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Introduction

This book is part of a series on **Beliefs and Issues** which provides teaching and learning material for Key Stage 3 Religious Education. The series has been developed and written with the belief that good religious education can be seen as relevant, interesting and engaging to all students since it is concerned with studying aspects of the 'human condition'. For all of religious education there is a strong link with human experience. There are important or 'ultimate' questions that all people ask at some time in their lives. There are a number of sources for possible answers to these questions. Religions provide answers based on their own set of beliefs. It is important for students to be able to understand and appreciate views, opinions and beliefs other than their own in today's world of secularism, multi-culturalism and religious diversity.

The material seeks to:

- identify the link between human experience and religious ideas;
- engage and motivate students through active involvement in a range of activities;
- develop higher order thinking skills;
- promote greater understanding and acceptance of differing views and beliefs;
- develop skills of analysis, reasoning and discussion.

The non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education has also guided the development of the material, particularly in that it:

- seeks to 'place value on the ethos and values that religious education can establish independent of any faith';
- states that RE should enable students 'to develop positive attitudes to their learning and to the beliefs';
- states that 'RE can transform students' assessment of themselves and others, and their understanding of the wider position of the world in which we live'.

The Framework states that RE should promote values of truth, justice, respect for all and care of the environment. There is also a special emphasis on:

- students valuing themselves and others;
- the role of family and community in religious belief and activity;
- the celebration of diversity in society through understanding similarities and differences;
- sustainable development of the Earth.

The **Beliefs and Issues** series supports the development of these values and attitudes through the subject matter covered and the learning activities that are suggested. Students are encouraged to listen to others, to express their own opinions openly and productively; to be able to disagree while maintaining respect for an opposing view and to be open to having their own opinions, beliefs and understanding challenged and possibly changed.

The series of books are intended to be used across Key Stage 3. The National Framework for RE seeks to be 'robust' but also 'flexible'. The Beliefs and Issues material has also sought to balance these two facets. Although material is numbered, it is not necessarily intended to be used sequentially. Those responsible for overall planning need to have scope for creativity as they produce schemes of work for their individual situations. As a general rule, Year 7 students may concentrate on learning about religions and some of the explicit features of these, while certain moral and ethical issues may be better tackled in later years. However, younger students should not be denied the opportunity to discuss issues with which they are confronted in other areas of life. For example, they will be aware of issues such as global poverty from television and other media coverage. They may well be actively engaged in addressing this, even if this is simply through buying and wearing a 'Make Poverty History' arm band. So, rather than dictating when a particular topic should be covered, the material is presented much more in discrete units which can be identified and allocated to particular points in the Key Stage programme by the teacher responsible.

The material relates to the QCA scheme of work but is not arranged to match it directly. For example, the QCA unit 7E is 'What are we doing to the environment?' In this QCA unit, students study the approaches of different religions to issues of conservation and stewardship, using a variety of sources to explore the teachings of different religions and how beliefs affect the lives of believers. They compare, contrast and evaluate the views of each religion and reflect on the relevance to their own lives of what they have learnt.

This unit can be covered through the Beliefs and Issues series with teachers locating and using the relevant sections from the Student Book and the Teacher Guide for each religion being studied by students in their school. It would be possible to revisit this topic at different stages, perhaps introducing ideas from different religions each time.

A similar approach can be used to tackle other QCA units, such as 9B 'Where did the universe come from?' or 9C 'Why do we suffer?', which require students to consider ideas from a number of different religious viewpoints as well as secular philosophies such as humanism.

There are close links with the 'knowledge, skills and understanding' and 'breadth of study' from the National Framework and these are made clear for each unit.

This book accompanies the *Christian Beliefs and Issues* Student Book. It is intended to assist the teacher in making the most of that book by providing a flexible and useful resource which gives clear guidance for lessons based on the Student Book material.

The Teacher Guide has been written with both the non-specialist and the dedicated RE teacher in mind. The format for each piece is such that a non-specialist teacher has all that they require to deliver quality lessons which reflect the philosophical approach of the National Framework for RE. At the same time, the material is flexible enough for specialist teachers to use ideas from within the 'lessons' which can be incorporated into existing lessons or as part of the school's scheme of work.

The material is presented as discrete 'lessons', based on each double page spread of the Student Book. For each 'lesson', there is a starter activity, ideas for the main teaching section and a plenary and, in some cases, suggestions for the use of a photo from the CD-ROM as a stimulus for discussion. Relevant questions are provided for this activity which, like the starter activity, is intended to promote thinking skills.

The starter activity is provided to stimulate the students' thoughts and encourage some interactivity. The starter is themed so that it can be used to lead directly into the rest of the session.

The main teaching section gives instructions and guidance on how to work through the material in the Student Book. It contains suggestions for questions to stimulate discussion as well as background information where it is felt to be necessary. There are suggestions for additional activities which might be for individual students, pairs, small groups or the whole class.

The plenary is included to indicate how best to draw a session to a close, recalling and reinforcing the main teaching points.

Almost all the sessions have an associated Copymaster.

Although the above is the format for the presentation of the material, it is not the intention to limit the use of the material to individual lessons. It might be possible to work through a designated subject within that time frame but it may not give sufficient time for the students to really get to grips with some of the issues. There will be other reasons for wanting to spend more than one lesson on a given topic. Equally, there may be ideas from the books which you can use as part of an overall lesson you have planned around other material. In short, the material is presented as lessons and can be used as such but also contains 'stand alone' material which could be extracted for use outside the given format.

The activities in the Student Book are set out in the same order in the Teacher Guide. They are placed in the teacher guidance at the earliest point at which it would be sensible to ask the children to attempt them, usually when there has been some input or discussion. They provide for students to be actively engaged at points throughout the lesson. Beyond this, there is no strict timing for when the students carry out these tasks. So, for example, a teacher might feel that they would rather leave all the activities until the end of the direct teaching.

The activities offer an opportunity for a range of learning styles and provide a good deal of work for students. These are usually multi-ability tasks with differentiation being mainly by outcome. As has been said, the Teacher Guide also contains ideas for additional activities in the main teaching section. Neither these nor the Copymasters are intended as extension activities, available only to those who complete the exercises from the Student Book. They are activities which are intended to give further opportunities for students to reflect, analyse and respond and, in the case of the Copymasters particularly, to provide an assessment record indicating a student's level of understanding regarding a particular topic.

Some of the activities from the Student Book and the Teacher Guide would be suitable as homework projects, particularly some of the 'Take Time To Think' questions from the Student Book. Occasionally this suggestion is indicated in the material but, for the majority, this has been left to the discretion of the teacher or person responsible for RE planning.

WHY DO PEOPLE BELIEVE IN GOD?

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK LINKS

- 1c: investigate and explain why people belong to faith communities and explain the reasons for diversity in religion
- 2a: reflect on the relationship between beliefs, teachings and ultimate questions, communicating their own ideas and using reasoned arguments
- 3c: beliefs and concepts: the key ideas and questions of meaning in religions and beliefs, including issues related to God, truth, the world, human life, and life after death
- 3o: discussing, questioning and evaluating important issues in religion and philosophy, including ultimate questions and ethical issues

CD-ROM

- Display the photo of the damaged street.
- Ask students to suggest what they think has happened. (Possibly war damage or a natural disaster.) Suggest war damage if students do not.
- Ask how religious people might feel in such a situation.
- Ask how the situation might affect people who believe in God. What questions might this type of event provoke?
- Keep a note of the different responses to war damage and natural disasters. Ask if human beings are more obviously responsible for one rather than the other.
- If the damage is the result of 'natural' disaster, ask if anyone is responsible.
- Say that some people would say that such catastrophic disasters are evidence that God does not exist.

STARTER ACTIVITY

- Display an optical illusion that can be interpreted in two ways.
- Ask students to decide what the picture shows.
(*Two equally valid interpretations of the same 'evidence'.*)
- Or display the question "What is truth?"
- Record feedback from the class, which could include references to different types of evidence, evidence from our senses, personal experiences, documentary, etc.

MAIN TEACHING

Say how the starter activity opens up the question of how we decide whether something is real or true. Ask a simple question with an obvious answer, e.g. "Is the door open?" Everyone can agree on the answer. Say that, for some questions, there is no easy answer and sometimes no answer that everybody will agree on.

Does God exist?

- Read through the material and ask students to consider the two quotes. The Psalmist writes of a God who created and sustains the universe and found comfort. Pascal saw cold, empty vastness and was terrified. Give students two minutes to discuss how they feel with a partner.
- Read through the reasons given for belief in the existence of God.
- Students complete 'Over to You' (1-3).

(There is still a great deal of debate about 'Intelligent design'. Many scientists from a range of disciplines have concluded that the evidence from their studies points to an intelligent creator of the universe. Others argue that any apparent design is the result of random events, changes and mutations over millions of years.)

Does everyone believe in God?

- Display the word "theism" and say that this means a belief in the existence of God or gods. Say that not all religions are theistic. (Buddhists, for example, do not believe in a God.)
- Read through the definitions of atheist, agnostic and theist.
- Students carry out 'Over to You' (4).

Humanists and God

- Read through this section. Point out that the humanist assertion that all the goodness and kindness in the world comes from human beings leaves the question about where the badness and unkindness comes from.
- Students carry out 'Over to You' (5). Ask students to consider the circumstances that lead them to behave kindly or thoughtfully. Explain that they need to think about their motivations.
- Students carry out 'Over to You' (6). Point out that the question is whether human beings are basically good and kind. It is not saying that people always behave in this way.

Believing in God when bad things happen

The underlying assumption in this opening paragraph is that God has a direct hand in all events. The middle bullet points provide for more discussion regarding how humans respond in the face of suffering and the extent to which human beings are responsible for some suffering such as wars and even 'natural' disasters (for example, global warming').

PLENARY

- Ask individual students to recap on some reasons people might give for the existence of God.
- Say that the question of the existence of God is crucial for some people as it helps them to see a purpose to life.
- Say some statements and ask students to say who might have said them (an atheist, a theist or an agnostic).

"I don't believe in God because there is no scientific proof."

"I sometimes see a beautiful view and I think 'This can't be just accidental' but then I see such suffering in the world."

"Praying really helped me through a difficult time in my life."

- Ask how a humanist might respond to the last statement.