

Appendix P

Working Sensitively with Faith Communities

Teachers are often concerned that in RE there are many occasions when they might do 'something wrong' and offend somebody. The following pages are written to correct some common misconceptions and support teachers to use artefacts and engage with religious traditions sensitively.

Teaching about religions and using religious objects

For many faiths, religious artefacts have sacredness in their own right and should be treated with great respect as there is a belief that the objects possess their own innate spirituality. Pupils with a background in some traditions will not necessarily be aware of this.

Christianity

Icons

Many Orthodox traditions of Christianity use icons as part of the process of worship. These are pictorial representations of saints, patriarchs, etc. They are often held in great veneration by Orthodox assemblies, and adherents kiss the icon or the wall to which it is attached. They are often considered as objects which have their own spirituality and as such should not be passed around the class or treated lightly.

Bread and wine

The symbols used in Holy Communion, whether bread and wine or wafer and wine, are held in great reverence by some Christians as more than symbols of the Last Supper but actual physical manifestations of Jesus' body and blood. Great sensitivity must be given to the use of these objects if they are to be shown in the classroom. Communion wafers or Priest Breads should be kept wrapped and not passed individually from hand to hand. It is not acceptable to have wafers in the classroom which have been sanctified or blessed.

General guidance

Do not assume Christian belief by using phrases like 'we believe' as this will not be appropriate for all pupils. As with all religions, distancing devices should be used e.g. " Many Christians believe ..."

Support the pupils to understand that the Communion or Eucharist is also a memorial service as expressed in Jesus' words, "Do this in remembrance of me".

Explain that Christianity has diversity and takes a wide variety of different forms; eg: Catholic, Orthodox, Church of England, Pentecostal, Baptist, Quaker etc

Use the term Holy Spirit rather than Holy Ghost when referring to the third person of the Trinity

Teach the resurrection as part of the Easter story. However difficult it may seem, the resurrection and the crucifixion of Jesus are inextricably linked and one should not be mentioned without the other.

Hinduism

Hindu Scriptures such as The Vedas or The Bhagavad Gita can be kept in school but they should be treated with respect, wrapped when not in use, (preferably in a red cloth), placed on a book stand when being read and never, under any circumstances, placed on the floor.

Murti

Images of gods (murti), whether models or pictures, should not be placed on the floor and all Hindu religious objects should be kept away from shoes or from objects which are made from leather. If a shrine is built or a puja set displayed, it should be placed on a surface which has been cleaned and covered by a cloth. The colour red is considered auspicious. A useful approach is to create a shrine in the corner of the room in the same way as it would be displayed in a Hindu home. To make it more authentic, use coloured 'Christmas' lights and garlands around the shrine.

General Guidance

When teaching about Hindu belief in god do not suggest that all Hindus believe in many gods. The Hindu belief in God is more complex than this. Hindus believe that Brahman is the name given to the ultimate life force. Many Hindus would say there are many gods and goddesses but only one God and that is Brahman. The most important deities are the Trimurti which represents the three aspects of God. These are Brahma – the creator, Vishnu – the preserver and Shiva – the destroyer. Hindu families will devote themselves to one or two particular gods or goddesses as a way of coming to God. Some people devote themselves to the human forms of the god Vishnu, known as Avatars. Vishnu is believed to have come to Earth in human and animal form for example as Rama and Krishna.

Avoid trivialising the concept of Samsara (reincarnation) by suggesting that in one's next life one may be reincarnated as a species other than human. Whilst it may be possible to leap from human to another species, Hinduism explains that this process is a slow one taking place over many incarnations.

Islam

The Qur'an

Muslims believe that the Qur'an is God's word, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) through the angel Jibriel (Gabriel), over a period of twenty three years. The Qur'an focuses on mankind's relationship with God. It is seen as a guide to life for everyone; the revelations touch upon all aspects of human existence from doctrine to social organisation and legislation. Though translations are available in many languages, only the Arabic version is regarded as the true Qur'an.

It is thus a book treated with a great deal of respect, but more importantly it is an object that should be read and used on a regular basis by all. Opinions vary as to whether you can hold the Qur'an without washing first. It is a good teaching point to wash your hands before touching the Qur'an and ask the children to do the same. Copies of translations in English are available from, for example, the Islamic Foundation or the Islamic Society of Britain. Some insist on wrapping the Qur'an in cloth or placing it on a high location, but this is Asian cultural practice rather than Islamic teaching. A Qur'an stand is sometimes used to hold the Qur'an when reading but is not essential and is not a sacred object.

Prayer Mat

Muslims will often perform their prayers whilst standing on a prayer mat, although this is not essential. Prayer mats can be found in various colours materials and sizes. They are not sacred objects and therefore may be passed around the class for pupils to look at.

General guidance

Think about the forms of artwork Muslim children are asked to undertake. Patterns, designs, buildings and landscapes are usually acceptable but representing animate forms like animals or humans might raise difficulties. Muslim children should never be asked to draw God or Allah. Use the verbal picture of the 99 names of Allah when teaching about God in Islam.

Muslims do not refer to Muhammad (pbuh) as 'the founder of Islam'. Muhammad (pbuh) is the last and final Prophet of Islam. Muslims believe that their faith preceded Muhammad and goes right back to the earliest beginnings of human kind.

Pupils should not be asked to role-play scenes as Muhammad (pbuh) or as one of his companions.

The term God or Allah can be used when talking about the divine. Allah means 'the God' and is believed to be the same God worshipped by Abraham, Moses and Jesus.

Be cautious about exposing pupils to Islamic sounds without preparation. There are recordings of the Call to Prayer and Qur'anic readers which are intensely beautiful but to untrained Western ears they can seem unusual.

Never equate Islam with terrorism and violence; eg: avoid photographs which apparently show Muslims holding swords, spears etc. The greater Jihad in Islam refers to the idea of struggle in life. The lesser Jihad refers to using force as a means of self-defence.

Judaism

Tephilin

These are small black leather boxes worn on the head and arm during prayer by orthodox Jews. They contain scripture from the Torah. These scriptures are sacred objects to the Jews so the tephilin should not be opened or examined by hand. Some orthodox Jews may be unhappy at these objects being touched by females and many would prefer that these artefacts are not used in the classroom.

The Torah

The most sacred Jewish holy book is the Torah. Torah means teaching. It is written on a scroll and kept covered and placed in a special cabinet or cupboard called the Ark, in the synagogue. The written surface should not be touched by hand and the place is kept during reading by a yad or pointer. It is acceptable to have a yad but not a real Sefer Torah as you would find in the synagogue, although it is sometimes possible to obtain a miniature paper copy of the kind given as a present at a Bar Mitzvah. This, however, should also be treated with respect.

Mezuzah Case

These are small brass or silver cases which contain an inscription from the Torah. They are placed on the door lintel of each door in the orthodox Jewish household with the exception of the toilet. It is quite permissible to have one for use in the classroom but it must be empty and not contain scriptures.

General Guidance

Judaism is a religion with family and celebration as important parts of belonging to the faith. Although Judaism might be based on fulfilling the 613 mitzvot, this is not seen as a burden. They are undertaken with sincere intention and with joy. Ensure teaching about Judaism includes a balance and is not only about obeying rules.

Do not use the dating system BC (before Christ) and AD (anno domini) as it assumes that Jesus was the Christ. BCE (before the common era) and CE (common era) are widely used by Jewish writers and others.

It is appropriate to refer to the first 39 books of the Bible as being 'the Jewish Bible' or 'the Tenakh'.

Don't make use of 'Yahweh' or 'Jehovah' with reference to God. The Hebrew letters standing for God - YHWH - are never spoken out loud. Instead phrases like 'Lord', 'the Holy One', 'King of the Universe' were always used.

Make sure you are clear about the difference between the Menorah and the Hanukiah. The menorah is the seven branched candelabrum and symbol of Judaism, the hanukiah, is the nine branched candelabrum used at the festival of Hanukah.

When teaching about Jerusalem talk about the Western Wall and not the wailing wall. The term wailing suggests that Jewish prayer is negative and moaning.

Sikhism

Guru Granth Sahib

The Sikh holy book is the Guru Granth Sahib. It is treated with tremendous respect, as if it were human, hence the use of 'Guru'. It is kept in a bed in a special room or at certain times on a throne. It is kept covered by a cloth called a romalla, often decorated with Sikh symbols. A chauri is wafted periodically over the scriptures when they are being used. You should not have access to a copy of this in school although you may have extracts from songs, prayers or scripture or a prayer book, usually the Sacred Nitnem, which should be kept wrapped when not in use, and on a book stand when being displayed.

Kirpan

One of the 5 Ks of Sikhism is the kirpan or sword. It symbolises the Sikhs' willingness to fight against oppression. It should not be taken from its sheath as this would almost never be done if the object were owned by an initiated Sikh and would cause great offence.

Kaccha

The kaccha are the undershorts that are worn by all baptised Sikhs, men and women. There are obvious sensitivities in having this artefact handled in the classroom. Some Sikhs would prefer schools not to have kaccha, but some Sikhs argue that as one of the five Ks, this should be available. If you have kaccha, it is probably best to keep them in a clear plastic bag for viewing and they should not be passed round the teaching group from student to student.

Artefacts from Sikhism should not be shown, examined or explored in a room where smoking has been taking place or where alcohol has been used. Materials should not be handled by teachers who have tobacco on their person.

General Guidance

The Amrit ceremony should not be referred to as being the 'Sikh Baptism'. The two rituals are not good parallels.

When referring to the Sikh holy book always use appropriately respectful terms such as 'Guru Granth Sahib' or 'Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji'. Don't use the term 'Granth' by itself.

The five K's should be appropriately titled. The kirpan is not a 'dagger', however small, it is a 'sword'. The kara should not be called a bracelet as it suggests that it is only a piece of jewellery. It is a steel band.

Religious Festivals and Fasts

Schools are reminded that:

- The observance of festivals and fasts provides good opportunities for learning about and from religion.
- Festival calendars, published annually, provides accurate information one year in advance on most of the festivals and fasts observed by faith communities in England.
- Since officially only Christian holy days are recognised, school attendance may be affected when other faiths are observing festivals and fasts. Schools need to plan for this development.

Places of Worship

Arranging a School Visit to a Place of Worship

Although visits may involve quite a lot of work to organise they can really bring a religion to life for children. Learning outside the classroom is often more meaningful to pupils and is remembered for far longer, enabling them to connect the experiences to other parts of their learning. The Agreed Syllabus expects that children will have the opportunity to visit some of these places of worship during their education.

SACRE have put together a list of places of worship to visit in Wiltshire – please see Appendix A1

Detailed information on how to arrange a visit to a place of worship, background information and suitable activities for pupils can be found on the following extremely useful website.

<http://pow.reonline.org.uk/>

Why visit places of worship?

- Visits provide opportunities to meet people of faith in their community setting.
- The atmosphere in a place of worship cannot be simulated in a classroom.
- A visit provides opportunities to experience the sacred in an appropriate setting. (Many artefacts and some holy scriptures can only be seen in the place where they are used).
- Visits can contribute to the self-esteem of pupils whose place of worship is being visited and can facilitate school and community links.
- Visits can enrich the learning process. Educationists agree that experiential learning is more effective than simply learning from texts and electronic sources. Pupils usually enjoy their visits and learning is enhanced.
- To provide an experience of the numinous; visitors become awakened to a sense of awe and wonder.
- Education is about extending pupils' knowledge, understanding and experience of the world and a visit to a place of worship can help to do this

- Religion is a very important factor in society and it is essential that children have opportunities to explore religious practice and belief
- The experience of visiting a place of worship can help children to learn about religions but is never about indoctrination or persuading children and young people to agree with the beliefs of the religion being studied. Visits are usually part of a planned curriculum and are integral to the learning that will take place; to miss out on the visit would seriously impact on pupils' progress and understanding.
- There are always opportunities for cross-curricular learning and many aspects of the school curriculum can be studied through a religious building, including the arts, literacy, history, mathematics and design.

Preparation for visits

- It is essential that teachers make contact *beforehand* with their hosts and all concerned with the visit.
- Careful preparation regarding appropriate behaviour, dress and purposes of the visit will help to make the visit a successful learning experience.
- Discuss with a representative from the place of worship what children will see and what they will participate in. This will save awkward moments when children aren't sure whether to take part or observe.
- Background materials on people, culture, religion, and uses of the place of worship can help visitors to gain a deeper understanding its purpose.
- Prepare questions and tasks to direct children's attention to some features, and to evoke use of all senses and awareness of atmosphere, their feelings etc, - not just facts.
- Quality activities - should include some open-ended questions.
- Perhaps a talk by a visitor could be arranged but it cannot be assumed that members of faith communities are skilled in talking to children. Clear briefing is necessary. There may be possibilities for sketching, photography, tape-recording etc. Permission should be sought *before* the visit.
- Ensure that the person who will take you around the place of worship is aware of the purpose and theme of your visit so the talk to the children can have a specific focus.
- Visitors to places of worship will not be obliged to do anything they do not wish to.
- Eating, chewing gum and drinking are not allowed. However, in mandirs food may be offered as part of the experience.
- Teachers should be aware that strong and vivid imagery may be encountered during some visits.

Protocols for visiting places of worship

Dress and Respect Code

- Visitors are always made welcome but **quiet, considerate, respectful behaviour** is expected. **If worship is in progress**, visitors should remain STILL and SILENT.
- If worship is not in progress, questions are welcome.
- **Modesty in dress** is expected and in those places where women and girls must cover the legs, ankle-length skirts or trousers should be worn. Thick tights are not an acceptable form of leg covering.
- To a greater or lesser extent there is a norm among Hindu, Sikh, Muslim and Jewish communities that menstruating women do not to come to the place of worship. Teachers and pupils need to be aware of this cultural/religious tradition but make their own decision on the basis of their own convictions.

Specific dress codes

Buddhist temple-

No head covering is usually required. Preferably wear tops with long sleeves. Shoes will need to be removed before entering the building.

Church-

There is generally no particular dress code for visiting a church; however some churches would expect shoulders to be covered. Traditionally men and boys would uncover their heads.

Gurdwara

Visitors will be expected to cover their heads and remove their shoes.

Mandir

Visitors should dress modestly, avoiding shorts, short skirts, bare arms or tight fitting clothes. Shoes will need to be removed before entering the prayer hall.

Mosque

Visitors should dress modestly, preferably wearing trousers or mid calf length skirts. Clothes should not be tight-fitting or revealing and arms should be covered. Men and women should cover their heads. On entry to the mosque, shoes will need to be removed.

Synagogue

Visitors should dress modestly, avoiding shorts, short skirts, bare arms or tight fitting clothes. Men should cover their heads. In strict orthodox synagogues, married women are required to wear head coverings.

Parental Objections to Places of Worship Visits

We are aware that sometimes some parents object to their children visiting certain places of worship. The reasons for parental refusal vary greatly and include the cost of the trip as well as religious and, sometimes, racist objections. We recommend strongly that schools always ask parents to explain their decision, whilst remembering that parents have the right to withdraw their children from some or all of religious education, on grounds of conscience.

It is important to have a very clear rationale available to all parents and others about visits to places of worship. Advice about reasons is outlined elsewhere in this document.

There are many ways in which teachers and governors can try to prevent the difficult situation in which a parent refuses to give permission. These include:

- having a clear policy on which parents and pupils have been consulted, which has been ratified by the governing body and which is supported by all members of the school community. This can be incorporated into the race equality policy or the RE policy.
- inviting parents to attend trips to places of worship as helpers;
- using parents' evenings, assemblies, displays and newsletters to promote understanding of religious and cultural diversity and of previous visits to places of worship;
- being unequivocal in the school's approach to racism, stereotyping and prejudice;
- working with the local community to raise awareness – the local Christian church supporting the visit to the mosque, for example;
- having a period of preparation for the visit so that pupils' interest and enthusiasm are high;
- stressing the purpose of the visit to parents, some of whom might have an incorrect view of what will happen – such as expecting participation in others' worship.