **design** or **causation**, (Kant and Hume )What have they said.....

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

### **Levelled essay on the existence of God**

1. Describe what God is like using specialist vocabulary

**Level Four: facts: 5 marks**

2. Why do Christians believe in God?

Why do Atheists and Agnostics not believe in God?

**Level six, The effects of belief and level seven critical analysis: 5 marks**

3. What is the argument from Design or causation ?

**Level five, why and because: 5 marks**

4. What criticisms have been put forward about the argument from design:

**Level six effects and variety of belief. Level Seven critical analysis: 5 marks**

**At every point you will improve your work and prepare yourself for sixth form study if you use extension reading and include quotations and specialist vocabulary in your work.**

## **Section 4: How do we know what is real?**

**Part One: Introduction to Descartes ( this is suitable for year nine up wards or very bright younger pupils. It can be used to introduce Descartes to sixth form pupils.)**

I have always believed that nothing is too difficult to teach or to learn, it is simply a matter of how skilfully and simply one can put it across, so out of interest I taught this to year seven!

I have taught the ideas without saying this was the philosophy of Descartes for years but this time I did it properly. I also taught it to year nine.

All classes enjoyed it and were fascinated by the ideas and very proud of themselves for being able to do philosophy like undergraduates and also to be able to read Descartes' original words in the extract from the meditations, included here.

I knew it had made an impact when I arrived in lower school the following week to find my class all lined up and one of the liveliest boys, right in the front, stood to attention and said, "Cogito ergo sum, Miss !"

It does help to prepare pupils in advance because it is such a cerebral lesson. Ask them whether they would like to have ago at some real philosophy – you think they are clever enough to have a go , but would they like to ?

Year seven managed to grasp the ideas in their most simple form. Year nine were able to respond critically. One boy stayed behind to talk about his work.

"I don't write very well" he said "but I have been working hard on my essay. I would like another week to work on it. This is more interesting than anything else I have ever done." He gave me a note from his mother which explained that he had been so interested he had been looking up Descartes on the internet and discussing his ideas with all the family, including his grandmother. Hence the delay in completing the essay.

After talking to him for a while I was struck by his obvious intelligence and puzzled by his remarks about not writing well. I checked his CAT scores (cognitive ability tests) and found them to be 72 across the board. This was very low indeed. It didn't add up. Next week he brought me his book and stayed behind once more. Eight pages of writing which were almost impossible to decipher. His mother had carefully translated across the unreadable words and put a note at the end to assure me that the words were all his own. She had merely made it readable.

I asked him what help he had in school from special needs and learned that after being put in a withdrawal group to help him read in year seven, he had withdrawn himself and asked not be helped again. "I can read, fine, Miss. That's not the problem., it is writing that is hard. I hated being in the group. They thought that I was stupid."

It had been assumed from his CATS ,together with his difficulties with writing and spelling that he was very limited in his ability with literacy and understanding. "These scores cannot be right" I told him. "why are they so low?" Faced with CAT tests that made no sense, he had not understood what he should do so he ticked and filled in boxes at random.

Our modern education system gives us little opportunity to sit down and talk with our pupils and they are so rarely stimulated that they would want to stay behind to discuss a lesson. The multi sensory , experiential method had enabled this boy to understand and express his excitement at what he was learning, for the first time. The oral delivery of Descartes' philosophy had enabled him to access a very demanding text. Within weeks he was re tested diagnosed with dyslexia and dispraxia and found to have a non verbal score of 115.He became the focus of a special research project for our head of SSLD. (severe specific learning difficulties) He was moved to top sets, given IT support and with his obvious intelligence acknowledged by staff and peers, became a different boy. With extra time and having refused a scribe he gained 66% in his RE GCSE short course.

( You can imagine my delight when after successfully completing A levels at the local further education college, I heard, long after I completed this book , that he had entered the university of Southampton to begin a degree in comedy writing)

Examples like this are very rare – every teachers' dream, really, but it serves to underline the importance of presenting demanding, abstract concepts to mixed ability classes where literacy is never the starting point . He is also the best example I have ever had, of someone who was as motivated as it is possible to be ,to overcome the limitations of literacy difficulties, to produce the best piece of work he could, no matter what it cost him.

"You are the only one that picks them up" said the Head of SSLD a few months later when one of my year elevens was diagnosed, after a referral from me. "I don't understand it",I am the one who is going against the tide by saying don't have pupils doing lots of writing in class." I said ."She shrugged. Then I thought, "is it because bright pupils can use and display their thinking skills on an equal basis, along with everyone else, so that their consequent written work is an obvious mismatch, Is it also the fact that the demanding essays they always have the option of writing, rather than the short answer comprehension questions, we used to set, now throw these learning difficulties up.?"

It is more evidence that working in this way is more effective than filling exercise books with information that did not really go through the mind, let alone the soul." With other lessons I have to look back at what I have written to remember, with these classes it becomes a memory, a part of your life." Joe, a very able year eleven.(see chapter on writing and assessment in **Making RE Make Sense**)

### **Lesson recipe for Descartes' meditations**

This lesson has no set or multi sensory dimension because it is about ideas. But a display of fabric with a plant or something nice to look at would be good. A sharp citrusy scent in the room to stimulate thinking would be pleasant.

If you wish to build in a fun multi sensory element you could have containers of food and objects for pupils to feel and taste while blind folded .This is not essential to the lesson.

#### **This is what you need**

- Text of the meditations extract
- Music to come into, Some thing dramatic would be appropriate for example "Fingles' Cave" by Mendelsohn
- Something very calming for background during the lesson water or nature sounds very faint.

### **Exercise books pens**

**On the board write "what do you know beyond a shadow of a doubt?"**

**Any words of vocabulary that will need explaining before pupils read the Descartes**

For the activity

**Some containers with objects in that pupils can feel to guess what they are**

One could contain

A square of soap, a square of cheese, a square of chocolate, a square of blu tak, a piece of candle., a piece of eraser

Another could contain

A piece of scouring pad, a piece of loofah, a piece of emery board, a piece of sandpaper

Other containers could hold

Tinned kidney beans, tinned butter beans, tinned green beans, mushy peas, baked beans

**Some things to taste while blind folded (check volunteers are not allergic) soft drinks would be good.**

These things can be set up under cloths

**Blind folds**

**plastic gloves**

**This is what you do**

Come in settle and fade the music

1. Introduce the lesson: Today we are going to do some philosophy which is normally tackled by students at university - do you think you are up to it? It is very hard - very hard indeed  
Reveal the question – what do you know beyond a shadow of a doubt.

Set the question to be written in the middle of a page each pupil making a thought shower round it. Pupils to work in silence to a track of music "Fingle's cave" once more, perhaps. When they are happy with their list they should choose one thing only, the thing they are most sure of, and put it on a piece of paper, folded in two, so no one can see it and place it in the middle of the circle.

Turn to your partner and tell them what it is that you can prove beyond a shadow of a doubt. The partner should try to challenge this belief

Swap over

Come back to the circle

2. What can you prove beyond a shadow of a doubt – here are some typical examples

**There is a clock on the wall**

**That I am a boy**

**That my name is Sam**

**That I live in Bognor**

**There is a door over there.**

**Jenny is wearing a black sweater**

Let's test this out

How do you know that you are seeing what you think you are?

**Because everyone else is**

**How do you know that they are seeing exactly the same thing that you are**

What they are seeing will be different just because they are sitting in a different place in the room.

How do we know that each person sees colour in exactly the same way - we only know it is roughly the same.

How do you know that this is not a dream?

How do you know that your senses are not deceiving you right now?

Has anyone ever seen or heard something and then realised that they were mistaken ?

Has anyone ever touched something and been mistaken ?

3. Would anyone like to come up and put on these gloves and this blindfold and touch what is in this box and tell me what it is ?

Do the same with the containers of food and the drinks.

**Activity : Invite pupils to come up and put on some thin plastic gloves and feel objects in a box and try to guess what they are.**

**Volunteer to come up blindfolded and taste some drinks from a row of plastic cups under a cloth and guess what they are .**

4. What is the point of all this?

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century a French philosopher asked himself the same question that we have today but for him, it was a very daring question to ask because of course the answer was obvious - that God exists for a start!

He decided to find out what he could know for certain by deciding to doubt everything and to find out what was left.

I think it would be good to read what he found out in his own words exactly as he wrote them in ...

**5. Put up the extract from Descartes meditations**

Read it together as a class, the italicised words may need explaining beforehand so that everyone can understand. If it is read aloud slowly and carefully so that everyone, including non readers, will be able to follow.

Invite pupils to explain it back to you in their own words,

Invite pupils to question it .

Invite pupils to select a paper from the pile in the middle can you prove it ? What would Descartes say about it.?

**Debrief/plenary**

Use the cloze passage on the projector as a plenary to reinforce and test understanding

**Add a true false game**

Read the study booklet that follows which summarises both Descartes and Bertrand Russell's teaching on knowledge.

## Study booklet on Rene Descartes and Bertrand Russell –What can we know beyond a shadow of a doubt?

Rene Descartes, the father of modern philosophy, was born in France in 1596. He was educated at a Catholic, Jesuit college. He wanted to work out a way of knowing based on reason and mathematics, rather than faith and belief.

This was dangerous ground in a time when to question the existence of God or the ways of the Church could lead to torture and death.

The church taught that the universe was made of ten *concentric* glass- like circles which moved in perfect *harmony* to *celestial* music that only angels could hear. The stars and planets were *embedded* in the circles like jewels in a crown and that is why they moved in the heavens. They moved because of the love of God.

The earth was at the centre of the universe because it was the most important part of God's creation. Gravity was not yet understood, people believed things fell to earth because they were gross and sinful. The heavens were the *abode* of God heaven was perfect and so nothing moved in them.

All this began to change when **Nicolai Copernicus** a Polish man born in 1473 discovered that the sun and not the earth was the centre of the universe. He was fortunate enough to die before his ideas became public. A copy of his freshly printed book was placed in his dying hands .Written in Latin it could easily be understood by **Galilei Galileo** an Italian who, fascinated by some lenses he bought from some spectacle makers, put them together in a tube to make the magnification greater.

The merchants in Venice where he lived were delighted to hear that their ships were on the way to port long before they could be seen with the naked eye. Then trouble started; Galileo turned his new "seeing tube" a telescope on the heavens. He discovered that comets moved in the heavens where nothing was supposed to change and that the sun was the centre of the universe, not the earth.

He thought he could convince the church leaders by simply giving them the telescope to see for themselves. They looked, saw and declared that what they had seen was the work of the devil. The church threatened to put out Galileos' eyes so that he could no longer look through the telescope that he had invented. He spent his last years under house arrest, forbidden to write.

In 1642, the year of Galileos' death, **Isaac Newton** was born in England. England had broken away from the Catholic Church. Newton grew up in a world which allowed freedom of thought. His ideas smashed right through the crystal spheres to show that the planets circled the sun because of gravity and they moved because of forces not because of the love of God.

Descartes was not so fortunate. He died when Newton was only two years old and did some of his most important work while Galileo was imprisoned and silenced by the Church.

Descartes was a philosopher, mathematician and scientist. He, like so many men of his age (why not women?) wanted to know things. Remember, he is regarded as the father of modern philosophy because he began the process of thinking for himself without the limitations of the church.

His problem was that he wanted to find out what it is that we can know beyond any possibility of doubt. In order to do this he decided that he would have to doubt the existence of absolutely everything.

**He wrote four meditations in Latin in 1637. Why do you think he wrote in Latin rather than French ? In the first, meditation , he describes how he began to explore what we really, really know beyond any shadow of a doubt. In the second he tells us what he *concludes*.**

**Can you see why it was dangerous ? What was the terrible, never to be asked, question that he would need to ask if he was going to doubt the existence of absolutely *everything* ?**

He asked himself

" How can I know anything?" He answered, "I know because my senses tell me. There is no other way that I can know any thing. I also know that sometimes my senses deceive me so are they reliable sources of knowledge?"

Ask yourselves, have you ever been deceived by your sight taste touch or hearing ?

Descartes asked himself how he could ever know whether his senses were telling him what was really happening or not

He asked himself "How can I know whether, while I am sitting here thinking about these things that I am in fact not dreaming." He wondered how he could be certain that all of life was not a dream.

What he concluded was that he alone could be certain of his existence because he was thinking

" I am thinking therefore I am existing *cogito ergo sum*"

**The extract below is in Descartes own words. I have set it out point by point so that it is easier for you to follow. Make sure you understand each sentence and you will see how he builds his argument. Then, see if you can criticise it!**

**Extracts from the first and second meditation in the penguin classics edition of "The Discourse On Method And Other Writings. Translated from the Latin by F E Sutcliffe**

" Everything I have accepted up to now as being absolutely true and assured, I have learned from, or through, the senses.

But I have sometimes found that these senses played me false, and it is *prudent* never to trust entirely those who have once *deceived* us.

But, although the senses sometimes deceive us, concerning things which are barely *perceptible* or at great distance, there are perhaps other things about which one cannot *reasonably* doubt, although we know them through the medium of the senses, - for example that I am sitting here by the fire in my dressing gown, with this paper in my hand.

And how could I deny that these hands and this body belong to me unless I were to *assimilate* myself into those insane persons who constantly assert they are kings.

However, I must consider that I am a man and in the habit of sleeping. How many times have I dreamt at night that I am sitting in this chair by the fire?

I see so clearly that there are no means by which one can *distinguish* clearly between being awake and being asleep that I am quite astonished by it and my astonishment is such that it is almost capable of persuading me that I am asleep now.

Is there not a God, or some other power, who puts these thoughts into my mind? Perhaps I am capable of producing them for myself.

I had persuaded myself that there was nothing at all in the world: no sky no earth, no minds or bodies; was I not also persuaded that I did not exist ?

No Indeed. I existed without doubt by the mere fact that I thought at all. There is therefore no doubt that I exist .

After having thought carefully about it, and having scrupulously examined everything that *cogito ergo sum*, I am thinking, therefore I exist. The proposition I am , I exist, is necessarily true."

Descartes philosophical method is the foundation of *epistemology* - the theory of knowledge, how we know things and decide whether they are true or not. Below is an extract from Bertrand Russell's "Problems Of Philosophy" written in 1912, where he continue to develop Descartes' ideas. It would be very good indeed for you to quote from these passages in your essays.

**"The Problems of Philosophy"  
Bertrand Russell 1912**

Is there any knowledge in the world which is so certain that no reasonable man could doubt it? The question which at first sight might not seem so difficult, is really one of the most difficult that can be asked. When we have realised the *obstacles* in the way of a straightforward and *confident* answer, we shall be well launched on the study of *philosophy* - for philosophy is merely the attempt to answer such *ultimate* questions, not carelessly and *dogmatically*, as we do in ordinary life and even in the sciences, but *critically*, after exploring all that makes such questions puzzling, and after reading all the *vagueness* and confusion that underlie our ordinary ideas

In daily life, we assume as certain many things which, on closer *scrutiny*, are found to be so full of *apparent contradictions* that only a great amount of thought enables us to know what it is that we really may *believe*. In the search for certainty, it is natural to begin with our present experiences, and in some sense, no doubt *knowledge* is to be derived from them. But any statement as to what it is that our *immediate experiences* make us know is very likely to be wrong.

It seems to me that I am now sitting in a chair, at a table of a certain shape, on which I see sheets of paper with writing or print. By turning my head I see out of the window buildings and clouds and the sun. I *believe* the sun is about ninety three million miles from the earth; that it is a hot globe many times bigger than the earth; that owing to the earth's rotation, it rises every morning and will continue to do so for an *indefinite* time in the future. I believe that, if any other normal person comes into my room, he will see the same chairs tables and books and papers that I see, and the table which I see is the same as the table which is pressing against my arm. All this seems so *evident* as to be hardly worth stating, except in answer to a man who *doubts* whether I know anything. Yet all this may be *reasonably* doubted, and all of it requires much careful discussion before we can be sure that we have stated it in a form that is *wholly true*

## **Cloze passage /writing frame and research on Descartes and Russell**

Bertrand *Russell* was influenced by the great French philosopher Rene *Descartes*, who was born in the year 1596 He is thought to be the founder of modern *philosophy* because he was the first person to ask questions without worrying about what the *Church* might think.

At this time the church taught that *God* made the world .It was made of ten glass *spheres* which *revolved* because of the *love* of God. The earth was the centre of the universe because it was the most important part of God's *creation* Nothing moved in the spheres because it was heaven where God lived. *Copernicus* and *Galileo* discovered *comets* moving in heaven and that the *sun* was the centre of the *universe* not the earth .

Descartes wanted to find out what a person could know beyond a *shadow* of a doubt. To do this he began by doubting *everything*. He said that the way we know things is through our *senses*. Our senses sometimes *deceive* us .so how could we know when they were telling us the *truth*? He asked how he could know whether he was *dreaming* or awake. Was all of life a dream? In the end he said that because he was *thinking* he knew that he existed. He said *Cogito ergo sum* "I am thinking therefore I am" This was the one thing of which he could be completely *certain*.

**Look up Descartes on the internet** .Find out what country he escaped to avoid persecution (the inquisition) by the church. Who befriended him there? Why did she protect him? and how did he end his life? (Up to level six)

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Bertrand Russell writing in 1912 in “The problems of Philosophy asked**

Is there any *knowledge* in the world which is so *certain* that no *rational* person could *doubt* it ? Our task in *philosophy* is to ask *questions* like this as carefully and critically as we can because philosophy is the attempt to answer *ultimate* questions, such as, how can we know some thing beyond a *shadow* of a *doubt*. What do we mean by *truth*? What things can we reasonably *believe*?

In daily life we *assume* many things which when we look more closely have got so many *contradictions* in them that only after a great deal of *thought* can we know what we can *reasonably believe* to be absolutely *true*. In our search for *certainty*, it is natural to begin with what is *happening* to us right *now* but any statement about what we can know absolutely from this is very likely to be *wr*

**Levelled essay**

- 1.What was the problem Descartes was faced with and why was he frightened by the reaction of the church at the time ?(level three;facts. Level four: why and because .Level five :the affect of belief on a person family or community.Level six: variety of belief within a tradition. )5 marks
- 2.What was the solution Descartes arrived at in the meditations in his discourse on knowledge in 1641 ? (Level three to six) 5 marks
- 3.What did Bertrand Russell contribute to epistemology, the theory of knowledge in his book “The problems of Philosophy” in 1912?
- 4What questions and criticisms can you offer of their thinking ( Level seven critical analysis) 5 marks

**How do we know what is real? Part two**

## **The Disappearing Table: Reality is an Illusion ( suitable for year nine or bright year seven pupils. Useful for science and religion units or Eastern tradition at GCSE and A level)**

This is a concept building activity. Its main purpose is to enable students to understand the concept of infinity without which most religions cannot make sense.

What it also does is provide a conceptual basis for the exploration of religion and science. This centres around the relationship of religion and philosophy to the new physics. It has moved a long way beyond religion and evolution.

For anyone interested in this area "The Tao of Physics" by Fritjof Capra is essential reading. If you can get hold of it, Arthur Koestler's "The roots of coincidence is a fascinating, readable account of scientific explanations for what many regard as the paranormal.

An exploration of science and religion makes the concept of Brahman, Atman, the idea of an afterlife and spiritual healing or miracle intellectually tenable.

### **When to teach it**

Because it is a concept builder ,it can be used as a stepping stone to understanding wherever you need it. It could go into a unit on philosophy or a unit on belief. It could be part of a section on symbols. It would be a great help to students in thinking about the existence and nature of God, how could something be a spirit ? How could something be infinite ? It helps students understand issues involved in discussing creation and the origin of the universe. It helps them consider arguments about the existence of the soul and after life. I use it as part of a unit on science and religion in year nine. It builds on work pupils have done in year seven on symbols and belief. It prepares students to consider the world view of Eastern Religions . **(See teaching Hinduism and Buddhism SFE)**

Hinduism teaches some amazing concepts that can be very difficult for a westerner

- Reality is an illusion
- Nothing is created or destroyed, it only changes
- All things are one

During the course of the lesson students discover that an ordinary object such as a school table is not at all what it seems. First of all it appears to be

**A table** : Pupils discover that it is only a table because of its context – change that and you begin to wonder if it is a table ?

**Solid**: Students discover that the table, just like any other matter, is actually made of atoms which are mostly space.

**Still**: Students discover that because of the nature of an atom the particles of which the table is made are whirling at such speed it only appears to be still

**Finite**: Students discover that the table has in a sense no beginning and no end. It merely changes from one form to another – just like everything else in the universe and possibly the universe itself.

**Energy** : Students discover that although the table appears to be solid and still it actually consists of energy that electrons , the energy that electrons, the parts of an atom are made of

**Conclusion**: The universe begins to look more like a great thought than a great machine

### **What ultimately is the difference between mind and matter?**

Where does this leave our thinking about the existence and nature of God and an immortal soul?

Religion and Science

## Making a table disappear

This is a concept builder .It can be used as a stepping stone to understanding Wherever you need it It could go into a unit on philosophy ,or a unit on belief .It could be part of a section on symbols. It would be of great help to pupils in thinking about the existence and nature of God. How could something be a spirit? How could something be infinite? It helps pupils understand issues involved in discussing creation and the origin of the universe. It helps them consider arguments about the existence of a soul and an after life. I use it as part of a unit on science and religion in year nine. It builds on work that pupils have done in year seven on symbols and belief.(See introduction) and prepares pupils to consider the world view of the Eastern religions . Hinduism teaches some amazing concepts that can at first be very difficult for a Westerner.

- **Reality is an illusion**
- **Nothing is created or destroyed it only changes**
- **All things are one**

During the course of the lesson pupils discover that an ordinary object such as school desk is not at all what it seems. It appears to be first of all

- **A table.** Pupils discover that it is only a table because of its context. - change that and you begin to wonder if it *is* a table.
- **Solid** Pupils discover that the table, just like all other matter, is actually made of atoms which are mostly space
- **Still** Pupils discover that because of the nature of an atom the particles of which the table is made are whirling at tremendous speed. It only *appears* to be still
- **Finite.** Pupils discover that the table has in a sense no beginning and no ending. It merely changes from one form to another - just like everything else in the universe. and possibly the universe itself.
- **Energy** Pupils discover that although the table *appears* to be solid and still it actually consists of energy, the energy that electrons, the parts of an atom are made of.

**Conclusion: The universe begins to look more like a great thought than a great machine**

**What ultimately is the difference between mind and matter?**

**Where does this leave us in our thinking about the existence and nature of god and an immortal soul?**

I first became interested in this area of thinking when teaching pupils who were interested in Religion and also studying physics. They introduced me to Fritjof Capra's book "The Tao of Physics". Arthur Koestler's "The Roots of coincidence" is also interesting and readable. You will find his parable of Eddington's desk helpful. I became so interested in this area of thought that I introduced these ideas which are known as the new physics to my students as part of their A level course. I thought it was a pity that only a very few pupils would ever get to play with these ideas and so I worked the ideas into a fun and interesting lesson for younger pupils. It certainly doesn't appeal to everyone because it is so abstract but once pupils have grasped the concepts it will pay dividends in so many areas of your discussions and thinking together.

If you doubt whether they will be able to understand remember that

- These kinds of ideas are bread and butter to them in science fiction films and TV
- It takes ideas that they will have learned in science, the difference here is that we invite them to *reflect* on the implications of the scientific information.
- If you teach it initially without using literacy and in an active participatory way children of all abilities will be able to follow the ideas.

## **Lesson Recipe for teaching the case of the disappearing table**

### **What you will need.**

- Chairs in a circle
- A table in the centre of the circle
- Five pieces of paper
- A picture of an atom (optional)
- A picture of the energy from an electron (optional)

### **Music**

Not essential to this lesson but it is always good for pupils to come into music to set the mood and the atmosphere. The Star Wars theme might be a fun choice or something from the planet suite by Holst. Hawkwind's "silver Machine" would be apt as you will be asking what part of a machine is a machine. Deep Purple's smoke on the water would also be fitting and fun. They wrote this after watching a recording studio burn down – Nothing is created or destroyed it only changes!

Use your favourite relaxation music if you want to get everyone calm and focussed. You could always try both, having the class enter to something dramatic, after all something rather exciting is going to happen today and then settle everyone to something very quiet so that they are focussed and ready to begin.

### **What you do.**

I always prepare pupils the week before by telling them that I would like to make the table disappear next week. It is a very hard lesson, usually taught for A level, they will have to listen very hard, do they think they would like to have a go?

On the board is written

- **Reality is an illusion**
- **Nothing is created or destroyed it only changes**
- **All things are one**

I ask the pupils to look at them and work out what they mean. Then ask where they come from. Answer, Hindu teaching about three thousand years old. This teaching is saying that What we see around us, the material world, is not real because it is not permanent, everything comes into existence for a while and then it passes.

What a wise human should do therefore is to concentrate on things that are permanent and therefore important and helpful, that is looking after the inside bits, the soul. This lasts, Hindus believe, for ever, passing from one body to another.

### **All things are one ? Hindus believe that everything is bound together by this**

permanent, unchanging life force, which they call the Atman or Brahman.

What these three points also are, though, is a summary of the very latest discoveries of science. What people like Albert Einstein, who you will have heard of, and other great physicists of this century like Niels Bohr, Werner Heisenberg and Fritjof Capra have discovered, is that in a way, reality *is* an illusion. Nothing really is created or destroyed and in a sense everything in the universe is one.

Today, we can discover this too, together.

***The main thing that everyone will need to help them with this lesson is their imagination.***

1. Let's look at the first one, reality is an illusion.

To test this out we need to start very simply, with this table.

What is it ?

A table!

How do you know?

Because we recognize it

What makes something a table?

The way we use it

Suppose we were to fill the sides in would it still be a table?

Yes.

Suppose we were to turn it upside down, is it still a table

No, it's a box.

Suppose you came into the classroom today and found all the desks piled up carefully on top of on another with books and plants in the spaces, what would they have become?

A bookcase.

So the first thing we have to ask is what makes an object an object. Think of a car or a motorbike Which bit is the car or bike? is it the wheel or the tyres or the spokes or the tiny nuts and bolts holding bits together ?

What about the pieces of art we see from time to time where all the bits of a machine are put together to form a human shape or something like that ?

***The first thing we have discovered in testing out reality is an illusion is that objects are often not just that.***

2.What colour is the table?

Brown

**Activity:What colour is a table ?**

Pick a child to come out and point to the brown

There are so many shades that there isn't one thing that is brown in itself

What if what we see is actually slightly different ? How do we know that we are all seeing exactly the same thing when we see brown?

Has anybody ever thought they saw or heard something and it turned out to be wrong.?

***The second thing we have discovered is that our senses sometimes deceive us so how can we be sure that we are not being deceived now ?***

**Imagine** if I took a piece of the table top and magnified it and put in on the overhead projector. Would you recognise it ?

**Imagine** if I took that same piece and magnified that piece even more and put it on the projector would you recognise that it was the thing you were just looking at?

**Imagine** that I magnified it even more , more that we can actually magnify things, so that you were looking at the spaces between the particles it is made of it would be as though the table disappeared.

***The third thing we have discovered is that the size of an object and the size of us is important in helping us understand the real world. Einstein called this the theory of relativity. Nothing is anywhere or any size in itself it is only by comparing it with something else that it makes any sense. Let's explore this idea some more using our table.***

**3. Imagine** that you are coming to school .It is very wet and windy as you approach the school you notice that there is a huge canopy over the school and the playground .you are really pleased that you can wait in the playground without getting wet,. you are rather surprised that it has appeared overnight, a quick bit of building. It is only when you look up and spot a huge piece of chewing gum on it that you begin to realise that it is in fact a giant school table!

**Imagine** if you came into the classroom today and all the desks had become really, really tiny .Would you notice them if they were not much bigger than specks on the floor.

So the size of something in relation to us is very important to help us make sense of an object.

4. Now we really need to work on making the table disappear in a different sense one that shows us how in a way, reality is an illusion.

What is the table made of ?

Wood, metal, paint glue,

What are they made of ?

Atoms. What is an atom made of

Nucleus and electrons.

Right, everyone knows this but let's think about what it means for reality and what we are looking at when we look at something like this table.

#### **4. Activity: Making an atom in the classroom**

Let's make an atom in the classroom.

**screw up** the first piece of paper and place it on the table

This is about the middle of the room. Our atom is going to be the size of this room so I will put the nucleus here. Now I need to make some electrons.

**screw up** the second piece and give it to a pupil in the corner of the room. **Do the same with the next three pieces of paper.**

If we had one single atom and we blew it up in size to fit this room this is what it would be like hold up your pieces of paper.

### **Look carefully and think about what we are seeing**

Imagine there is nothing else in this room except the atom

What does the room mostly consist of ?

Space! Nothing just empty space! So what does the table consist of mostly?

Empty space.

5. Our pieces of paper are rather big so to get a more accurate picture I want you to use your imaginations again. If this nucleus was this size the particles which you are holding to represent the electrons would actually be on the edges of the field or in nearby streets, Just picture it - how much space there is in an atom and therefore in everything solid that we see.

Everything only *appears* to be solid. but why?

Because the electrons are whirling at such speed and we are so far away that everything appears to be solid. It's like looking at a tree ,close up you can see the spaces between every leaf from a distance the tree appears solid.

## 6. Activity: How small is an atom?

Exactly how small is an atom? Bend your thumb, now take the finger nail of your other thumb and run it in a straight line from the first joint to the tip of the nail. You have just run your nail along two hundred and fifty billion atoms. Let's do it again thinking about how small they are.

Why can't we pass objects through each other?

Because the electrons are whirling so fast, held together by gravity, that one hand cannot pass through another hand.

8. Now let us make the table disappear and in fact everything else Ready?

### eyes closed

**Activity: Visualisation ;making the table disappear**

- Now imagine yourself here sitting on your chair and gradually getting smaller and smaller
- Imagine that you are a few centimetres high and you are sitting about the size of a toffee in the centre of your chair
- Now imagine that suddenly you shrank so that you are smaller than an electron
- Imagine what would happen next
- Imagine what you would see on your journey.
- When you are ready open your eyes and come back into the classroom

### Debriefing the activity on making the table disappear

- This is very difficult work so please don't be afraid of making a mistake. Tell me what you thought would happen when you became so tiny and what did you see?
- you passed through the chair, the floor, the earth and on through the whole universe
- what you saw was nothing just the occasional floating speck
- Everything not only the table disappeared just because you changed your size.

One more question

- What is an electron made of?, surely that is solid? Actually electrons are tiny pulses of energy so ultimately everything solid in the universe is actually energy.
- What about our thoughts, feelings, dreams. What are they made of?

Ultimately said one scientist

**"The universe begins to look more like a great thought than a great machine." Sir James Jeans**

### which reminds me of this saying

**"All we are is the result of what we have thought "**

**Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha**

### Plenary/debrief

Look at our three teachings on the board, Can you see how, in a sense, reality is an illusion? That, in a sense, everything *is* one. and finally, if I was to really make the table disappear what would I do to it?

Burn it ?  
what would be left ?

### **Ash and heat**

**Nothing is ever created or destroyed it only changes.**

## **Vocabulary /flash cards on the disappearing table**

### **Matter**

Everything in the universe that appears to be solid

### **Energy**

Everything in the world that appears not be solid, what atoms mostly consist of

### **Atom**

Once thought to be the smallest ingredient of matter. Now that atoms have been split electrons have been found to be smaller.

### **Electron**

Small component of an atom. several buzz round the nucleus of an atom at such speed that matter appears to be solid.

### **All things are one**

The Hindu belief ,now confirmed by quantum Physics, that essentially everything in the universe is composed of the same thing.

### **Nothing is created or destroyed**

.The Hindu belief now, confirmed by quantum physics, that all the matter and energy in the Universe was created at the Big Bang. Creation and destruction is merely the process by which one thing eg a pencil changes from one form eg a tree to something else , eg ash

### **Reality is an illusion**

The Hindu belief, now confirmed by quantum physics, that in a sense reality is an illusion because it only *appears* to be solid, still and separate

### **Einstein**

Modern physicist whose discoveries led to modern quantum physics

## Cloze procedure /writing frame on “The Disappearing Table “

What is a table ? we only recognise a table as a *table* because of the use we put it to. If we were to pile our school desks up along the back wall of the classroom they would look like a *bookcase*. If we turned them upside down and filled in the sides we might think they were *boxes*.

What part of the table is the *table* ? is it the top?, the legs ?, the glue?, the screws ?

What colour is the table what part of the *colour* is the colour we are describing and how do we know that when we look at a colour that we are all seeing the *same thing* ?

What is a table made of ? What is the *smallest* part of a table ?.A table is made of *atoms* like *everything* else we can see.

### Describe an atom, naming the parts of an atom and giving an impression of its size and the amount of space inside it (level four facts to level seven critical analysis)

.....  
.....  
.....

If we made the tables really *tiny* we would not notice them and if we made them really *large* we might not *recognise* them. We can only recognise objects because they are the size they are and we are the size we are .Einstein called this the *Theory of relativity* ,Nothing is anywhere or anything in itself

### Explain what is meant by this in your own words, giving examples, (level four to level seven)

.....  
.....  
.....

In a sense the table disappeared because once we had recognised that it was mostly *space* and *energy*, like the whole *universe* ,it was in a sense not really *there* .We imagined ourselves shrinking smaller and smaller until we became smaller than an electron then what did we imagine happened ?

.....  
.....

Finally, we imagined ourselves magnifying the table top so much that when we put the picture on the screen there was nothing there this was because

.....

the table had disappeared

Sir James Jeans said “the world begins to look more like a great thought than a great machine” what did he mean and do you agree ?.How does what we have learned about matter and energy affect our understanding of the possibility of an eternal soul

### Levelled essay on “The Disappearing Table”

1.Describe what we realised about the table as we thought about what it was made of Level three; facts level four ;why and because . 5 marks

2.Describe the implications of the fact that everything is made of atoms for our understanding of what is real. Level five; the effects of belief on a person ,family or community . Level six. different beliefs within a tradition. 5 marks

3Discuss the implications of this for our understanding of religion .How do Religion and science meet in the following sayings

Reality is an illusion

All things are one

Nothing is created or destroyed it only changes.

Level seven; critical analysis. Level eight. Development through history.Comparison between traditions. 10 marks

## **Section 5: The origin of the Universe**

### **The Pulsating Universe –The Big Bang , accident or design (This lesson is suitable for year nine, GCSE and A level)**

#### **Teaching about the Big Bang**

This is a concept builder. It builds on the work done in the case of the disappearing table where students consider the nature of matter and energy and reality. Pupils have looked whether anything is created or destroyed and now they look at this in relation to the entire universe. It can, of course, stand alone as a lesson. It does not need to follow the disappearing table.

It is an excellent basis for going on to consider whether God created the universe – was it accident or design?

What follows is the text of the study booklet I made for my pupils to use to do their homework and for revision. Reading it through will give you the subject knowledge you need to teach this topic. You can print it off for your own pupils, as it is, or adapted.( On this occasion I have left the tasks as part of that text rather than put them at the end of the lesson recipe). If they have already had the experiential lesson they will understand and engage with it. Pupils who find reading difficult will be able to listen as it you read it through in class together. They will be able to complete the cloze procedure to whatever level they are capable of working.

I use this with **year nine** as part of their science and religion topic and with **year eleven** as part of their work on the existence of God. The lesson recipe follows the study booklet. I use it with the sixth form as part of their AS module on science and religion

## **Study booklet material on the Big Bang**

### **Where did the universe come from ?**

How did the Universe begin? As a matter of fact we do not know !

What follows is a theory. This is what some scientists believe happened .

Why do they believe it ? because they can actually see it happening !!!

When we look out into space we look back in time. Today, our telescopes are so powerful that we can see 90% of the way back to the beginning of the universe. What used to be a theory or an idea about how the world began in the sixties is now being confirmed as we can see further and further back towards the beginning of time.

## **How Did The Universe Begin?**

The question for us in RE is .....

- **Was that beginning an act of creation ?**
- Did something *make* it happen ?
- Is there some force, or power, or mind that *caused* the big bang that set the whole universe into being?
- Did it do so for a very good reason?
- Does it know the end of the story ?

- Does it know that in the end, despite all the wars and famines and suffering that we cause each other because, unlike the animals, we have free will, that in the end there will be a happy ending ?
- Does it know that after many cycles of creation that we will have learned that we are fundamentally *spiritual* beings and learned to control the impulses and desires of our *material* bodies.
- Does it know that in the end we will come to realise for ourselves that the kingdom of heaven is within us ?

## **Or did it just happen by chance ?**

### **In the beginning .....**

There was no matter, space or time, only a seething mass of energy, smaller than a pinhead, smaller than an atom. It exploded, expanding a hundred trillion, trillion times ..... to the size of a grapefruit!

In the first few seconds there was hydrogen and helium which combined to create stars. They did not shine for another half billion years.

***In every sip of water you take you swallow hydrogen atoms created at the time of the big bang.***

### **The Anthropic principle**

Our bodies are made of atoms created at the time of the Big Bang

We are carbon based life forms. If carbon had not formed at the moment of the big bang we could not have evolved.

Some scientists like **Reverend John Polkinghorne**, a leading physicist who, as a result of his studies became a Christian minister, says that the creation of carbon happened as a result of a complex chain of events that could not take place by accident. He believes it had to be planned, deliberate.

He looks at we human beings and asks

**"How come our minds are so perfectly formed to ask the questions we are asking today?"**

- **Where did we come from and what is our purpose ? No other creature in the universe - that we know of - asks these questions.**
- He and science writers like **John Gribbin** have developed what they call the **anthropic principle** from anthropos meaning man

**The Anthropic Principle is the recognition that**

**"The process of the evolution of the universe is shot through with signs of mind"**  
*Polkinghorne*

According to this theory evolution appears to have taken place with the purpose of creating intelligent life forms, capable of thinking, creating and making choices ,life forms that are capable of developing, changing and evolving. Life forms who have evolved from creatures who lived in caves to ones that have designed cathedrals, sky scrapers and space stations. Creatures whose tools have developed from a shaped flint to a computer - unlike any other creature we *know of* in the universe.

Now let us look at how the universe might have begun. In order to do this we need to understand

- What a star is
- What a galaxy is
- What a light year is

The sun is our nearest star. It is the centre of our solar (sun system) It consists of nine planets that do not shine so we cannot see them as clearly. Every star is a sun, but do any of them support life on any of the other planets orbiting them ?

Our solar system is part of our galaxy

- What is a galaxy?

A galaxy is a star city.

- How many galaxies are there in the universe ?

Ten for every person on the earth.

- How big is our galaxy? Let us get a sense of the size of our galaxy.

First the nearest star - our sun

It is 86,000 million miles away and the light from it takes *eight* minutes to reach us - that means that every time we see a picture of the sun, or look at it , ( not with the naked eye!)what we are seeing is *eight* minutes old.

- Now where is the nearest star to us after that ?

Put up two fists .If one is the earth and the other is the sun where would you place the nearest star ?

It would be in London.

How far is that?

To find out we need to measure the distance in light years

That is the distance light travels in a year

- **Light travels at 186,000 miles per second so in a year it travels nearly six billion miles!**
- **The nearest star to us is four light years away!**

### **Our Galaxy, the milky way**

- How many stars are there in our galaxy ?

There are two hundred and fifty thousand billion stars in our galaxy

The milky way is a hundred thousand light years long and twenty thousand light years thick .Our solar system is on its outer edge.

Our whole galaxy is spinning and moving away from the other galaxies at the speed of light. There are other galaxies quite near to us what we call our neighbourhood.

### **Remember, when we look out into space we look back in time.**

The two nearest ones are the large and small **Magellanic clouds**. They are 150,000 and 170,000 light years away. That means the pictures we receive from them when we look through our telescopes have taken 150, 000 years to reach us.

Imagine that you were looking through a radio telescope at the universe. Imagine that as you slowly turned in a circle you could see the galaxies at the furthest edge of our neighbourhood. You would be looking at the galaxies as they were at the time the dinosaurs were on earth.

Now ,imagine that someone on one in one of those galaxies is looking at *us* through *their* telescope. They are more powerful than ours, though! They can see creatures moving on the surface of our planet which they are able to study with great interest. The only problem is that light is taking so long to reach them that all they can see are the dinosaurs - the picture going out today will not reach them for another 150,000 years ! By the time they get to see you and me our planet might not even exist !

Now turn your telescope on a further object, **Andromeda**, the furthest object you can see with your naked eye. It is two and a quarter billion light years away, so when we look up at it we are seeing it as it was two and a quarter billion years ago.

*Is it even still there?*

- **The edge of the universe is fifty billion trillion miles away**
- **The furthest object we can see is twelve thousand million light years away.**

When we see star systems go supernova we are looking at events that happened millions of years in the past. That is why we can now see so far back that we can actually see baby galaxies beginning to form at the edge of the universe, with all the mature ones like ours in front. One day we may be able to watch the Big Bang itself!

**Where did the Universe come from and what will happen to it?**

The universe was once the size of a pinhead - but what was there before that? No one is really sure. Some scientists think there were atoms of gas continually being created and that this is still happening. The gas due to gravity in the atoms compressed itself together becoming more and more dense until the pressure was so great that it exploded into the Big Bang.

The matter from the explosion flew off in all directions, larger pieces drawing smaller pieces near to themselves until galaxies were formed. The galaxies are still flying away from each other with the force of that first great explosion - but what will happen to them ? will the universe just keep flying apart forever?

**There are several theories**

The first is that the galaxies will fly away from each other for ever

• **This is called the Theory of the Expanding Universe**

Each galaxy will finally be alone, unable to see any others through their telescopes. Eventually each galaxy will die as every star finally burns out one by one. All that will be left will be Gas again - and then what will happen ?

• **The Steady State Theory**

This theory says that while galaxies and stars are dying all the time, the universe constantly renews itself as new atoms of gas are being created which eventually form galaxies, so what is happening ?

• **The Big Crunch**

In the end the force of the explosion will become weaker than the gravity in the galaxies and pull everything back into a single lump again - and then what will happen ?

• **The Theory Of The Pulsating Universe**

Eventually, every star will burn out becoming a black hole leaving just gas, and then what will happen?

***How many times have we had this lesson before ?***

Nothing is created or destroyed it only changes - even the universe itself!

Have we explained where the universe came from ?

Who made the gas ?

**Sentence stems, cloze passage and writing frame.**

Completing the sentence stems and cloze passages will take you to **level four**. Completing the writing frame will take you to **level seven and eight**.

A star is .....

A solar system is .....

A Galaxy is .....

A light year is .....

The speed of light is .....

The universe is .....

When we look out in space we look back in .....

Our universe is 12 billion years old. One day it will cool and die. It is still *expanding* still flowing *outwards* from the force of the *Big Bang*

The energy signal from the first second of the universe can still be heard

It was picked up by the *Hubble* telescope., astronomers thought it was *pigeon droppings* but it was microwave radiation almost *undetectable* but every TV set in the world can pick it up.

In the beginning there was just *gas* . There was no *matter, stars* or

*time* just a seething mass of *energy* smaller than an atom. It exploded, expanding a trillion, trillion times to the size of a *grapefruit*.

In the first few seconds there was *hydrogen* and *helium* and *carbon* was formed.

Reverend John Polkinghorne says this is important because **(level five why,because )**

.....  
.....  
.....

Polkinghorne believes that the universe is shot through with signs of

mind. He thinks that it looks as though the universe was created specifically to support *intelligent life* . This is called the *Anthropic*

*Principle* it means .....

Our bodies are made of the atoms created then. In every sip of water you take you swallow *Hydrogen* atoms created at the time of the *Big Bang*

We live in the *Milky Way*, a *star city* containing *250 billion stars* . It is 100,000 light years long and 20,000 light years wide.

A light year is .....

We can see *90 %* of the way back to the big bang.

There are three theories about how the universe was created and what will happen to it. **(level four: facts.level five : why,because )**

The galaxies are all

.....  
.....  
.....

The steady state theory is

.....  
.....  
.....

The Big Crunch theory is

.....  
.....  
.....

The theory of the pulsating universe is

.....  
.....  
.....

Have we now explained how the universe came into being ? Give your arguments for and against using quotations to improve your work. Remember to use quotations to support your argument. This work can take you to level eight.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Word pool**

***atom outwards expanding Big Bang heard Hubble bodies gas grapefruit hydrogen with signs of mind intelligent life Anthropic principle Milky Way stars long wide light year 90% helium pigeon droppings radiation undetectable star city matter space time hydrogen carbon Big Bang billion***

**Here is some information in bullet point form which you can put on the screen or on paper to use with your pupils as a summary to draw the lesson together.**

- Our universe is 12 billion years old. One day it will cool and die
- Our universe is expanding, still flowing outwards from the force of the big Bang

- The energy signal from the first second of the universe can still be heard. It was picked up by the Hubble telescope . The same noise background could be heard from all directions. Astronomers thought it was pigeon droppings on the telescope! It was microwave radiation, almost undetectable, but every TV set in the world can detect it.
- How did it all begin? In the beginning there was no matter ,space or time, only a seething mass of energy, smaller than an atom. It exploded, expanding a hundred trillion, trillion times - to the size of a grapefruit!
- In the first few seconds there was hydrogen and helium – they didn't shine for another half billion years, yet they combined to create stars. In every sip of water you take, you swallow hydrogen atoms created at the time of the big bang. Our bodies are made of atoms created then.
- We live in the Milky Way, star city. Our galaxy contains 250billion stars. It is 50,000 light years across and 250,000 light years long.
- A light year is the distance light can travel in one year – 24 billion miles. If one fist is the sun and the other is the earth, the nearest star would be in London. Andromeda is two and a quarter billion miles away.
- The edge of the universe is fifty trillion miles. The furthest object we can see with a telescope is 12,000 million light years away. (one light year is nearly six billion miles)
- Whenever we look out into the universe we look back in time. It takes time for light to reach us from an object in order for us to be able to see it. Light travels at 186,000 miles per second.
- It takes light
- A second to reach us from the moon
- Eight minutes to reach us from the sun
- An hour and a half from saturn
- Two and a quarter million years from Andromeda
- Light from our neighbourhood galaxies left them 60 billion years ago – the time the dinosaurs died out! If they were looking at us now they would be seeing the earth before we evolved.
- With our telescopes we can now see 90% of the way back to the big Bang. When we look back as far as we can we see mature galaxies like ours in front and behind, baby ones still forming which they did in the first billion years or so, In a sense we can actually see the formation of the universe
- Perhaps one day we will be able to see back to the Big Bang itself

## **Lesson recipe for teaching the Big Bang**

### **What you will need**

- 4 Sets of fairy lights laid on the floor in swirls to represent galaxies
- Extension lead with four outlets
- Muslin to place over lights
- Photographs of the sun and galaxies on overhead
- Set of cards with sentences on placed under each chair from 1 - 30.
- Photographs of galaxies to lay over the set

- Music - Star Wars theme or 2001 space odyssey or Mars from the planet suite.
  - On board write sentence stems
  - A star is
  - A solar system is
  - A galaxy is
  - The universe is
1. A light year is

### **Creating the set**

Lay lights on floor

Cover with muslin

Scatter photographs over set.

Project OHT of the sun on ceiling or board

### **This is what you do**

1. Class come in to music .Sit in circle, fade music and introduce lesson
2. Ask what the picture is of

Explain that the sun is a star 86,000 million miles a way takes light 8 minutes to reach us

Explain that looking out into space means looking back in time.

Explain solar system

Explain galaxy

3. Now we going to get a sense of the size of a galaxy

To do this we need to be able to measure distance in space

It is so big, we need to use light years

Explain light year . Light travels 186,000 miles per second

in a year it travels nearly 6 billion miles.

### **Activity: How far away is the nearest star?**

Hold out two fists .One is the sun, one the earth

Where do class think the nearest star is ?

People suggest near their shoulders or the corner of the room, for example

In London! ( which is 60 miles from us , so choose you equivalent city !) or four light years away that is 24 billion miles

That is just one star !

### **There are 250 billion stars in our galaxy**

does that give you a sense of how vast our galaxy is ?

**4. Put up OHT of the galaxy.**(Make an overhead from the drawing in the study booklet)

its length is 100,000 light years.

### **Its width is width 20,000 light years**

We are on outer edge.

**5. Show OHT of our neighbourhood.** Make an overhead of the drawing in the study booklet)

Light left those galaxies at the time the dinosaurs died out only just reached us.

**Activity: Visualisation; looking at earth from the Magellanic cloud**

Close your eyes. Watch your breath noticing how it slows down and you become calm and relaxed. Push outside thoughts away

Imagine that you are standing on one of the nearby galaxies, it is called the Magellanic cloud, It is 150,000 light years away.

You are looking at our galaxy through a telescope.

You home in on the earth.

Your telescope is much more powerful than the ones on earth. You can see creatures moving around on the earth.

You focus the telescope to see the images clearly.

The images you are looking at left the earth 150,000 years ago . They have been travelling through space all that time.

The creatures you are looking at are the You are looking at the dinosaurs. Human beings have not even evolved yet !

When you are ready open your eyes and come back into the classroom

**6.Show picture of the Andromeda galaxy**

It is two and a quarter million light years away. The picture we are looking at shows what Andromeda was like two and a quarter million years ago. Perhaps it is not even there now.

7.How did the universe begin and end ?

**8.Describe the Big Bang theory.**

**9.Describe the other theories of creation**

- Continuous creation
- Steady State
- Big Crunch
- Pulsating Universe.

***So how many times have we had this lesson before ?***

**Debrief/ Plenary :**

Look at the overhead with the bullet point summary

Use the summary cards with facts to sum up. Number them when you print them off and give one to each pupil in the class. Read them in order round the circle.

Complete sentence stems on board.

**Next lesson:** Read the study booklet material through and set the tasks

***Summary cards for the theory of the pulsating universe***

θ A Solar System is when planets revolve around a star like our sun

θ Our Galaxy is a huge collection of stars

- θ There are two hundred thousand billion stars in our galaxy
- θ The Universe is everything
- θ Where did it come from?
- θ How big is it ?
- θ When will it end?
- θ What will happen then?
- θ The speed of light is 186,000 miles per second
- θ A light year is how far light travels in one year, that is six billion miles
- θ **\*If this was the earth and this was the sun\***  
the nearest star would be in London
- θ The nearest star to us is four light years away  
That is 24billion miles
- θ Our galaxy is 100,000 light years across and 20,000 light years thick.
- θ The nearest galaxy to us is the Magellanic cloud, it is 150,000 light years away.
- θ The furthest object we can see with our naked eye is the Andromeda galaxy. It is two and a quarter million miles away.
- θ Light from galaxies in our nearby neighbourhood left the galaxies 60 million years ago - the time the dinosaurs died out
- θ There are a hundred billion galaxies in the universe, ten galaxies for every person on earth
- θ Fifty billion trillion miles from the earth is the edge of the universe.
- θ The universe was once the size of a pinhead
- θ The universe is twelve billion years old

θ The universe was once the size of a pinhead. It exploded as pure energy. The energy converted into matter

θ It is still expanding .The big bang was so hot the left over heat is still there .It is just under three degrees zero. It has been picked up by the Hubble radio telescope.

θ We can still hear it and it can be heard on every TV set.

θ The furthest object we can see with a telescope is twelve thousand million light year away.

θ When we look back as far as we can, we have mature galaxies like ours in front and behind are baby ones still forming which they did in the first billion years.

θ So in a sense we can actually see the formation of the universe.

θ With our telescopes we can now see 90% of the way back to the big bang.

θ How likely is it that there is another planet on the universe with life like ours on it ?

θ What will happen to the Universe?

θ Where did the Universe come from?

## **Section 7:Life after Death**

### **Part One: The Two Pilgrims and the Secret Treasure (Suitable for year nine, GCSE and A level)**

**This section of the file deals with the following questions**

- Is there life after death?
- Is reincarnation possible?
- What is the mind?
- Can the mind exist without the body?
- What is a near death experience ?

I tackle this section right after ultimate questions (see introduction). It arises from the pupil's own desire to know if there is an afterlife, or not. In the previous lesson, which is how I begin year nine, Pupils are invited to write down five or six questions that they would most like to know the answer to. Almost every pupil includes the question about an afterlife.

After sharing their questions in the circle, everyone is invited to write, anonymously, about what they believe about the existence of God and the after life on a piece of paper which they place in a box in the middle of the room .

When everyone has finished we count up and put on the board the number of "yes", "no", "don't know" and read and discuss the answers. Will these numbers have altered by the end of the course ?

(Doing this exercise again in year eleven (see Lesson on ..) I find that the pupil's definition of God has matured, broadened and is less defined. It would be more accurate to say that they have a more positive attitude towards metaphysical issues, including the idea of God, very few dismiss the concept as nonsense)

- About half of every class believe there is a God and or an afterlife .
- I think that the issue about an afterlife is important because it is religion neutral .
- A person may consider that they have a spiritual nature that can continue to exist after the death of the body whether they have any religious beliefs or not.
- I think the issue is important to study, not only because it is fascinating and thought provoking, but because it is also important in helping pupils explore the effect of religion on people.
  
- It is important to help pupils consider the effect of this belief on their own view of the world.
- We consider how this belief affects morality. We look at having a moral outlook on life based on concern for the world rather than a reward in the next life,

After the exercise described above, I introduce the work we are going to do this year - a lot of what is in this book - explaining how we will explore the issues that they have raised in their ultimate questions including ideas about God and the after life and whether there is life on other planets.

## Sheet1

In this lesson the stimulus is two stories, quite brief but thought provoking. **The two pilgrims** may be a familiar story, devised by the philosopher John Hick. **The secret treasure** I made up myself. Creating a small set for the two pilgrims and acting out the secret treasure engages, intrigues and helps the pupils remember

**Lesson Recipe for teaching about life after death through the stories of the two pilgrims and the secret treasure**

This what you need

**CD Player**

**Music.** For pupils to come into, decide whether you want to be upbeat, with **Something** from the charts emphasising the party side of life, or serious and sad, such as the Theme from Titanic. Neutral and atmospheric might be Albinoni's adagio, dramatic would be "O fortuna" from the Carmina Burana by Carl Orff  
**Something** calming for background during the lesson  
**Two small figures** to represent the pilgrims in the story  
**Something** to represent the journey of life that they will take, twisted fabric laid out like a path would be effective  
**Obstacles** they encounter, a small piece of wood, a plant,  
**Something** to represent the celestial city , a candle perhaps, placed on an upturned box draped with fabric

A small attractive chest or box wrapped in wrapping paper, increase the drama by placing it inside a gift bag. Leave it in view of the pupils during the lesson to intrigue them

**A birthday card in an envelope. writing inside as indicated in the lesson.**

**This is what you do**

Pupils come into music ,settle in the circle, fade the music,

**Ask : What happens to us when we die ?**

If I were to arrive late for lesson one day and come rushing into the class room, apologising ,because some amazing news had come through on the radio at break and then I was to tell you that it had been scientifically proved, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that there was a life after death, how many of you would be pleased?

Most of the class put their hands up.

We discuss why, and we look at why some people are indifferent.

**1. Tell the story of The two pilgrims**

Which one do the class think is happiest ?

Why?

Ask the pupils to consider which one they are and why.

**2.Activity ;The special birthday present.**

Ask what happens when it is your birthday?

The purpose of the scene setting that follows is to engage pupils in the feelings of excitement and celebration. Not all pupils will celebrate birthdays. For some birthdays are not really acknowledged and may simply bring back painful memories of a time before an absent parent left. They may be a time when their special day is unacknowledged by an absent parent once more. They may be a painful reminder of a bereavement so sensitivity is required. But I think it is also an opportunity to give pupils ideas about how to make birthdays special for their own children. It does not require lots of money ,just lots of love and thinking about how to make a person feel very special and loved and appreciated. It is all part of my concern to encourage secular young people to create ritual, tradition, rites of passage and ceremony in their own lives. They may not belong to a religious tradition but there is no reason why they should miss out on the emotional benefits that celebrations within the traditions brings

Pupils will reply that on your birthday, you get presents .If you don't celebrate birthdays imagine that it is an occasion when you receive presents. In our family celebrations always take place at the weekend before a birthday ,if it falls on a school day ,so that it can be properly savoured and enjoyed.

The birthday person gets to choose to spend the day as they wish. Might be a sleep over, or a trip to the shops to spend birthday money. We will try to make the whole weekend special. The grown ups usually choose to take the family out for a meal, or make a special meal at home when everyone will make sure they are there.

Everyone is always there for present opening, presents are in the lounge set out with balloons, sparkly confetti streamers, happy birthday banners . There will be treats to eat for breakfast chosen by the birthday person.

If it is a special birthday they may receive a letter telling them how special they are and pointing out all the positive characteristics and strengths they have , How might that make the person feel?

Growing up is very hard and very painful, full of self doubt. How great to have a mirror held up reminding you how successful you are as a human being .

If you received a letter like this would you want to open it in front of anyone ? No, so it is slipped under the door for when you wake up.

#### **4.Activity: Visualisation; A special letter**

Close your eyes and watch the breath .

Notice your breathing slowing down and how relaxed you feel.

Push outside thoughts away just concentrating on your breath going in and out of your nose.

Think of a person you could send a letter like that to. A friend or a member of your family.

What kind of things would you say ?

What would you say to show them how much you admire, respect or appreciate them ?

What might be the effect of that letter ?

If you say you like things about someone maybe you get more of those things in return

How would it make you feel to have people show their appreciation of you .

When you are ready, open you eyes and come back into the classroom.

### **5. Activity : re enacting the story of The Secret Treasure**

Today we are going to imagine it is a very special birthday, It is your birthday .It is your eighteenth. I would like you to imagine that you are going to receive this very special present. (Hold out a sealed gift bag and birthday card.)

Imagine the day , you come down stairs, all excited and there on the breakfast table are your presents. You do a quick count - you know who is going to give you a present , don't you ? There is one extra .It has no label. It gets left to last .

Can we have a volunteer to come out and open the present ?

Card first

Pupil opens the card. It doesn't say who it is from. It says

“Inside the parcel is a special gift. No matter how hard you try you will not be able to open it “

The pupil reads it out and opens the parcel. Inside is a small decorative box, underneath it is a label. “This box will open by itself on the morning of your ninety sixth birthday.”

What do the class think is in it ?

Class discuss.

Continue the story

You put the box on a shelf and do not think very much about it, periodically you see it and wonder . How does it make you feel ? Is it a good feeling ? Your life goes on .

Finally it comes, It is the morning of your ninety sixth birthday. You get up and come downstairs .half way down you see it , there on the shelf, the lid is open and the inside of the box is glowing.

Let's open the box and see what is in it.

Pupil opens the box

It is empty!

### **Debrief /plenary**

What was the secret treasure ,what was the gift that the person had ?

It is rather like the effect of belief in an after life on a person. Perhaps it is just wish fulfilment, but like the pilgrim in our story it has a positive effect on the whole person's attitude to life.

A copy of the two stories follows so that they can be printed off for the pupils. As the lesson is largely reflective there is no specialist vocabulary or essay for this lesson

## **The Story of the two pilgrims**

Once upon a time there were two pilgrims. They took a long journey together. On this journey they had many experiences. Some were good and gave them much happiness, some were difficult and some were painful and unpleasant.

The first , believed that everything happened to him for a reason, whether it was good or bad, it was an opportunity to learn. He believed that at the end of the journey he would find the celestial, or heavenly city.

His companion took a different view, he believed that everything that happened to him happened by chance, it was all just an accident. He believed that the journey would one day come to an end, which would be that he simply ceased to exist.

### **The Secret Treasure**

Imagine that on your eighteenth birthday that you were to come downstairs to find your family gathered and all your presents set out on the table. As you look them over you notice that there was one you were not expecting . It has no label. Puzzled you leave this one until last.

Finally, you pick up the parcel and shake it .No noise and it is not very heavy or very large. You see there is a birthday card underneath it. You open this first and find there is no sender just a note saying that however hard you try you will not be able to open the gift that is inside the wrapping.

You remove the paper to find a small beautifully carved box .It is resting on a small card which falls to the floor as you remove the wrapping. You pick it up and find on it a message. It says "No matter how hard you try this box will not open until it does so of its own accord on the morning of your ninety sixth birthday."

What do you suppose is in it ?

### **Cloze procedure /Writing frame for the story for the two pilgrims and the secret treasure.**

Describe the story of the two pilgrims in your own words. **Level Four: facts.**

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This story is an allegory , that is a story where each part has a meaning what do you think it is about ? **Level five: why, because**

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How does the different beliefs of the two pilgrims affect their lives ? **Level six The effect of belief upon a person, family or community**

Re tell the story of the secret treasure in your own words **Level four : facts**

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What was the real gift inside the chest and what has this got to do with belief in the afterlife ? **Level five : Why, because**

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How does belief in an afterlife affect people in religious traditions. You could write up to **Level Eight** in this section

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**Life after Death, Part two: What is the mind ? Can the mind exist without the body?**

**The Mind/Body Problem: The Candle**

This lesson can follow the previous one but is particularly good after the work on science and religion. In many ways it wraps up all the work on ultimate questions .It posits a scientific hypothesis for the possibility of the soul existing independently of the brain ,The possibility of a scientific basis for spiritual healing, an explanation for mystical experiences being a view of the way the universe *really* is. Although what it also says is that the way the world really is depends on the observer – *there is no objective reality*.

It is an excellent preparation for the study of religious experience, miracles and verification.

The ideas are extremely hard and will only work with a well motivated class. It would be ideally be presented on power point or using an interactive white board, Pupils could have a copy of the text to highlight and annotate as the passages are discussed in class and in order to do homework after the lesson. If you do not have access to IT the lesson could be conducted from a paper copy.

## **Lesson Recipe for exploring the mind /body problem**

### **What you need**

Power point presentation of the quotations and commentary of the text used in this lesson

A paper copy of the text for pupils to read and or highlight and annotate during the lesson.

A candle

Matches

Candleholder

Create a multi sensory display which could contain any of the following  
photograph of a table, a galaxy

A CD , a floppy disc ,

Pictures of, or actual examples of a computer , a CD player, a television set, a radio, a ghost, a medium , a magician, an angel, heaven, reincarnation

### **What you do**

#### **1.Class come into a horseshoe round the projector and screen**

They will be intrigued by the pictures

2. Identify the photographs and objects with the class and see if they can guess what the subject of the lesson might be

3. Introduce the lesson which is to discuss the following which you can put up on an overhead or power point. You could also print it off as a study booklet for pupils to refer back to for written work

### **Study booklet**

**Is the brain an organ which secretes consciousness like the liver secretes bile and the stomach secretes acid ?.If this is case we are at an end when the body dies.**

Or

**Is the brain like a radio transmitter transmitting consciousness from elsewhere? in which case when the brain dies, the consciousness remains: We simply cannot communicate with it anymore because the brain, like radio or TV set, is turned off**

Another way of describing it is to compare a human being to a computer or CD player.

**Is the mind/soul like a floppy disc or CD, Capable of existing separately from the computer or CD player ?In which case it can be transferred to a different computer or CD player if the main machine is damaged. Or is the mind/ soul part of the hard drive, in which case we are at an end when the computer dies or is destroyed ?**

Is a spirit like a CD or floppy disc existing in the world alongside us but unable to communicate with us without a machine. Are there some people who can receive information from the disc without a machine ?

At the moment doctors and scientists are still divided on this . The possibility of an afterlife is both scientifically possible and not possible depending on what the doctors and scientists consider the nature of consciousness to be

What follows is an extract from a book called “Past Lives” published by headline in 1999 by Peter and Elizabeth Fenwick. They are both doctors interested in the nature of consciousness

They write about consciousness in terms of what we now know about the quantum world. They do not believe that consciousness need necessarily be confined to a brain within the skull. (see the disappearing table )

Here is their argument.

We start with the traditional scientific view which they wish to question. It would be helpful to read this paragraph on overhead or power point with the pupils. Be sure they understand what it means. Discussion and criticism can come later. Each quotation could be put on overhead or power point to enable the class to consider each one carefully.

**Point one:**

“The **scientific view** is simple. Our consciousness of the world is generated by brain function. Memory is located entirely within the brain. There is no mechanism that science knows for storing or accessing memory outside the body, or in the absence of a brain. When at death the brain dies , so do our memories and so does our consciousness of the world. There is nothing beyond this, and any step in this direction is un proven and speculative.”

**Before reading the next point:** It would be helpful to make sure the highlighted words are understood.

“**Galilean** science has helped us understand the brain, the way **neurons** fire, how they group together in pools, how features of the outside world are taken from the stream of neuronal firing which makes up the information entering the brain. Modern **neuro imaging** has shown that the brain deals with different functions in different areas. Hearing, vision, smell and sensation all take place in different areas of the brain. Even the **transcendental** feeling of being at one with God and the universe are being mapped onto the brain. Neuro imaging pictures taken while a person is under the influence of **hallucinogenic** drugs show that specific brain areas are activated. Even **God** appears to manifest in certain brain areas.”

**Point two:**

“Connections between experiences, such as seeing an angry face and neuronal firing abound in the brain, but nowhere is there any theory which suggests how you get from neuronal functioning to **conscious experience**”

This, they say is our problem. **Until we can understand consciousness and the way it interacts with brain function, we cannot even begin to approach the question of a soul and the possibility of reincarnation.**

**Commentary**

Now, this is where it gets interesting and we start to turn the way we normally look at the world on its head. ....

Remember how we learned that things are not what they seem, when we discovered that everything in the world only *appears* to be solid and still and that it is mostly empty space because it is made of atoms?

We then discovered that atoms are not solid, but consist of **energy** – it is almost as though ultimately there is no matter there at all - “the world begins to look more like great thought than a great machine “ Sir James Jeans

### **Our two authors continue**

“Galileo argued that **matter** was the **primary quality** of the universe and consciousness was secondary, but it is now clear that **consciousness** is primary and that *the material world only takes its form because it is the way it is structured in our consciousness*”

### **Commentary**

Do you follow what the authors are suggesting ?

In our lesson on the disappearing table, our table only *seemed* like a table to us because of the way we organise things in our minds. If we were to change our size, becoming very small, or extremely large, we cease to be able to see it as a table.

### **Point Three:**

“At the moment physicists are way in front of biologists in beginning to form a general theory of consciousness. In Quantum mechanics consciousness is seen as an integral property of the world. If it is a property of the world, then there is no reason why consciousness cannot exist *outside* the brain. This is getting very close to saying that some component of man exists *outside* of the body”

“If brain process could be seen to modify (have an effect or change in some way ) structures beyond the brain ( other parts of the body , things outside the body eg spiritual healing ?) or could themselves be modified by such structures, then there is the possibility of a soul outside the brain. There is also the possibility that the soul could be released by death.”

### **Commentary**

In our lesson on the **Big Bang** and the **pulsating universe**, we learned that the universe was once smaller than a pin head but contained everything that has come out of it. It has linked the very large and the very small in such a way that there is no longer any distinction between them.

Recently, our book tells us, a doctor, Stuart Hammeroff and a mathematician, **Roger Penrose**, have suggested that there are areas inside the brain where quantum events could take place. If this is so then the effects would be widely distributed throughout the nervous system and it is likely that the whole brain and nervous system work as quantum mechanical computer.

### **Point four:**

**“The implications of this are exciting. If the brain did work as a quantum mechanical computer, then the rules governing information transfer within it would be quite different. Because quantum mechanical events are spread throughout the universe, it can be argued that brain function would be extended in space beyond the skull”**

### **Commentary**

The writers suggest we see it as a quantum **allegory**. We could postulate that the soul exists as a **virtual field**. The field need not even have a **spatial location**. ***When the field interacts with a brain, it would collapse from its virtual form into that of a defined soul.*** At death the soul would return, modified by life experience, to its virtual form. This would then await its interaction with another brain to again become manifest.

**Point five:**

Again, using quantum allegory it is possible to postulate a theory whereby **soul stuff (energy ) is of such a quality that it falls below the theoretical level of detection, and thus cannot be found.** It could still effect the Galilean world of the brain.”

**Point Six:**

A new quantum mathematical theory developed by **Amit Gotswami** a physicist at the university of Oregon described in his book **“the self aware universe”** postulates that the basic structure of the universe is **consciousness** not **matter**. He says that there is then only one observer in the whole universe – you could call it God if you wished. – although it might be better described as part of the universal conscious process. A further consequence of this is that **all individual consciousnesses are one , a belief already held by the mystics.**

**Point Seven:**

“There is now a huge amount of data which shows that as your consciousness changes your perceived world alters. There are descriptions of **mystical experiences** in which the world is totally transformed. People who have had these experiences say that when they are in this **altered state of consciousness** that the world has a quite different structure. Often, they will describe the world as being composed of love, and say that every element of the world is alive and conscious”

**Activity ;The candle.**

Take a candle on a dish and invite the class to consider the candle as an image of the body  
The wick running through the candle represents our lives from childhood to death

Light the candle

What does this represent ?

Life

As the candle burns away it is like the course of our lives the body wearing out. Finally when all the wax has burned away what happens ?

The candle goes out

This is like death.

But is that the end of the candle ?

Nothing is created or destroyed it only changes

What happens to all the heat energy that is created as the candle burns ?

It goes on into the universe forever

**Plenary/debrief**

Write a bullet point summary that can form the basis of the cloze procedure/ writing frame.

**Vocabulary /flashcards on the mind / body problem**

**Matter**

Everything in the universe that appears to be solid

Energy including matter	Electrical impulses that are the fundamental basis of everything
<b>Consciousness</b>	Thinking, awareness
<b>Neurons</b>	Cells of nervous tissue which conduct impulses
<b>Neuron firing</b>	Impulses passing round the body
Neural imaging pictures of the areas of the brain which are heated up as a result of activity, this enables us to identify which areas deal with which kind of mental activity	
<b>Hallucinogenics</b>	Drugs which cause humans to hallucinate, seeing and hearing things which are not actually there.
<b>Mystics</b> and with God	People who through meditation experience a sense of oneness with the universe
<b>Mysticism</b>	the state of oneness experienced or described by mystics in their writings
<b>Altered state of consciousness</b>	Being awake and aware but experiencing the world differently from normal

### **Writing frame cloze procedure on the mind /body problem**

Is the mind capable of existing *separately* from the body ? is the brain an organ of *secretion* secreting *consciousness* like the stomach secretes *acid* to digest our food in which case we are at an *end* when the brain *dies* or is it an organ of *transmission* like a radio or television set, transmitting consciousness from elsewhere, in which case the consciousness will continue after the body and brain are *dead*.

Describe the image of the mind as a CD or floppy disc than can be moved for mthe machine (the brain) or something hardwired into the brain. Level four why and because.....

.....  
.....

Scientists used to believe that the primary material in the world was matter (solid stuff ) they now believe it is energy (electrical stuff ) We can only see things and make sense of our world because our consciousness makes sense of it and interprets it for us.Matter is mostly energy which we can only see because we are the size we are and it is the size it is.

Dr Peter Fenwick explains a theory that some modern scientists hold that the mind is made up of energy that does not have to be contained inside the brain. He says that some people have described the mind as being like a virtual field extending beyond the body . When the field interacts with a brain it collapses into a defined soul. When the brain dies it becomes part of the virtual field once more until it can interact with another brain.

Can the mind die ? Explain the image of the candle in your own words. How does the scientific fact that nothing is created or destroyed fit in with life after death?

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Does science make a reasonable case for the existence of the soul after death. Describe both points of view giving reasons for your answer. level seven;critical analysis

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.....

Comparing different views of the after life held by the different traditions and discussing how they fit in with the scientific views studied in this unit will take you to level eight .Development through history and comparison with other traditions.....

.....

### **Life after Death: Part Three**

### **Near- Death Experience( suitable for year nine, GCSE and sixth form)**

Here is a study booklet that you can use with pupils from year nine to sixth form as part of a topic on Life after death. This topic could also be included as part of the next topic on Religious Experience.

## **Study booklet on Near Death Experience**

### **What is a near Death Experience?**

NDE's occur when a subject appears to be dead. ie has no heartbeat and appears not to be breathing.

There have been cases where the subject has had no brain activity either.

The reason why they are described as "Near Death" is because we have had to re define what we mean by death in modern times.

Drowned people have been revived because the ice cold water has delayed the rapid disintegration of brain cells when they are deprived of oxygen.

People can be kept alive with machines leaving us with dilemmas about when a person is actually dead.

What has happened is that if a person is revived after being apparently dead then the death is redefined ie it is said that they were not actually dead, which is interesting for us.

It seems that death has to be defined as the point of no return because it is more difficult to decide when it is and of course if you do return then logically you cannot have been dead in the first place !

What does this mean for the raising of Lazarus ? (John chapter 11) I guess he could have been in a coma for three days. The account says he will smell .It didn't say he did. What does it mean for the resurrection of Jesus?

In one account of Near Death experience in a television programme, made by Doctor Peter Fenwick ( whose book on reincarnation is used in the previous lesson ) A woman in hospital is declared dead and wheeled away. Her husband is called and comes to collect her clothes. She is later found to have a pulse.

There seems to be an interesting interval of time. This particular example of a near death experience seems to have taken some time rather than a few minutes. She herself does not know where she was or for how long.

These experiences may not be subject to the laws of time - rather like the story of Narada and Vishnu when he goes to the pool to collect a drink for Vishnu and lives out two immensely vivid and painful incarnations. When he returns to Vishnu but a moment has passed.(see Teaching Hinduism and Buddhism SFE)

NDEs have been experienced by men and women of all ages and cultures throughout history but are happening more frequently now because of advances in medical technology which mean that doctors are more frequently able to revive people after clinical death

I would suspect that people are also more confident about reporting those experiences as they become aware of how common they are and that they are perhaps not figments of their imagination as they once thought.

A Gallup poll in 1982 revealed over 8 million Americans having at least one NDE

### **NDEs follow a common pattern**

- ⊖ Cessation of pain and stress
- ⊖ Feeling of peace and well being

- ⊗ Out of the body experience - patient sees their own body from the ceiling
- ⊗ Patient witnesses events going on around and is later able to describe it
- ⊗ Is drawn into darkness floating effortlessly at high speed towards a bright light
- ⊗ On reaching the light there is a feeling of being enveloped in it.
- ⊗ Often a religious figure is present
- ⊗ Often deceased friends and relatives with whom the deceased seems to communicate telepathically
- ⊗ May be life review or panoramic recall - instantaneous memory of ones entire life.
- ⊗ A view of the heavenly scene of beauty accompanied by a feeling of peace
- ⊗ Some have felt fear and visions of hellish torment
- ⊗ At this point some sort of barrier - a wall or bridge - is felt
- ⊗ The person is told to return or decides to go back
- ⊗ The patient wakes up "in pain"
- ⊗ The subject has no sense of time during the experience
- ⊗ Has a profound sense that the experience is real (unlike dreams?).
- ⊗ The patient is aware throughout that they are dead or dying

### **Features that point to the experience being veridical (true)**

- ⊗ Reports from all over the world are surprisingly similar, despite medical and cultural differences
- ⊗ The experiences often include features not expected by the subject  
Eg The Atheist Philosopher AJ Ayer reported of his own NDE  
**"I was confronted by a red light, exceedingly bright, and ...I was aware that this light was responsible for the government of the universe"**
- ⊗ Patients have given true accounts of events objects and people that they could not have seen or known about from where they were lying
- ⊗ Telepathic communication with deceased friends and relatives sometimes takes place with people that the patient did not know at that time *were* dead.
- ⊗ Children meet a relative that they had not met ie grandparents who had died when they were very young or before their birth.
- ⊗ The quality of the experience is lucid, clear and stress free.this is strange considering the amount of trauma and pain the body is *actually* In
  
- ⊗ They do not appear to be drug induced hallucinations because they happen without drugs and are similar despite the huge variety of drugs that are given in some circumstances
  
- ⊗ They do not appear to be dreams because of the degree of lucidity and the similar nature of the experiences - it would be difficult to dream the same dream as another person.

⊘ It is not thought to be the result of endorphins ( happy hormones)because they can give patients up to 72 hours of pain relief and these experiences last only a few minutes. It would not explain the clarity of the experience. endorphins make people drowsy .This experience is clear and lucid.

⊘ Low levels of oxygen or high levels of carbon dioxide do not work as an explanation because they produce different symptoms- siezures and inability to solve puzzles. There have been cases of NDE without cessation of breathing or heartbeat

### **Physiological explanation of NDEs**

⊘ Limbic lobe siezure features panoramic life recall.This fits but these experiences also seem to give rise to feelings confusion and anxiety.People who have an NDE seem peaceful and calm.

⊘ False sight - a short cut of the central nervous system which would account for the unanimity of the accounts which would be due to the common structures of the brain. This would still leave unexplained the content of the NDEs, especially the out of body experiences and meeting with deceased relatives.

### **Psychological explanations for NDEs**

⊘ Wish fulfilment - the dying person fantasises about survival

⊘ NDEs resemble birth - though for a baby moving into the light and noise of the delivery room is unlikley to be a pleasant experience

⊘ It is difficult to explain contact with people you don't know are dead as wish fulfilment

### **Are they an insight into whether there is an after life?**

⊘ Many people have had these experiences without them being Near Death

⊘ Not every one who is near clinical death and is revived reports an experience like this

⊘ Some say this is because the unpleasant NDEs are blocked out because the mind does block out trauma and some who have reported hellish experiences have later forgotten the experience

⊘ NDE which take place without cessation of heartbeat and breathing cannot be veridical experiences of an afterlife - there may therefore be no connection between NDEs and death.

### **Points of interest in conclusion**

⊘ What is the nature of the person who goes into this after life ?

⊘ Different cultures see their own version of a heavenly being .

⊘ Interesting that AJ Ayer saw a red light that was responsible for the governance of the universe - what would Russell who did not believe in God have seen ? Does this speculation add anything at all ?

⊘ The accounts of medical procedures and the presence of objects that cannot have been known about have yet to be explained

⊘ Communication with people not known to be dead needs explaining

⊘ Children meeting relatives they do not know needs explaining

⊘ How many of these accounts come from people -such as children - who in fact have never heard of NDEs - or would we now all have one because our minds are preconditioned to?

⌘ Can you dream something that you have not experienced? since dreams come from the subconscious and are entirely to do with your own wishes fears and images then does this help us with NDEs or are they quite different?

⌘ My friend who left his body under hypnosis and found himself looking down on his house was sure that it was not a dream and that he really was seeing it

⌘ Why would people choose a hellish experience or is that guilt and fear operating much like the subconscious in dreams

⌘ Arthur Ford in "Life after Life", having found out a lot about the other side from mediums ,suggests that the other side is exactly like this one for a while, a kind of holding station consisting of our idea of bliss before, having adjusted, we move on beyond a physical plane.

### **To finish with - a personal story**

⌘ When my aunt died and I was friendly with a young mum called Maria who claimed to be psychic. I remember telling her about the death over the phone. I remember saying to her ."I have not told you her name " she said "no .you haven't" and I said "I am not going to, either. My aunt was a passionate Atheist .My becoming an RE teacher had inclined relatives to talk about their beliefs as I was growing up. My aunt had had a difficult painful life crippled with arthritis from her twenties.She had no reason to believe in a loving God.

⌘ After she died. I remember standing at the sink and saying to my aunt "I wonder what you think now, perhaps you could let Maria know " bit silly I suppose. I can,t remember if I told Maria of that "conversation" .Perhaps I did in our phone conversation and that's why I chose to point out that I had not mentioned her name. I saw Maria every friday when we put our one year olds together to play while we chatted. As I was leaving on Friday, shortly after the death of my aunt Maria was washing up in the sink with her back to me. I called out "bye" and went to open the door "Sue" she called out turning from the sink "Does the name Sylvia mean anything to you?

I am not sure what to make of it all - my silly little experiment done on the basis of a "well, might as well see what happens". Was the name a lucky guess ? - not that common and the only guess she made. Was it telepathy? I am not aware that I was even thinking about it

It certainly hasn't convinced me there is an afterlife but its an interesting event that I experienced myself and so I know it isn't made up - whether it provided any useful information I don't know

## **Vocabulary /Flashcards on Near Death Experience**

**Out of the body experience** The feeling that one has left one's body and is able to travel separately from it

**Near Death experience** The feeling that after severe trauma or after the stopping of the heart that one has separated from the physical body and watches the process of resuscitation. longer experiences report travelling down a tunnel towards a bright light sometimes seeing relatives or a divine being on the other side.

**Limbic lobe** Area of the brain in which religious or mystical experiences seem to take place

**Panoramic life recall** Seeing ones whole life flash before one at a time of physical or emotional trauma.

**Veridical** Truthful

**Verification** Testing for truth

**Cloze procedure/ writing frame on near death experience up to level eight**

1 Either complete the cloze passage below or describe the features of near death experiences in your own words **Level three; facts to four why and because .5 marks** .

Increasing numbers of people report *mystical* experiences when on the point of *death* or suffering severe physical *trauma* such as a road accident. People report a sensation of *leaving* their *body*, sometimes *hovering* just above it, close to the ceiling and sometimes *standing* beside it .

Some people have described being *ignored* by those around who do not seem to be able to see them or who *walk* right through them. If the experience lasts for more than a few *moments* before they are revived and *re enter* the body, subjects often describe passing through a *tunnel* travelling towards a *bright light*.

Some times they go *back* at this point and sometimes *pass* through to the other side where they describe *heavenly* scenes sometimes peopled by dead relatives and friends. These experiences are accompanied by feelings of *bliss*, *peacefulness* and a sense of *timelessness*. Sometimes they are accompanied by beautiful *music*. At some point the subject either *chooses* to *return* to complete unfinished business or is *sent back*.

2 What reasons do people give for believing these experiences to be real (**Level five why and because to level six ; Variety of belief within a tradition. 5 marks**)

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What reasons do people give to cast doubt on the experiences being real **Levels five to six. 5 marks**

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Are near death experiences proof of an after life ? **Level seven; critical analysis .Level eight; development through history ,comparison with other traditions. 5 marks**

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.....

**Levelled essay on near death experience**

**1.Describe the features of a near death experience level three;facts level four why,because 5 marks**

2.What arguments are put forward to support the view that they are real ?level five to six . 5 marks

3.What arguments are put forward to suggest that there are psychological and physiological explanations for these experiences

4.Are they evidence that the mind /soul is capable of existing separately from the body ? are they evidence of life after death. In your answer show arguments from both points of view. Level Seven ;critical analysis.Level eight development through history ,comparison with other traditions

## **Section 8: Religious Experience and verification**

Part one: Are religious experiences true?

This lesson comes usefully after an experiential lesson such as **prayer** or **Lourdes** (See Teaching Christianity) . The Study booklet is there for use with the class and for homework. It contains a number of examples of religious experiences which can be put on overhead and read with the class as a literacy exercise . For that reason I decided not to simplify the 19<sup>th</sup> century account of **Mr Wilmott** . I thought it would be a good literacy exercise to give the pupils. Likewise, The King James version of the road to **Emmaus**. If you put the difficult words on the board first then they can read with understanding and feel pleased that they have.

My classes do not recognise the Doctor who broke the rules (Jesus and the raising of Lazarus) and consequently listen with great attention. It is a useful teaching point to ask them what difference it made to how they took the story because they did not recognise it. Did they take it more seriously because it was new ?

### **Lesson recipe for teaching about religious experience**

**This is what you need**

**Music :Moby :”Grace” – good on a loop for the whole lesson**

**Wordsworth “Tintern Abbey” extract**

**Study booklet for this lesson**

**Copies of stories you want the class to read as a group on overhead**

**This is what you do**

Class come into Moby. “Grace”

Fade and settle.

1. Introduce the lesson which is about exploring religious experience. We are going to do a **reflective exercise** which can take you to an imaginary place or somewhere you have really been, or both!

**This activity is effective done to Moby played very quietly**

**Activity: visualisation for a special place :**

Close your eyes and watch the breath notice how your breathing slows and you feel relaxed and calm. Push outside thoughts away.

Think of a special place that has a special kind of atmosphere. It is very peaceful. It may be somewhere you have been or somewhere you have seen in a film or a picture.....

It is a very beautiful.....

This is a place that moves you , Makes you *feel* something.

Now you are leaving this place

Very gently you begin to float above the special place , above the earth

You are floating over the surface of the planet. Warm and safe.

Down below is a range of mountains, the tops are covered with snow, at the bottom of one of the mountains is a tiny river, you can see it sparkling in the sunlight like a piece of silver thread.

You slowly sink down between the mountains until you are standing beside the stream in a valley .The mountains are tall and dark, towering above you , the valley is very beautiful.

## **Read Extract from Wordsworth's Tintern Abbey.**

When you are ready come back into the classroom

What do you think he was experiencing ?

### **2. Introducing concept of the numinous**

**Rudolph Otto** was very aware of how limiting we find it to use the word God, All sorts of unhelpful pictures get in the way. Otto thought that God was an *experience* something you sensed, or felt, perhaps, at important times in your life, or possibly in nature, in the presence of a place that was very beautiful or wild. He wanted to find a way of expressing the presence and sense of something he called "**the other**". He called this "other", the **numinous**

The last **reflective exercise** was about pictures and feelings. I would like to do one now about thoughts.

**Activity; Reflective exercise about an important person – discovering the inner voice**

**Close your eyes and watch the breath, once more until you are feeling peaceful and relaxed and have stilled your thoughts.**

- Think about people who are significant in your life right now .There may two or three people who figure in your thoughts at the moment about for different reasons
- Is there someone you are worried about ?
- Is someone bugging you?
- Is there someone Who is helping you and caring for you ?
- Is there someone you need to talk to about how you are feeling ?
- What can you do to make life feel better?
- Is there something you need to do to change things?
- Is there someone who needs to know how much you care ?
- What in your life do you have to feel grateful for?... Who do you need to say thank you, to?

...

When you are ready, open your eyes come back into the classroom.

That was of course confidential, but who found themselves becoming aware of things and realising things, that perhaps were not as clear or conscious before?

What is the nature of that experience? When we do this ,we hear our inner voice and listen to our feelings. For some people doing this regularly would be a religious experience ,an opportunity to communicate with the other. Others would say that this gives us an opportunity to listen to our real thoughts and wishes and so it feels like a conversation with the real us inside ourselves which we are often too busy to listen to.

Is prayer a communication with something outside ourselves , “the other” as Rudolph Otto would say, a **transcendent** being or is it a conversation with something within ourselves.? Something **immanent** , what some believers say is God within in or the Atman. Is this what Christians describe as the holy spirit?

Is the inner voice connected to prayer ,or is it entirely within ourselves ? Does it matter ?

Religious experience can be prayer ,worship, a sense of nature. A very high proportion of people have had that sort of experience. Some people have also had what they consider to be a religious experience at the moment of death. Other people having a similar experience have decided that there must be a scientific explanation for their experience even if they do not know what it is. They would not consider any of these experiences to be connected with religion..

The following examples of an out of body experience and religious experiences can be found in the study booklet that follows this section.

### **3. Activity:The story of Mr Wilmott. (Page..)**

This is not a religious experience it is an account of the first properly recorded **out of the body experience**. It took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Read, or tell the story of Mr Wilmott. (Page...)

### ***Are these experiences based on something real, outside our selves ?***

Others have **visions** and **hear voices**. They may believe they have experienced a miracle like Bernadette (see Lourdes in **Teaching Christianity** for experiential lesson with religion neutral exercise on spiritual healing. This exercise could be done here

### **4. Activity the story of Moses and St Paul (page ...)**

Read or tell the story of **St Paul** and **Moses**

### **4. Activity :Story of Jan Chelcicky. (Page ...)**

People who have a religious experience do not necessary welcome the event.

Moses did not want to go back to Egypt. He was afraid.

St Paul became an outcast not trusted by Jews or Christians.

Jan Chelckiky gave up everything he had when he became a Christian

Read or tell the story of Jan chelcicky

Why would these people make up these stories or imagine them?

The fact that they believe them to be real doesn't mean they are real but ...

If Moses did not *believe* his experience to be real how come we are sitting here having this RE lesson today ?  
–Think about what his conviction , his absolute belief in the reality of his experience led to !

What follows is a story which many people believe really happened.

### **Activity: The story of the doctor who broke the rules**

Once upon a time, in a far away place and a far away time, there lived a healer, who did not work by conventional methods, He was ahead of his time. Like many people who lived in the past, he was accused of being in league with the devil.

After a while he went in fear of his life. He moved away from the capital city and lay low for a while. One morning he received a message from a small village that lay just outside the city walls. It told him that one of his dearest friends was sick and dying. Imagine the heartache in that house that day. "You are our only hope" said the messenger.

"You cannot go" said his friends. "It is madness. They will kill you. We care for him, too. You may not get there in time and what good will that do. You will both be dead.

How can you put your own safety before that of your friend said the messenger.

*What do you think he should do –what would you do?*

Without a word, the wanted man went into his room and shut the door.

They waited .No one dared disturb him. A day and a night went past .

They waited for him to come out of his room.

Another day and a night went past.

On the morning of the third day the door opened

"It is time. Let us go." He said.

"But why ? It is surely too late now !" his friends gathered round, aghast .

Without a word he picked up his cloak and bag and set out.

Terrified they followed him as he strode forward - into the lion's mouth.

What did he mean , it is time ? they wondered ? Why did he wait ? If he was going to do it why didn't he come straight away?

"This is madness". They said.

News of their approach reached the village where the sick man lived. A woman came running, followed by a crowd

She fell at his feet sobbing ."Why didn't you come ? It is too late , he is dead "

"Take me to him" was all he said

One of the other women placed her hand on the weeping woman, lifting her to her feet. "Do as he asks" she said ,gently.

They led him to the graveyard. The whole village had gathered, silent, awe struck.

"Open the grave" he commanded .

"He has lain there three days. He will smell "

He looked up to heaven and prayed.

"Lazarus, come forth" He commanded and the young man came out of the tomb

"Unbind him and take him home" said Jesus.

Like several of the stories we have discussed, this is both a religious experience and a miracle. Did this happen ? Is it just a symbolic story to help the reader see the meaning behind Jesus' own death and resurrection? This example can be explored again in the next lesson on Miracles.

Read sections from the study booklet to sum up the learning

**Debrief/plenary**

Look at the arguments for and against religious experience on the projector and discuss with the class.

## **Study Booklet on Religious Experience**

### **Is Religious Experience true?**

- How does belief affect a person?
- How do we know if what we experience is true?

Some of us have thought about the fact that we know everything through our senses but our senses sometimes deceive us, so how can we know that anything is real and not just a dream or a figment of our imagination? In the,

in the story of "The disappearing table" we discover that in a sense what we see around us - such as a school table - can only be seen at all because we are the size we are and it is the size it is. This is because everything that is matter is made of atoms, which are mostly space and are

whirling around at tremendous speed. There is a sense in which, as we can also learn in Hinduism, that

- Reality is an illusion
- Nothing is created or destroyed it only changes
- All things are one

We are going to look at some stories about Religious Experiences. We will be looking at topics studied in Advanced level in Religious Studies. They are:

- Near Death Experiences (Called NDEs or OBEs - out of body experiences)
- Religious Experiences ( The Resurrection of Jesus: St. Bernadettes' vision of the virgin Mary at Lourdes:
- Conversion Experiences (St Paul on the road to Damascus : Jan Chelcicy -Leader of the Communist Party in Russia.

These experiences go way back. Since the beginning of time people have reported visions, voices, examples of precognition, telepathy and a feeling of being out of the body especially at times of extreme stress and danger

- People who believe these experiences are based on something that is really happening say this points to the existence of a soul or spirit that is capable of existing without its physical sheath. They say it is evidence of life after death
- People who do not believe these claims are based on something really happening outside the persons' own imagination say they are the result of chemical changes in the mind caused by stress or illness.

Our task as students and philosophers is to look at the five examples - and examine the arguments for and against these experiences being based on what is really happening put forward by philosophers.

### **Example One - An OBE**

This is an account of an incident that took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is one of the first accounts throughout history to have been the result of an objective investigation by researchers.

This is the original account as it was written over a hundred years ago. You will need to concentrate hard in order to understand the account and enjoy the mystery and challenge it presents us! It is so interesting that I am sure you will think it is well worth the effort!

#### **The voyage of Mr Wilmott, a story about an out of body experience**

Mr S.R. Wilmot sailed from Liverpool to New York, passing through a severe storm. During the eighth night of the storm he had a dream in which he saw his wife come to the door of his state room.

She looked about her and seeing that her husband was not the only occupant of the room, hesitated a little and then advanced to his side, she stooped down and kissed him. After gently caressing him for a few moments, she quietly withdrew.

Upon awakening from his dream Mr Wilmott was surprised to hear his fellow passenger, Mr William J. Tait, say to him "You're a pretty fellow to have a lady come and visit you in this way" Pressed for an explanation, Mr Tait related what he had seen while wide awake, lying in his berth. It corresponded exactly with the dream of Mr Wilmott!"

When meeting his wife in Watertown, Connecticut, Mr Wilmott was almost immediately asked "did you receive a visit from me a week ago, Tuesday?"

Although Mr Wilmott had been almost a thousand miles at sea on that particular night, his wife asserted "It seemed to me that I visited you" She told her husband that on account of the severity of the weather and the loss of another vessel, she had been extremely anxious about him. On the night of the occurrence she had lain awake for a long time and at about four O'clock in the morning it seemed to her that she left her physical self and went out to meet her husband, crossing the stormy sea until she came to his stateroom.

She continued "A man was in the upper berth, looking right at me, and for a moment I was afraid to go in; but soon I went to your side, bent down and kissed you and then went away."

### **Example Two - The road to Emmaus. A Religious Experience had by a group of people.**

(This translation from the Greek in which it was originally written was made in 1611)

Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices, which they had prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And they entered in and found not the body of the lord Jesus. And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed, behold two men stood before them in shining garments: and as they were afraid and bowed down their faces to the earth they said unto them. Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here but is risen; And behold two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, and they talked together of the things that had happened. And it came to pass that while they communed together and reasoned Jesus himself drew near and went with them. And he said unto them What manner of communications are these that ye have to one another, as ye walk and are sad? And one of them whose name was Cleopas said Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem and hast not known the things which are come to pass these days? And he said unto them what things ? And they said unto him Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, how our chief priests and the rulers delivered him to be condemned to death and have crucified him. Then he said to them O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. And beginning at Moses he expounded unto them all that the prophets spoken concerning himself - He made as though he would have gone further but they constrained him saying." Abide with us for it is toward evening". And it came to pass as he sat at meat with them he took bread and blessed it and brake and gave it to them and their eyes were opened they knew him and he vanished from their sight. They rose up at the same hour and made their way to Jerusalem and found the eleven gathered together saying "The Lord is risen and has appeared to Simon" and as they thus spake Jesus himself stood in the midst of them ,and they were terrified and affrighted and supposed they had seen a spirit.

And he said to them Behold "my hands and my feet handle me and see for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have. And while they wondered he said Have ye here any meat ? And they gave him a piece of broiled fish and of an honeycomb and he took It and did eat before the And he led them out as far as to Bethany and he lifted Up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass while he was blessing them, he was parted from them and carried up to heaven.

### **Example Three - A vision - The Story of Bernadette**

Bernadette Soubirous was born in France in 1844 .Her family were desperately poor. Her father a miller had six children they were forced to move several times and eventually lived in an old prison cell. Bernadette was not very clever there were some who thought she was in fact rather simple. She was cheeky, naughty and always getting into trouble. She believed very strongly in God and would often go off by herself to a cave to be by herself and think.

At the age of fourteen, in 1858, she experienced in the space of six months eighteen visions of a woman in white at the rock of Massabielle at Lourdes. No one else saw these visions. After the sixth she was interrogated by the chief of police but found to be simple, sincere and modest.

The priest told Bernadette to ask the lady in white who she was and make the rose bush flower instantly when asked. On the fifteenth apparition, in front of 8,000 people, Bernadette asked, but nothing happened. On the 25th March the feast of the annunciation which celebrates the angel Gabriels' visit to Mary to tell she was to bear the child . Bernadette asked again "Mademoiselle will you please tell me who you are ? The woman in white answered " I desire people to come here. Go drink of the spring, go tell them to build a church, I am the immaculate conception." Bernadette could not have known that the Pope had only just agreed to this way of describing Mary.

The people believed. People came to drink from the spring believing it to have special power to heal sickness. By the end of the year the first pilgrim had been healed. From that time to this day the spring produces 27,000 gallons of water a week. People go to drink from the spring and to be healed. The grotto is full of the sticks and crutches that those who have been healed have left there For many there is no physical change but they feel a great sense of courage, hope and peace - spiritual healing – from the experience of the powerful atmosphere of the grotto The vast pilgrimage movement developed from that time is the largest in Europe.

Bernadette was repeatedly interrogated and suffered much from the publicity she received. She was ill and asthmatic. To find peace she became a nun. She lived the rest of her life away from the world in a convent. She lived away from the development of Lourdes, gaining nothing from it and died after much suffering at the age of 35 in 1879. In 1933 She was canonised not because of the visions but Because of her commitment, integrity and trust . She was totally sincere in her belief.

**Example four - A conversion, Jan Chelcicky  
from his book "My last days as a Communist"**

Brought up in Communist Russia in the first half of this century young Jan was taught, like all communists, that God did not exist. Based on the teachings of Karl Marx whose book "Das Kapital" formed the basis of communist thought, the government taught that Religion was a fantasy, an opiate, a drug to comfort people in pain from their suffering. This was caused by the distribution of wealth among a few, causing the poverty of the many. A more equal society, taught the communists, would not need this belief. To prove this to be true, religion was forbidden .The Orthodox churches were closed. Christians met for worship secretly in the woods. Owning or reading a Bible was not allowed. At 16 Jan was an atheist. At 18 he had risen to become the leader of communist youth in all Russia. He wrote

"Now today I had been elected national president of the communist youth. I drifted off to sleep and dreamed. Out of the sky came a voice. "Take heed that ye be not deceived. many will come in my name, saying I am Christ.... and then shall they see the son of man coming in a cloud and with power and great glory."

I awoke with a start. My heart was pounding fiercely. I tried to tell myself it was only a dream. But God's presence was there in the room. Dropping off the side of the bed on to my knees , I prayed "O Lord forgive me, accept me. I spent the rest of the night in prayer. Then as the first light of dawn appeared, another voice spoke inside of me.

"What have you done? You will have to give up everything you worked for. Your former friends will mock you, despise you, persecute you. Turn back now before it is too late. I was full of fear but inside God said "Have no fear; my spirit shall witness for you. I resigned my functions as leader. You are fool they said. Why do you wish to take such a stupid action "I can no longer follow Marx and Lenin" I said "because I am now a follower of Jesus Christ, "Today I am a pastor of a small church near the Russian border."

There are many other important examples of Religious Experience. These two famous ones have had a huge impact on our society here and the world over

#### **Example four - Moses and the Burning Bush,**

Having run away from Egypt after killing an Egyptian taskmaster Moses believed that God spoke to him from a bush that burned without being consumed. He was told to return to Egypt to rescue his people who were slaves to the Egyptians. He did not want to go. He did return. He stood up bravely to the Pharaoh and after many struggles led his people out of Egypt and across the desert to freedom. The Jews remember this event at the festival of Passover. You can read this story in Exodus chapter 3

#### **Example five - The vision of Saul on the road to Damascus.**

Saul of Tarsus was a Jew, a member of a group of scholars called the Pharisees. He was very religious . When he heard a young Christian called Stephen preaching that Jesus was the promised Messiah and explaining how the Jewish Bible predicted the coming of Jesus and that he would be rejected by the Jews and put to death, he was very disturbed. The crowd were so angry that they stoned Stephen to death there and then. Saul held their coats. Immediately afterwards he went to the high priest and asked for letters of authority to allow him to go throughout the land searching out Christians and throwing them into jail. On the way into the city of Damascus, on the far edge of Israel after he had done much harm to the Christian community. Saul heard the voice of Jesus. "Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?"

He fell from his horse, quite blind and was led into the city. After three days he was visited by Ananias, a Christian who had been told by God in a vision to visit Saul and baptise him as a Christian. Ananias refused because Saul was an enemy of the Christians. Eventually he gave in and as soon as he baptised Saul, he recovered his sight. He changed his name to Paul its Greek form and spent the rest of his life travelling throughout the middle East preaching about Jesus. He was eventually imprisoned in Rome and put to death by the emperor Nero because of his beliefs.

You can read this story in Acts chapter 9.

#### **Can Religious Experiences Be Verified ?**

***In other words - Did something really happen or is the person lying ?Is it the result of their imagination or wishful thinking ?***

There are certain things that seem to go along with religious experiences

- They often happen to people who do not want to have them.
- People are often not believers already .

- They do not happen to believers who would like to have them
- The person who has them seems to have no control over whether they happen or not.
- The person does not seem to be able to prevent them happening.
- The person often has to give up a great deal as result of the experience
- They are followed by a period of intense suffering, rejection and ridicule by others.
- They often bring about change that lasts the persons' entire life.

• In other words they don't change their mind or decide maybe it was their imagination, later.

### **What Philosophers say about them**

As we go through ,see if you can criticise the argument using examples from the experiences we have studied. Remember this is not about whether *YOU* believe in God but how well you can think

Most ordinary experiences are easily verified because other people also have them

Most religious experiences are *private* experiences. One person has them and they are ineffable - Mysterious and noetic, that is, they cannot be described in words.

The Philosopher, Richard Swinburne put forward the following view which is called

### **Swinburne's principle of credulity**

*"Apparent perceptions ought to be taken at their face value ,in the absence of a positive reason for challenge!"*

*"With normal experience it is logical to believe our senses that is, if something appears to be present then it is present unless there is good reason to think we are wrong"*

Swinburne says

*"It would be irrational and unhelpful to doubt all that we sense"*

*"How things seem to be is good grounds for a belief about how things are "*

"The only reason for believing an experience is *not* true is *another cause* for the experience"

by proving that there is

With a religious experience, it cannot be proved if the object  
not, so the only reason for denying its existence is by proving that *another* object or event was the cause of the experience.

(voice or vision ) exists or

The Lion handbook of the Bible says

***"In the end if there is no reason for the person to lie and if they are known to be a trustworthy person, not given to lying we just have to take the persons' word for it"***

**There are philosophers who do not think religious experience can be verified - here is their argument**

People usually interpret their experience to mean that they have been visited by their divine being but their experience is usually not that precise - no one can be sure that it is their personal God

People often appear seem to experience something connected with their own personal religion - Bernadette is a Catholic. Mary was very important to her. Other Christians do not seem to see Mary. Hindus see visions of their divine beings They do not see visions of Jesus or Mary. This sounds like wish fulfilment or the product of the person's own imagination.

Experiencing something is not enough to say it exists. Drunks feel the room spinning . It is not .The sick become delirious . Drugs cause hallucinations. The mentally ill see things that are not there. The very old can live in a different world not recognising us or believing we are someone from their youth. Memory of the event does not mean it is real. There are no tests to distinguish real from imagined memories.

There are however no tests to prove the existence of electrons, either. Their existence is inferred by their effects so perhaps we can infer the existence of a real experience from the effects - These can completely transform a person for the rest of their life. People who have these experiences find that the experience itself is so overwhelming that all rational thoughts are lost and any doubt about the experience disappears.

The main issue is .though, that they do not provide evidence of the existence of God for anyone else because the experience is entirely personal, although the experience of Moses, The disciples and Paul, Mohammad and Buddha has led to the beginning of a major world religion.

Individuals like Bernadette still have an effect on the people within the tradition to this day.

So what do you think ? - do we believe these people or not?

Our task as students and philosophers is to describe the experiences as accurately as we can, think about the arguments for and against them being real and then try to criticise these arguments .

We can do this by thinking and challenging them as we did when we were learning about Descartes.

What you conclude doesn't matter it is your reasoning that is important are you being rational and logical or are you just being emotional believing or disbelieving just because you feel like it! What follows is a summary of their arguments.

### **Reasons why religious experiences might be true**

People who would like to have them don't .

People who do have them often wish they hadn't

They often mean huge life changes

They often mean being alienated by friends and family

They are often followed by a period of depression

People maintain the changes for the rest of their lives , they did not change their minds and revert to their old lives later.

### **Reasons why religious experience might not be true**

- What we think we see is not necessarily there - ie drunks feel the room spinning when it is not.
- People hallucinate because of physical and mental illness
- Memory of an event does not mean it really happened.
- Religious Experiences can be created by stimulation of parts of the brain producing feelings of bliss and unreality.

### ***Are they evidence of belief in God ?***

- They can never be evidence of belief in God because the experience whether true or false happens only to that individual. However ....
- Why would they make it up ?
- Why is their conviction that the experience was true, lifelong
- Why does it have such an effect on their life and the way they see the world?

### **Flashcards/ Vocabulary on religious experience**

Numinous

Immanence

Transcendence

Verification

Wordsworth

Rudolph Otto

Moses

St Paul

Emmaus

Berbadette

Mr wilmott

Swinburne's principle of credulity

### Cloze passage /writing frame on Religious Experience with

#### Research:

- Use the internet to see what you can find out about

#### Religious Experience.

- Use the **Bible** to look up other stories about the resurrection. You will find these in the last few chapters of each gospel. You could read **John Chapter eleven** to find the story of **Lazarus**.
- You could include some research with your cloze passage or with your essay.

Look at **Bernadette** or **Lourdes** on the internet or from a book and add some fresh information that is not included in this booklet. You may include it in the cloze passage or separately Write down that it is your own research and where you got it from

#### Cloze passage /Writing frame

In our lesson we listened to the story of a number of religious experiences

This is what happened to **Moses** and why it is important  
 .....

This is what happened to St Paul and why it is important  
 .....

We listened to the story of Bernadette. This is what happened to her.....

#### Level five :Why,because

#### We also learned the story of Jan Chelcicky.

This is what happened to Jan . Write his story in your own words using this booklet to help you level four. Describing how he was affected by the experience and the difference it made to his life will take you to **Level six**.

.....  
 .....

After that we looked at reasons why these stories may be

true.These ..... are  
 ..... We looked at reasons why they might not be true. These are

.....  
 .....

Can they tell us whether God exists or not? **(Level seven: Critical analysis**

### **Levelled Essay: Writing up to Level Seven: Critical analysis**

1. Are Religious Experiences real? Can we verify them ?

Can they tell us anything about the existence of God?

**Begin** by saying what the problem is and what you are

going to discuss and explore in your essay. **Level five :why, because**

**Go on** to describe the religious experiences of Bernadette

and Jan. **Level four :Facts:5 marks**

**2.Continue** by describing the effect their experience had

on themselves and others. **Level :Six :The effect of religion on an individual, family or community 5 marks**

3. **Continue** by describing the arguments for and against these experiences being true . **Level five :why, because 5 marks**

**4.Conclude** by saying in your own words whether they can

tell us anything about the existence of God. **Level Seven: Critical analysis 5 marks**

### **Religious Experience and verification**

Part two: Miracles

(Suitable for GCSE and A level)

**This section can usefully be used after the previous one on religious experience and verification or it can stand alone as a way of introducing challenging and engaging pupils looking at this topic as part of an examination syllabus.**

It is based on a study of the philosopher David Hume. He was one of the first people to say he was an atheist and did not suffer because of this. These ideas are from his essay "Concerning Human Understanding" first published in 1777.

Neil Cantwell's book on Miracles from the series published by Abacus books is the source for much of what follows. These summaries of arguments from philosophers have been turned into a study booklet which year eleven and sixth form pupils can use to help them understand and enjoy these ideas and arguments. Neil's book, like the rest of the series is an excellent book for extension reading. There are many definitions from modern philosophers such as Hick, Davies and Swinburne which make it a useful and accessible source for A level students studying the philosophy of religion.

### **Lesson Recipe for Miracles and Religious Experience**

#### **This what you need**

- Class in circle for discussion
- Centrepiece of fabric and flowers may also have pictures which represent miracles and religious experience – Biblical stories, Bernadette, Padre Pio, any thing from the press that people are describing as a miracle.
- Music - something calm as this will be a discussion lesson.

#### **This is what you do**

Class come in and settle

1. Introduce the lesson by describing a coincidence that *you* have experienced

I have given an example. It is not relevant to your lesson but you will react to it and so it will set you thinking about your own example and what points you can make from it.

My example is this: Several years ago my husband went to a classic car show in Southern England. He saw a very rare car there that he thought would be perfect for our family. It was called a Peerless. There had only ever been about 300 made which was in the late fifties and there were only about seven on the road at that time.

He came home and told me all about it. He thought it would be perfect for us because it was fibre glass, so it wouldn't rust, had a space frame chassis that was easy to weld and had four seats so there was room for our then, small children. Also, because no one had ever heard of them they were cheap! However the crucial factor in all this was rarity. It wasn't something you could go shopping for!

Two years went by when lo and behold one came up for sale at a garage some sixty miles away and was soon ours, providing daily transport for my husband for seven years.

Finding one within travelling distance and at time when we were looking for a car was pretty good as coincidences go but the spooky part was finding a pile of photographs in the boot, some of which were pictures of the car going back to the seventies. Among them were some recent pictures. There was the car my husband had seen at the show two year before - with my husband in the crowd looking at it !

2. Invite the pupils to share examples of **coincidences** and **synchronicity**.

**Are they miracles** ? What do pupils think?

Statistically coincidences are very common and if we look at the reasons behind them they are not very remarkable at all.

**Is there a purpose and a plan for us is everything just chance ?**

**3. Do miracles happen ?**

What would need to happen for pupils to consider that a miracle had taken place?

For example **suppose** you went round to your mates house one day .They heard you coming and shouted out of their bedroom window. It was up stairs.

“Watch this!” they said and flew out of the window across the garden and landed in a tree in the corner.

How would you explain what had happened ?

Would that be a miracle ?

**Suppose** it happened to you .You were standing at your bedroom window and suddenly found yourself flying across the garden to a tree, where you sat, until they recovered from your shock sufficiently to fly back.

Would you consider it a miracle ?

If there were no witnesses how would you convince any one else that it had happened ?

**Suppose** it could not be repeated, is that important in deciding if something is a miracle ?

If there was the one witness as in the first example would it make a difference ?

Now, let us change the scenario a bit **suppose** a similar thing happened, in one you are the witness and in the other it happens to you.

**Suppose** the person is sitting in their window when they hear a plane approaching overhead. They see something falling. They fly across the garden towards the tree and catch the falling object. It is a baby.

Or, **suppose** the person is standing by their window and they hear a plane approaching an object falls from the plane. It is a baby and it lands safely in the tree unharmed.

Is that a miracle?

**4. Here is an example from the philosopher RH Holland**

**The story of the toddler and the train**

One day a toddler was playing in its pedal car in the garden .The postman had left the gate open. It strayed on to the rail way line where the car's wheels became jammed in the train tracks. A train approached. It was round the bend, out of sight and could not see the child stuck on the line. The child was too young to realise that it should get out of the car and run to safety. It heard the train and continued to wrestle the car free of the tracks. The train stopped. It did so because the driver lost consciousness and as soon as he ceased to apply pressure to the instruments the brakes came on automatically. Ever afterwards the mother regarded it as a miracle.

What do you think?

Let us add a spanner to the works ... I am going to add some details to R H Holland's example

What part in the miracle did the postman play in forgetting to close the gate when there was a child in the garden?

What kind of miracle was it to the family of the train driver who had in fact had a fatal heart attack?

And what kind of miracle is it when a person is the only survivor of a plane crash (our falling baby, if you like ) – for everyone else it is a disaster. For the survivor and their family it might be evidence of the existence of God. For the families of everyone else It might be proof of the opposite!

## **5. This is a story adapted from one by Roald Dahl**

A hundred years ago it was not uncommon for frightful epidemics to sweep across Europe and take the lives of the very young. Polio, Diptheria, Whooping cough and sometimes Measles swept through villages and towns leaving parents heartbroken

.One such epidemic came to a small town in northern Europe. It was 1875 . The children became desperately ill from diptheria and whooping cough, both of which stole away the breath of the children. With diptheria their throats closed up until they could not breathe . They choked to death. The only hope was to open the windpipe from below the blockage to allow air into the lungs. Sometimes the shock and pain of this, in itself, carried the children away. With whooping cough the children coughed and vomited, unable to breathe, dying from the horrible fever which accompanied the worst cases.

One mother watched four of her five young sons die. One by one they became too ill to be saved . Finally the last surviving child became ill. As he,too, began to vomit and burn up with fever she prayed and prayed that the last one would be spared, that the disease would be burning itself out in her family. In the last night of her torment she sat beside her son, weeping softly, holding his hand and praying with all the love and sincerity in her heart. Finally the little boy began to sleep. The doctor exhausted from days of struggling to keep the children alive arrived and examined him. "The fever has broken, he said. I think he is going to make it . I am so happy for you that the Lord has spared you at least this one son, Frau Hitler "

Have we come to any conclusions about what a miracle needs to be in order to be a miracle

## **6. Activity;did the Resurrection happen? Peter on trial**

- Did the Resurrection happen ? Peter on trial. Put pupils into groups to argue for and against the points on the paper

### **Did the Resurrection happen? Peter on trial**

- The apostle Peter said that Jesus had risen from the dead and appeared to him. Several other disciples also agreed.
- He appeared in the garden to Mary
- He walked with two disciples to a village outside Jerusalem and then disappeared after breaking bread with them
  
- He appeared in the upper room showed his wounds and ate fish. Are they telling the truth?
- We are going to put them on trial.
- Choose a chair person and a scribe. Will you defend or prosecute Peter ? Choose a prosecutor or a defence lawyer for your group. Write arguments for and against each point to feedback to the whole class.
- After ten minutes discussion, each lawyer will come to the stand to make their case . The court will ask questions
- At the end we will vote anonymously as we did for belief in God.
- Was another person substituted at the last minute ? Did someone volunteer to die in his place?
- Was Jesus just in a coma and came alive in the cold stone tomb?
- Did the disciples steal the body and persuade everyone that he was dead?

### **Debrief/plenary**

***Is a miracle a way of interpreting a natural event and seeing a special significance in it.? For example***

#### ***Moses***

The ten plagues

Crossing the red sea

Water from the rock

Manna and quails

The ten commandments on Mount Sinai

#### ***Jesus***

The Virgin Birth

The Baptism

The Transfiguration

Healing and raising from the dead.

The Resurrection

#### **A miracle is**

- is an event which breaks the laws of nature
- Do we know what they are yet ?
- Is a miracle something that can be explained later
- Is a miracle a coincidence ?

- Is a miracle for one person a disaster for another ie the person who survives a plane crash
- Why do they happen to some people not others?
- Can we prove whether miracles happen ?
- Are they proof of the existence of God?

**Conclusion: Whatever you have decided about whether the resurrection happened or not, this fact remains. If the disciples had not been convinced we would not be having this lesson today!**

This is the Study booklet on miracles to use after the general lesson on verifying religious experience. I use this with year eleven as part of their GCSE course on Religious experience and as a starting point with the sixth form for their AS unit on Miracles. The text has links with many of the lessons described in this resource file, such as how we know things (Descartes) and arguments for the existence of god, life after death and Near Death Experience. The first part of the booklet is simple enough to use with year nine .The latter part deals with the philosophers, Hume, of course and the more modern ideas of R.H. Holland. Someof the quotations are taken from Neil Cantwell's excellent booklet " miracles" published by Abacus pres.

## **Study booklet on Miracles**

### **Introduction:**

You may study this topic as part of a unit on **religious experience** .In which you will concentrate on the **verification** of miracles. That is working out whether they are true or not

You may be studying this topic as part of a topic on **religion and science** where you will find that

⊞ **Scientists** believe that ultimately *everything* that happens in the universe be can explained by science. There are things we do not know yet but there will *always* be a logical, rational explanation for *absolutely everything*. There are no such things as miracles.

⌘ **Theists** believe that there will *always* be some things in the universe that cannot be explained - such as the existence of the universe itself - the existence of these things and occurrence of certain events that cannot be explained mean that there must be a divine being. *Miracles are important to theists as evidence that there is a God.* Part of the definition of a miracle for them is that it must be an event that can *only* be explained as an act of God

⌘ **Proving that miracles take place must prove the existence of God.**

Providing a rational explanation for everything that happens has to not only be possible it *must* be the case. How can there be an event that cannot be explained - ever? The event occurred eg someone rising from the dead or being healed in front of us, an NDE, the existence of the universe, a chair rising from the ground with no visible means of support. The event happens. There must be a reason and an explanation. The question is *are* they miracles or are they events that people *believe* are miracles?

And that basically is it -there isn't answer!

It comes down to how you *choose* to *interpret* what happens to you

### **Near Death Experience**

James Gallup who does the famous Gallup polls did one on NDEs and individual's belief in life after death. He discovered that an astonishing 8 million Americans had had an NDE, however not all of them believed that they were evidence of an after life. He found the more educated they were, the more they tended to dismiss the experience as a hallucination caused by drugs, loss of oxygen or trauma, when we know endorphins flood into the body and may cause strange emotional effects as they attempt to protect us.

⌘ **A miracle is defined as something that goes against the laws of nature**

That takes us into whole areas of debate about what the laws of nature actually *are*

**A miracle would need to be something that goes against those laws** and is a miracle because the laws, as we understand them, mean that what happened is *impossible*, it may also be that the event we are discussing only ever happens *once*. *Eg The resurrection*

Now this raises some interesting questions

Did this event happen? is an obvious one. The issues are the same ones that we face with any kind of religious experience

We take these events seriously when;

1. People go through a life changing experience but they rather wish they hadn't because of what they have to give up in the end.
2. They remain affected throughout the rest of their life.

However....

3. Personal experience can never be verified by another person because by its very nature it can only be experienced by one person

4. Religious experiences do not happen to everyone, unlike other experiences, such as falling in love, which do happen to most people.

But....

5. We conclude that we have to accept their testimony as true *ie that they believe something happened. It doesn't mean of course that it did in objective reality.*

6. What we have to accept is their belief because there is no evidence to the contrary that would indicate that they are lying.

### **The Resurrection**

Let us think for a moment about the effect of the resurrection on those who *believed* they were witnessing it . They gave up their lives to preach, with the unpleasant consequence that they had to hide and were dismissed by their society .Ultimately they almost all died. The Apostle John was the only one of the twelve who is believed to have escaped an unpleasant death.

We might take the consequences of their belief as evidence that it was true. - Actually it is only evidence that they *believed* it is true

### **Queen Shub \_Ad's tomb (see page )**

On the other hand look at the 66 servants who went, apparently willingly, to their death when Queen Shub Ad was buried three thousand years ago. Sir Leonard Woolley in opening her grave in Ur discovered all the bodies lying in rows curled up on their sides with a complete absence of terror or violence .One young girl had a silver hair ribbon curled in her pocket as though she had been in such a hurry to join the procession that she had not time to put it on.

Sir Leonard in his book "Ur of the Chaldees" concludes that the only explanation for them lying so neatly and peacefully must be that they had gone to their deaths willingly, taking poison and lying down beside their queen, while the grave was closed, convinced that they would be re animated with her in the next life. It makes us feel rather sad, perhaps, that they were so deluded. The strength of their belief does not make it any more or less true

### **All that for something we now know isn't true - or is it?**

This belief in reanimation into a brighter paradisaical version of this world does fit in with the NDEs .Some scholars are saying that people seem to create in their near death experience a version of the perfect world . Some people have said , after their experience, that there are not three dimensions in the world they entered. They can't describe it but wonder if there is perhaps a kind of vestibule, a holding place, before we move on which is our *OWN* idea of paradise.

It is a timeless existence, but after a while the soul will move on, Eventually, the spiritual existence moves beyond the need for a perfected version of this life.

### **The Pyramids( See stories about Egyptian belief in an afterlife page )**

Or, let us consider the Egyptian Pharaohs. They built the pyramids to protect their physical bodies from being damaged by thieves. They were after the jewels and tokens of their royal status in the bandages of their mummies . If their bodies were pulled apart by the greedy thieves it was believed their re animated body would be destroyed.

All that time, a life time almost, of effort and wealth, it took twenty years for the great pyramid of Cheops whose base is large enough to accommodate five cathedrals the size of St Pauls, all to protect the tiny body because of the power of that belief.

### **Living without food**

I am reminded in contrast of a programme I saw recently about a woman and her husband who held week long courses on health and spirituality, which they claimed to be life transforming. The really interesting and crucial aspect of what they were preaching is that people *should not eat* - at all -ever again!

The belief of the participants was profound.

What was offered was incredible health and happiness.

We could have accepted this if the people being helped through their first week came through the other side transformed, but that evidence was hard to find!

We also learned that the husband has been in prison for fraud and the family refrigerator is stacked with food . Their daughter says that Mum does occasionally have some chocolate and a few other things from time to time and finally....They are making a very great deal of money from the courses which are very expensive ( and with no catering costs of course!!!) and from the books they write about it.

All in all I think most people watching the programme would conclude it is a fraud!

What about people who do survive without food ? ,If there are any, There are plenty of stories about Hindu holy men who exist without sleep,, or food for example. Is this miraculous or is there scientific explanation which we haven't discovered yet which will be something to do with the power of the mind to affect the body.

**Conclusion - Lack of scientific knowledge doesn't make an event a miracle**

**Telepathy** is just about proven. **Telekinesis** may be . Perhaps even spiritual healing. **Prayer** for example ,is reported in independent studies, to affect the recovery of sick people, but that does not mean that they are miracles or that they are things going against the laws of nature. We only use a tiny part of our brain, perhaps we are all in fact capable of these things but have not developed the faculties

⊞ **These things, even if true, are not necessarily miracles - successfully affective prayer and healing do not necessarily prove the existence of a divine being**

This brings me to my final point . Some philosophers and Theologians are concerned about trying to prove the existence of God through argument because they say it takes away the need for faith. If I am right and there is an explanation for everything, then it is a bit like having the snowplough of reason and science, sweeping away of the magic of not knowing why things happen until there is ultimately nothing that cannot be understood. Where does that leave us ? Does that mean that there is, then ,no divine being?, no purpose to the world no spiritual existence ?

Actually I am not sure - along with Gautama the Buddha , how important or helpful the the idea of God is at all. What I do think is of fundamental importance is to live as though we have a spirit that can exist separately from our bodies and which is capable of experiences because the consequences of believing this are useful

- It encourages people to live a thoughtful, purposeful existence in which they think about the consequences of their behaviour for others.
- It helps them to have a balanced attitude towards the satisfaction of bodily and spiritual desires.
- It makes them less materialistic
- It makes them less selfish.

- It helps them to put events that happen to them in perspective. Events that cause unhappiness are less important, given their place in this wider scheme of things, that includes a life beyond this one.
  - It is a comfort, and an antidote to the fear of death.
  - The consequences of not believing are not useful
  - Living for the moment can become a selfish disregard for others
  - What is the point in living a moral and unselfish life?
- 
- Life can seem pointless – Sartre, a modern French philosopher, said the randomness of life and its ending in oblivion mean that life was entirely without meaning
  - Ending with nothingness seems to deprive life of meaning and purpose
  - Unbelief can make people less happy
  - Unbelief can lead to a fear of death.

### The Philosophers on Miracles

That was all by way of introduction. What we are now going to do is to study David Hume's work on Miracles from his essay

**“Concerning human understanding” first published in 1777.**

Hume was one of the first people to say he was an atheist and nothing happened. Neil Cantwell's book on “Miracles” is the source for what follows and an excellent book for extension reading. There are many definitions from modern philosophers such as Hick, Davies and Swinburne

#### Hume on Miracles

A common approach deciding whether there are such things as miracles is to ask what the **necessary** and **sufficient** conditions for using the term

⊞ A **necessary** condition is a property that a certain event has to have in order for it to be a miracle

But that may not be all there is to it.

⊞ A **sufficient** condition is a certain property which an event has to have which leads to it automatically being called a miracle.

**A miracle - as we already have said - is something that goes against a law of nature**  
**Aquinas(1225 -1274) said**

***“Those things which must properly be called miraculous which are done by divine power apart from the order generally followed in things”***

He says there are three kinds of miracles

**1. Events in which something is done by God which nature could never do**

Eg the sun going back on its course across the sky

**2. Events in which God does something which nature can do, but not in this order.**

Someone living after death

**3. Events which occur when God does what is usually done by the working of nature, but without the operation of the principles of nature**

Someone being instantly cured of a disease which doctors might have been able to cure given time.

Hume says

**"A miracle may be accurately defined "A transgression of the laws of nature by a particular volition of the deity or by the interposition of some invisible agent "**

Richard Swinburne defines miracles as

**"a violation of the law of nature by a God, that is, a very powerful rational being who is not a material object" ( ie is invisible and intangible)**

John Mackie defines one as

**"A miracle occurs when the world is not left to itself, when something distinct from the natural order as a whole intrudes into it.**

Swinburne gives examples from the Bible

⊖ Levitation

⊖ Resurrection from the dead by a man who has been dead for more than 24 hours

⊖ Water turning into wine

⊖ A man getting better from polio in a minute

There is an obvious similarity between Swinburnes' definition and that of Aquinas

**Summary:**

⊖ **A miracle is brought about when some invisible agent affects the working of the universe.**

***Problems with Humes' definition of Miracles***

The **interventionist** God

Brian Davies suggests that this view of God (known as deism) is unacceptable because it makes God a spectator - there is also the question of why he intervenes sometimes and not others

Theists see God as the preserver and sustainer of the universe and so totally present in everything that happens, miraculous or not.

Other theists say this is not a serious criticism as God sustains the natural laws independent (They operate of their own accord although part of his creation) of his existence and so intervention is possible

God has created a set of natural laws to sustain the universe but in exceptional circumstances may need to intervene

Cantwell points out that being omnipresent and intervening doesn't make much sense

⊖ ***The outcome of this debate depends on issues concerning the nature of God***

**What is a Natural law?**

John Hick defines natural laws as

**"Generalisations formulated retrospectively to cover what has in fact happened"**

From this definition it seems there can never be miracle because a natural law can never be broken

**"If some unusual event were to happen, outside the bounds of current natural laws, it would only lead to the widening of the natural law, rather than the event becoming miraculous"**

**Cantwell**

**"A related point is the idea that what may seem to be a case of a law of nature being broken may in fact be due to an incomplete description of the law in question."**

**" If the full law were known, then it would cover the so called miraculous event and therefore any attempt to define miracles in terms of breaking a law of nature faces the problem of uncertainty about whether or not such a law has been broken"**

**Cantwell**

**"The argument gains support from the fact that in earlier times we were ignorant of certain "natural laws" and so cannot be confident in any assertion that a natural law has been broken"**

**Cantwell**

**"Modern scientists suggest there is a fundamental degree of randomness at the basic level of nature...what we may term a miracle could be just the working of a law of nature that we are not yet aware of"**

**Cantwell**

Such as:

- ⊗ Life after death - if NDEs are later proved to be part of the laws of nature
- ⊗ Spiritual healing - later is explained by the operation of energy and forces which cause the atoms to act on the cells so that they heal.
- ⊗ When we watch the transporter on Star Trek
- ⊗ Or the medical ray gun
- ⊗ Or the manifestation and disappearance of monsters on Buffy

We assume that laws of nature are operating within this fictionalised story, yet if they were to happen in the classroom today, might we think they were miraculous ,or, as we become more sophisticated, are we never going to accept that a miracle has taken place - merely re define a law of nature?

Lets look at some Biblical miracles

The burning bush :The stilling of the storm :The feeding of the five thousand :The raising of Lazarus :The Resurrection appearances of Jesus:

Are these "classic miracles" the most famous and fundamentally recognised miracles of our society actually miracles from the vantage point of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? The big question about them is did they ever happen - are they invented as literary devices or re written and altered to make a spiritual point? But assuming they did happen are they miracles or might we one day have laws of nature to explain them?

If we do, does that mean there is no God?

**A different way of looking at miracles - the writings of RH Holland**

Holland has a completely different definition of miracle

**"A miracle need only be an extraordinary coincidence of a beneficial nature interpreted religiously"**

**Cantwell's summary of Holland**

The child on the railway track

This is Hollands' famous example

A child riding his toy car strays on to the crossing and gets his wheels stuck in the track. An approaching train cannot see and so there is no time for the brakes to be applied in time to stop. The train does stop however and this is because the driver fainted, the lack of pressure on the instruments caused the brakes to be applied

The mother ever afterwards regarded it as a miracle

Holland asserts that

**"A coincidence can be taken seriously as a sign and called a miracle" - such an event - "Cannot without confusion be taken as a sign of divine interference with the natural order"**

**Holland, in his article "The miraculous"**

**An anti realist says that miracles reveal things about God but God does not actually cause the miracle . Miracles are symbolic rather than literal and only exist in the life of the believer.**

**The realist believes that miracles contain deep religious significance and that God did cause the miracles to happen**

Basically this view is saying that miracles only exist in people's minds its all down to their interpretation of events depending on whether they are believers or not.

This seems to be all about people and their outlook on life rather than about whether anything "miraculous " actually happened

So far we have looked at defining a miracle which is about words.

Now we have looked at defining an event as a miracle and that is about personality

How would Hollands' belief be affected if the event happened to an atheist who then became a believer ?

None of this gets us any nearer to deciding whether miracles happen - very like the question of the existence of God - it all comes down to which of the two pilgrims you are , are you the person journeying through life who believes that everything happens by chance and at the end your life simply ends or are you the one who believes everything happens for a reason and that life ends at the celestial city? I wonder if that will come down to which side of the brain is dominant. Gallup discovered that many more women experience and describe and interpret NDEs than men - what is that all about? We are becoming increasingly aware of the role of the left and right brain in enabling people to be good at some activities and not others. Hollands' approach seems to depend largely on the way we interpret events

Take a plane crash with only one survivor. The family of the survivor think it's a miracle - what do the other families think? It's the same event - or is it? Is every event made up of infinitesimally small other events?

I am reminded of Sartre's reflection on the randomness of life - he thinks that the whole of life is such chance that life cannot have any meaning - even suicide is out of our control he says because we might be revived so , one of the issues is about whether we regard life as random or directed and planned - Do we have free will or are we determined?

**"The condition of deep religious significance seems to be the most plausible candidate for being both necessary and sufficient in order to call something a miracle"**

**Cantwell**

Is that satisfactory do you think

In summary Hume's argument seems to be that the witnesses who report on miracles are unreliable. Why should we believe what they have to say? He says that The existence of different religions makes it like a court of law, where each witness denounces the others as liars - each religion disagrees with the others, each claiming that their miracles are true and the others are not. And so that means that they are in fact denouncing their own! (add quote from Hume here )although this is not how we would see this nowadays - De Chardin, a modern Theologian, for example, sees all the religions moving towards the Omega point of a single understanding of spirituality, what he calls the Omega point

**"It is plausible to say that Hume has not presented any knockdown arguments for denying the possibility of miracles - Hume has presented many reasons for being cautious about believing reports of miracles but there doesn't seem to be any conclusive reason for saying miracles could not happen"**

***Cantwell***

**Why does God Perform miracles?**

Cantwell argues that some miracles seem to be pointless ,so do not fulfil the condition of having deep religious significance

Peter Vardy says

**"A God who intervened at Lourdes to cure an old man of cancer but does not act to save the starving millions in Ethiopia who helps an individual believer with a job, but does not prevent the mass murder of Jews at Auschwitz must face some hard moral questioning"**

This brings us to the problem of evil - why does god act in some cases and not others?

Maurice Wiles argues that these miracles cannot happen because if they did God would not be worthy of worship.

**"If the direct action of God ,independent of secondary causation is an intelligible concept, then it would appear to have been sparingly and strangely used"**

What do we make of the miracles of Jesus - yet the temple fell - I think there is an answer  
.How can you justify both those actions of God's and Vardy's comment

***If miracles are true and really do happen, does that prove the existence of God?***

## **Vocabulary / flashcards**

**Miracle** an event which goes against the laws of nature.an event which can only be caused by the intervention of a divine being

**Law of nature** Known processes by which the universe function, .repeated and always the same

**Hume** David Hume, Scottish philosopher of the 18<sup>th</sup> century who did not believe there were such things as miracles.

**R H Holland** Modern philosopher who said a miracle is an event which a person regards as such

**Interventionist God** God intervening to help some one sometimes

**Coincidence** accidental events occurring which *appear* to be connected and as the result of a plan

**Writing frame on miracles**

1. Summarise the definitions of miracles you have learned and the problems with them. (Hume and RH Holland)

**Level Five :why, because**

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

2. Are there such things as miracles - why do you answer as you do?

**Level Seven: Critical analysis**

.....  
.....  
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3. What might miracles prove?

**Level Six : The effects of religion on a person, family or community? Level Seven: Critical analysis.**

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.....  
.....  
.....

### **Levelled Essay:**

1.State Humes' argument against the occurrence of Miracles

**Level Five – Seven. 5 marks**

2.Explain the importance of "experience" in Humes' argument

**Level Five to Seven.5 marks**

3.Examine the criticisms which have been made of Humes', argument

**Level Seven :Critical analysis.5marks**

4.Assess the view that belief in miracles is essential for a religious person

**Level seven:Critical analysis.5 marks Section 9: Coping with Loss, Death and Change**

### **Teaching about death in the classroom**

This topic is the big one- the scariest topic to face in the classroom and the scariest topic to face ourselves. If you don't want to tackle it, don't. It is not essential, but if you follow my suggestions about approaching the topic of death, through exploring how we cope with the loss and change that goes on perpetually through out our lives you will find it pays rich rewards and your pupils will thank you for it.

Cruse bereavement care do an excellent pack of activities for schools called "Good Grief". Working from this superb and well thought out resource produced by people very experienced in the field inspired me to work with confidence in such a difficult and sensitive area.

### **Dealing with bereavement in school**

Most schools face tragedy at some time in their history with the loss of a pupil or teacher and are becoming increasingly skilful and sensitive in dealing with this important issue.

What deters teachers from dealing with this topic is lack of training and experience but primarily concern about distressing pupils. The chapter on dealing with sensitive issues in **Making RE make sense** may be helpful here but the main issue is that people need to be able to express grief in order to be able to accept their loss and move on. When tragedy strikes a school it can be tempting to adopt a heads down , let's keep everything normal approach. It is certainly easier on the surface, but actually increases pupil's distress and fear of death.

It is helpful to

- Have an assembly as soon as possible in which as much of the circumstances of the death as is possible is told to pupils. It deters rumour and quietens overactive imaginations. What people imagine is often worse than the reality.
  - Accept that school will be disrupted for a while, longer depending on the circumstances of the death.
  - Accept that it will raise unresolved issues to do with loss, for staff, as well as pupils and that it is helpful to encourage colleagues to talk to each other.
  - Pupils may want to talk about other bereavements they have experienced.
  - Set aside a room where pupils can go preferably with a member of staff to listen or just keep an eye and supply lots of tissues.
  - Put a photograph of the person who has been lost and some flowers in reception together with a book where pupils can sit and write their thoughts, memories and messages to their friend.
  - Hold a memorial service where pupils are invited to speak about their friend. In our school the family of the deceased pupil or member of staff have been invited to attend and have greatly appreciated this expression of support.
  - If pupils are not able to attend the funeral, a simple service in school around the time of the funeral held just for them will be important.
  - Accept that teenagers especially will weep and grieve dramatically and in groups. This may irritate staff but it is healthy and normal.
- 
- As adults we may find it tiresome and feel that if we had insisted on lessons as normal that this might not have happened. We might also feel that our youngsters are attention seeking. This may also be true. We have so many children with unmet needs that this opportunity to become the centre of attention because of this loss or, one that they recall because of the situation may be providing an opportunity for them to feel important and that they matter as individuals for their first time in their lives. This is an opportunity for personal growth and healing if we can be patient and wise enough to accept it.
  - Most of the children will be able to talk about the loss and other losses that they have experienced at home. Other pupils may not, I have found, having sadly, lost fourteen pupils in the course of my career, that pupils in the early years of secondary school do find bereavement issues from their own family raised because of their stage in life.
- 
- If they lost someone in early to middle primary school, they may not have expressed grief at the time. Parents may have tried to protect them so that they did not discuss it, feeling that the child was too young. They may also have thought it best that their child did not attend the funeral. These issues may all be raised by the death of someone at school, *even if they did not know the person who has died and therefore experience feelings of loss personally*. It is normal, appropriate and healthy for these feelings to be triggered and it is very helpful to point this out to pupils who may feel that only those who knew the deceased should be grieving. Letting pupils staff and parents know what to expect and that the feelings though intense are normal will be very helpful.

- The atmosphere will be very charged and will affect all sorts of people in different ways. After a week, or after the funeral, if it is fairly soon after the loss I am happy be firm about children being back in class. If they need to talk I invite them to come after school, in their own time.

## **Teaching about loss and death in RE**

I teach this where it arises naturally in the syllabus and this can be a number of places. I taught a term's course on bereavement as part of our PSE programme in years ten and eleven which was called Rites of Passage. In this course we followed the journey from birth to death, looking at the issues that arise at each stage along with the rituals and traditions that accompany them. Pupils will benefit, though from exploring this topic at appropriate times throughout their lives at school. Bereavement is no respecter of age and many young children will have suffered the trauma of losing a pet or grandparent by the time they arrive at infant school. By secondary school a significant number of pupils will have struggled to cope with loss in a whole variety of ways, not least through divorce and separation of their parents and the adaptation to a new step parent or blended family.

Another important point at which to pause and look at the impact of loss on our lives occurs when exploring rites of passage in the traditions. In many ways it is very strange to be studying the bald facts about burial and mourning customs without considering the emotional impact.

## **Over the years I have developed a threefold approach to this issue**

**1 Teaching about the impact of the constant cycle of loss and change throughout all our lives**, and helping pupils cope with transition

**2 Teaching about death and mourning and what happens when people grieve**, together with helping pupils consider how they can grieve well through using participatory symbols and learn to help their own children to cope with death.

**3. Teaching about death and mourning in the religious traditions** and re enacting them in class, together with helping pupils overcome their personal fear through re enactment and evaluate the importance of mourning rituals for everyone. This is how I do it. Helping children learn what happens at a Christian funeral is helpful. Perhaps looking at the words of the ceremony, a re enactment of a Christian funeral might be too emotional for some of them but the need of the children to talk about loss was marked. You need to decide how far your teaching is to provide information and how far you want to deal with feelings. As a counsellor I was comfortable with the latter. You might not be !

## **Teaching about coping with loss and change**

**“Grief is the loss of that which is familiar”**

### **Cruse, Bereavement Care**

Coming across this at the beginning of my bereavement training had a big impact on my thinking. Had I been asked to define grief, that is not what I would come up with. I would have focussed my efforts on describing the pain, but the more I thought about this definition the more apt and helpful it seemed as a way of helping us understand our lives as a whole. We are so busy living, that often we have little time to think about how we feel and what is happening to us. All day, every day, in a thousand ways, we are confronted by change, time and events are never still. We may perceive the changes as positive, negative or a mixture of both, depending on the impact of the change on our lives and our awareness of how it is making us feel.

### **Shiva – a symbol of perpetual change**

I began this work with pupils by looking at the image of **Shiva Natarajah**. Where this comes as part of a course on Hinduism it does so after pupils have explored the concept of the Atman (see Lesson recipe) and the Hindu concept of the trinity which together express the cycle of life

**Brahma**, the god of creation, represents the coming into being of all that exists

**Vishnu**, the god of preservation, represents all things existing for a while

**Shiva**, the god of destruction, represents that in time all things must end

- Looking at the image of **Shiva Natarajah** as Lord of the dance, we learn that the movement of the dance represents the dance of the atoms of which everything in the universe is made, constantly changing – nothing is created or destroyed, it only changes.
- The circle of flame in which he dances represents, symbolically, the flame of destruction and change.
- His flying scarf emphasises the speed with which life changes
- The message for us all however, lies in the symbols he carries and the expression on his face
- In one hand he carries the drum with which he announces the beginning of all things and the rhythm of the passing of time – minutes, days, hours and years
- In the opposite hand he carries the flame with which everything is destroyed.
- Another hand points down to his feet where he is crushing a dwarf that represents ignorance

- With another , he reassures us "Do not be afraid, because all things must pass, whether they are good or bad"
- Finally we look at his face, calm ,in the midst of this whirling activity, reminding us of how we should be, however good or bad life seems.

**We hit the spiritual target when we take this image and meditate on its significance with our classes, helping them become aware of the first step towards coping with loss and change – accepting the fact that change is inevitable**

The next step is to become aware of how change inevitably brings loss

### **Creating a time line of change in our lives**

Give out pieces of A3 paper and ask everyone to draw a wavy line along or around the paper which is to become a time line of their lives. Begin with birth and finish with the present day. In between, mark all the important events in our lives. The work is confidential pupils may share but do not have to. The work will be destroyed at the end of the lesson. While the pupils work, I do mine on the board. I give it here as an example

Age four brother born

Age five start school

Age ten Great Grandmother dies

Age eleven start secondary school

Age fifteen start Saturday job and meet future husband

Age eighteen leave school and start work

Age nineteen go to University

Age twenty parents separate

Age twenty two graduate and marry

Age twenty eight move house

Age thirty three first child born, teach part time

Age thirty six second child born

Age thirty nine return to work full time

Age 45 mother dies

Age 47 celebrate silver wedding

Age 48 begin writing and presenting Theatre of Learning

Age 52 celebrate pearl wedding

This is a very ordinary timeline with some obvious losses but most of the events are predictable milestones. The important learning comes at this point. Every change, however exciting, also involves a loss that needs grieving for. With the pupils I discuss what these losses are.

- The birth of siblings means sharing parental attention
- Starting school means losing mother or carer and freedom
- Starting a relationship means more sharing and compromise
- Getting married means leaving home and being responsible
- The joy of children means giving up doing what you want when you want

- Growing older with all its satisfaction means the loss of youth

It is helpful to explore with the children how even good things also mean losing something. This is because it helps them recognise the feelings associated with significant change in their lives and learn to accept them

### **Case study**

I worked in counselling with a bright, underachieving girl who was suffering from depression. She had no interest or energy to put into her school work. Her family had recently moved into the area from the North. Father had been made redundant and had moved down south for a new position. It was a nicer area and a better house. She felt she should be happy. As we explored this it came to light that she had left her older brother, to whom she was very attached, behind with Grandmother to complete his A levels. She had left her friends and was struggling to settle into her new school. The sense of loneliness and isolation was profound. Her parents were so pleased by the father's promotion but anxious that he should do well. He was working long hours while he established himself. The girl was in fact both *angry* with her parents for uprooting her, but also felt *guilty* about feeling this way. Her rational self told her she was not to blame. She was anxious not to burden them with her pain. She turned her unexpressed anger inward. The emotional energy to deal with all this left her drained and depressed. Recognising what was going on and allowing herself to feel it and express it made her feel a great deal better.

**In the end, the gains will outweigh the loss but the time while we are adapting can be painful. We have lost what we are used to, the familiar, and until the new state becomes familiar, too, it can be painful**

I usually ask who has moved house or changed schools. We explore, as happened in the case above, that although it might be for a reason that is not pleasant, very often it is. Parents have a new and better job, the house is bigger, maybe in a more pleasant area but what about the losses involved for the pupils? Losing friends and changing schools can be particularly hard at first.

I conclude by asking pupils to look at their timelines and note down what they have lost. The point being as we move towards looking at grief to raise the pupils awareness of the fact that everyone has suffered loss in their lives, it is inevitable and universal.

Although it may sometimes feel that life rains on them more than anyone else or that everyone else seems to swim happily through life, that might not be as true as they think.

At the end of the lesson we have a round on what we have learned today and pupils often say that learning what classmates have lost has been a great comfort to them.

### **Teaching about what happens when someone dies - the four stages of grief**

**These stages are usually used to help people learn about what happens to our feelings when we lose a person to whom we are closely attached.**

The more we are attached, the more it hurts. Sometimes we lose someone and it feels okay and it is because we weren't particularly attached to them. Just because we see a lot of someone or are related to them it doesn't mean we are *emotionally* attached and will automatically grieve when they die. Young people can often feel confused and upset that they have not felt sad at losing a grandparent, for instance. It may be simply that they did not see a lot of them and that their lives have therefore not altered much – they did not in fact lose something that was familiar leaving a big gap. Grief is not compulsory.

### **These stages apply to losing anything to which we were attached**

They are

- 1) **disbelief**
- 2) **Anger**
- 3) **Guilt**
- 4) **Acceptance**

Around all of the first three stages there may be feelings of sadness and depression

### **Stage One: Disbelief**

The first stage describes how when we suffer a loss, it does not seem real at first, that is because in a way nothing *has* changed. It is just a piece of news. It takes a while to sink in and for us to experience the absence. I remember my five year old son running into his grandmother's house to see his step grandfather, Tom, a few days after Tom had been buried. He stopped dead in front of his armchair and said "oh", sadly, as he remembered. "Grandad isn't going to be here any more, is he?" he asked. A similar scenario was repeated over the next few weeks until it began to sink in and Grandad's absence became familiar.

During this stage, which can last from a few hours to a few months, the bereaved may "see" the dead person, behave as though they are still there, lift the phone to make a call, find themselves unable to feel sad or cry, have a general feeling of unreality. This is particularly hard if there has been no body available for burial or cremation.

### **Stages Two and Three: Guilt and anger, needing someone to blame**

Stages two and three can often happen in either order or together. Guilt is often felt after someone has died.

"if only I had...."

- Said sorry,
- Not been cross last time we met,
- Sent the card or letter I had planned to,
- Visited more often,
- Told them I loved them,
- Spent more time with them,
- Done something different that might have prevented it happening."

The bereaved often blame themselves as though they could somehow have prevented the death

**Anger** is perhaps the most surprising. The bereaved may find themselves feeling angry with the dead person for abandoning them and then realising what they are feeling and feel guilty.

**Anger** may manifest itself by finding someone to blame

- Themselves
- The doctors
- The hospital
- Bystanders
- Survivors

### **An Example**

One afternoon two of our pupils in year nine crossed a busy road with their bicycles. One crossed safely. The second, followed a moment later, was knocked down and died. On Monday morning after a moving assembly given by our head teacher, I sat with the pupils from the dead pupils' form. I wanted them to be aware of those feelings and to know they would pass in time.

We talked about the stages of grief and experienced the sense of unreality. I waited for the guilt and anger to manifest itself. Over the next few days several pupils came to talk to me about their guilt.

They had snapped at the pupil the week before

They hadn't been getting along with them, recently

They had had unkind thoughts about them

They had thought about giving them a ring and arranging to meet that afternoon and now felt responsible for them being put at that place with their bicycle.

The bereavement raised unresolved grief in many pupil's lives. One girl cried for a friend lost the previous year, others for relatives that they had not felt able to mourn for fear of distressing their parents. I waited for the anger.

Towards the end of the first week the surviving pupil came to see me.

"They are blaming me for not stopping it happening. They say I should have seen the lorry and stopped my friend from crossing the road. I didn't see. I was ahead"

There was the child's own guilt mixed in with the anger of the other pupils to deal with. As I explained this to the child and then, one by one, to each class in the year, what we experience when we grieve they began to understand and the tension faded.

**The message for us all is be aware of feelings, accept them and let them do their work. Be aware of the need to blame someone, including yourself. Don't beat yourself up, or them.**

**The fourth stage : acceptance**

This happens when the loss itself becomes familiar, the sorrow is no longer the dominating feeling in our lives. We never forget the person we loved and lost but we are able to carry on our lives without it disabling us. The way to get to that stage is to allow the grieving process to do its work. One of the ways it can move through the stages is when we allow ourselves and others to express their sorrow.

- It may be through crying
- It may be by talking about the dead person
- Going over photographs
- Sitting in their room among their things

**This is a natural part of the healing process and should not be discouraged**

The grieving person immersing themselves in the memories is often distressing for others to witness. We ask them not to distress themselves by doing this. We may encourage the bereaved to give away the dead person's clothes, to redecorate their room, but this immersion in what remains of the loved one enables a person to experience the loss and make it familiar until it is accepted and they are able to move on. Incidentally it seems that where a relationship is particularly warm and successful that a person may be able to move on all the quicker and in the case of a partnership into a new one. It does not mean as children often think that the person was not really loved.

**It is helpful for children to know**

- The four stages of grief
- To accept feelings as they come
- That they might come in any order and there is no set time to grieve
- Grieving for someone to whom we are closely attached may take about two years
- To allow yourself and others time to grieve. Don't expect them to just get over it in a few weeks
- Being happy again is allowed!
- If a person forms a new relationship not long after losing a partner, it does not mean that they did not care for the first one

**Activities to Help Pupils Grieve**

**Using Religion neutral exercises and participatory symbols to help pupils deal with death**

Shortly after my seven year old daughter lost her step grandfather, she attended his burial where she asked, especially, to be allowed to approach the grave after the family had left, to look carefully and thoughtfully down at the coffin. When we got home, she called my husband and myself into the kitchen. She told us she had to write a letter to "Gran Tom". She asked us to fetch a dish and some matches and to light a floating candle in the dish. Following her instructions we lit the candle, turned out the light and sat at the table.

She read the letter she had written, to us, solemnly. In it she told her grandfather how much she loved him and missed him and spoke about special things she would always remember about him.

“Now, I am going to send it to him she said and put the letter in the dish where her father burned it for her. When it was gone my husband asked her gently “What would you like to do with the ashes , Jenny? Would you like to go to the beach and scatter them on the waves ?” No” she said “I am going to put them in this little box and keep them in my room ”She carefully labelled the box “Gran Tom’s ashes” and put it on a shelf among her treasures – much to the consternation of her friends! We don’t know what motivated Jenny to do this but it seems to have been very natural and instinctive. She obviously found it very comforting.

Jill Blanchard an inspirational teacher works in Manchester. She wrote the Evil planet (See Teaching Christianity ) while she was still training. She works in a multi cultural school with 50% Muslim pupils. She wrote to me about her work with a year seven class who had been learning about Anne Frank.

“I have found some worthwhile experiential lessons to do with remembrance and pupils creating their own ways of remembering. The pupils wanted a ceremony to remember the death of Anne Frank and also the Muslims in Palestine. The pupils wore their own badges and brought in from home symbols that meant something to them. These were things like photographs or jewellery. Some wrote prayers or readings We took it in turns to go round the room in a circle, presenting what each item meant and we lit a candle to remember. Some pupils asked to pray, others volunteered advice or sympathy. They then asked if they could display some of their symbols and show how they remembered .This was a very rewarding lesson – very special”

An important part of the debrief after teaching about death or re enacting a funeral is to invite pupils to consider how they can express their grief in participatory symbols

- Have a tray of tea lights ready. Invite pupils in turn in the circle to light a candle for someone they have lost. Do this at the beginning of a lesson to set the atmosphere and engage their feelings. They may say “this is for ....or remain silent, or pass altogether if they wish.
- Invite pupils to place a stone by the grave in a Jewish funeral re enactment
- Invite pupils to place some earth in a dish containing flowers and a lit candle at a Christian re enactment
- Discuss how they might enable themselves to feel better about any unfinished business or not having been able to say goodbye. They might find it helpful to write a letter. What might they like to do with the letter?

It seems that the desire for symbol and ritual is as universal as spirituality itself. Secular pupils value the opportunity to explore this dimension of their lives in RE. This is an example of something that experiential RE can give them that will continue to nourish the inside bits long after they have left school.

## Teaching about Death as a Rite of Passage: Re-enacting a Funeral

This would have different implications in a faith school or one where a significant number of pupils come from a variety of religious traditions.

It is important to prepare pupils for this in advance. I ask them if they would like to do this as part of their lessons on coping with loss and change. They have always said yes. I usually give three weeks notice and remind them each week.

I describe very explicitly what will happen in the lesson. Pupils who do not wish to attend can sit in the library. In a year group of three hundred, usually only one or two do not attend the lesson. We talk beforehand as part of the preparation about what would happen if someone cries. We have issues on hand in the lesson. It is all part of allowing people to express their emotions and giving boys particularly the message that it is okay to cry.

Re enacting a Jewish funeral (See **Teaching Judaism**) and learning about Jewish mourning customs has not been an emotional issue for pupils in my classes. Re enacting a Christian funeral is .

- Pupils come into appropriate music. I use Verdi's requiem, the kryrie
- When the class are present and in the circle I fade the music
- In the centre of the circle is a plain box to represent a coffin. This is draped in black velvet with a bunch of lilies on top
- The suggestion of a coffin is a helpful part of the experience in enabling pupils to deal with their fears
- In the first part of the lesson I talk about what happens when a Christian dies
- We talk about what happens when the family know that a relative is dying
- They may wish to say goodbye
- Pupils may wish to share their experiences
- We talk about what might happen when a Christian dies
- I describe the rituals that might be used for a Roman Catholic ,confession and extreme unction
- For an Orthodox Christian we consider icons placed on the forehead, the open coffin full of flowers and the dish of wheat representing the resurrection
- We talk about how a body is prepared for burial or cremation and the possibility of visiting the chapel of rest
- Pupils may share experiences if they wish
- I describe what happens at a funeral or cremation
- Finally, to soft music I read extracts from the Church of England funeral service
- It is at this point that pupils may weep quietly
- Pupils are invited to lay a pebble beside the coffin as Jewish do. You may wish to invite pupils to light a candle or lay a flower there for someone they have lost.

### The Debrief

- All pupils have felt the experience is worthwhile even though not pleasant

- Some have welcomed being able to cry for a dead relative for the first time.
- Some have used the opportunity to talk to parents about a bereavement, perhaps one that took place when they were younger and not able to talk about it.
- Pupils have felt more open about discussing the topic at home and allowing both themselves and their parent to cry
- Many pupils resent not having being allowed to attend funerals when they were younger and say that they will be more ready to talk to their own children about death
- Many pupils express gratitude about having the opportunity to discover what a funeral is like. Others are pleased to be able to listen to the words calmly having been too upset to attend a real one.
- Many pupils say thank you for the experience

I invite pupils to write a record of the lesson afterwards. This may be a description of what we did and why. This may include, thoughts, feelings. Reflections and questions if they wish.

**There are no tasks for this unit of work as this would not be appropriate**