

The questions we might ask:

- *How do we know?*
- *What is a truth claim?*
- *What is belief?*
- *How do different people define the term 'religion'?*

The ideas we might explore

- Different ways of gaining knowledge and exploring what we know, e.g. rationalism, empiricism, epistemology, religious/spiritual experience
- Truth claims as facts, statements made in accordance with reality, expressions of belief, etc.
- The relationship between facts, opinions, beliefs, truth, faith and reason
- Diverse ways in which people understand the term 'religion', e.g. a formalised system of belief and practice, devotion to a particular thing (secular or divine), belief in and worship of a supernatural being or controlling power
- The distinction between religion and spirituality

Lincolnshire Locally Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education

KS3 Additional Unit: Philosophy and Religion – What is Religion, What is Belief?

Suggestions for Teaching and Learning

By [Gillian Georgiou](#), Diocesan RE Adviser

<p><i>How do we know?</i></p>	<p>Thinking:</p> <p>Ask students to explain how they know the table they are sitting at is real – what information do they have that tells them it is there and not an illusion? (e.g. their senses, previous experience, information from figures of authority, such as teachers, etc.)</p> <p>Ask students to explain how they know that beauty is real – can they use the same evidence to show that beauty has existence and isn't an illusion?</p> <p>Provide a series of optical illusions – ask students if they can always trust their senses</p> <p>You could introduce Plato's Allegory of the Cave to explore this further; note that the key feature of this story is that it is the job of the philosopher to make the effort to try and see things differently; to test different ways of understanding and knowing about the world.</p> <p>Introduce the key terms: reason and experience, rationalism and empiricism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reason = the power of the mind to think, understand and form judgements logically • Experience = practical contact with and observation of facts and events; uses the senses to engage with the world around us
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rationalism = we can gain knowledge independently of sense experience by using our ability to reason about the world around us (e.g. René Descartes, etc.) • Empiricism = we can gain knowledge through sense experience; this knowledge is more likely to be true because we can subject it to testing in order to check it (David Hume, John Locke, etc.) <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5CW2ms9s0Y0&list=PLcvEcrcF_9zKz1Bb5bLB4kbCK6dgt1O9o (How can we know the world exists? BBC Teach)</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LmxlcJFTaYU (How do you know you are real? René Descartes and rationalism)</p> <p>https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02pdc6n (René Descartes and knowledge)</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQ2qjVkJm6s (David Hume and the importance of empiricism)</p> <p>Ask students to produce a summary of the four key terms they have explored (reason, experience, rationalism and empiricism) and make connections between these ideas and philosopher's job as one who investigates how we know/gain knowledge. This summary could be visual (a poster/presentation/display/app/vlog) or audio (a podcast or recorded interview).</p>
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<p><i>What is a truth claim?</i></p>	<p>Thinking:</p> <p>Ask students to consider whether the following are true statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tomorrow, the sun will rise. • The England Women’s football team will win the next World Cup • This table exists. • This school is a good school. <p>Revisit the key concepts reason, experience, rationalism and empiricism.</p> <p>Introduce Socrates (“the only thing I know is that I know nothing at all”) – ask pupils to discuss why curiosity is an important part of seeking truth.</p> <p><u>Truth claims in religion:</u></p> <p>Introduce the idea that one of the key truth claims made by religious people is that God exists. Ask students to mind-map words, images and ideas that they associate with the word ‘God’. You could show students this clip from National Geographic that explores diverse views on the idea of God.</p> <p>Explain that there is a long tradition of people thinking about God, using both reason and experience to try to gain knowledge of God.</p>
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	<p>Introduce one example of this: the First Cause Argument for the existence of God.</p> <p>Provide an activity that helps students explore the idea of cause and effect (e.g. knocking down a row of dominoes or dropping a pencil and working out what will happen next and why).</p> <p>Watch this clip to 2.46 and ask students to record key terms and explain the basic argument of the First Cause Argument for the existence of God. They could do this in writing, as a recorded audio clip or in diagrammatic form.</p> <p>You could also look at this version of the argument from Thomas Aquinas.</p> <p><u>Challenges to this Argument:</u></p> <p>Ask students if they can identify any problems with this argument as a way of supporting the truth claim, ‘God exists’ (e.g. alternative explanations, such as the theory of the Big Bang as an explanation of the origin of the universe and human beings or the fact that this argument only suggests the existence of a being that sets thing off – this is not the same as arguing for the existence of a being with which humans can have a personal relationship, as you find in many religions).</p> <p>Ask students to reflect on whether it is possible to make truth claims about anything based on their learning so far (could revisit Descartes’ argument that the senses can be fooled).</p>
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<p><i>What is belief?</i></p>	<p>Thinking:</p> <p>Revisit the idea of knowledge and the ways in which human beings use reason and experience to help them know: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FGhd9cQDJ_o&index=6&list=PLcvEcrcF_9zKz1Bb5bLB4kbCK6dgt1O9o (How can I know the sun will rise tomorrow? BBC Teach)</p> <p>Ask students to participate in a couple of activities that explore the idea of trust (e.g. trusting someone to guide them safely across an obstacle course when they are blindfolded or trusting someone to give them the correct answer when participating in a group quiz) – why is trust important? What examples of trust might we find in daily living?</p> <p>Make a connection between the idea of trust and the idea of belief (literally, the acceptance that something is true, sometimes without proof). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9PvCQ9tufeQ&list=PLcvEcrcF_9zKz1Bb5bLB4kbCK6dgt1O9o&index=4 (what is belief? BBC Teach) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yigmLRZi9Tw&t=0s&list=PLcvEcrcF_9zLvpgjNYPQ0eirVnZcYEnaj&index=27 (U is for Uncertainty BBC Teach)</p>
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	<p>Introduce a statement of belief from a religious tradition (e.g. the Shahadah from Islam, the Shema from Judaism or the Apostles' Creed and the Nicean Creed from Christianity). Ask students to analyse this creed as they might a historical source or a literary text: what does it say? When was it written? By whom? For whom? What does it tell us about key beliefs from that religious tradition?</p> <p>Ask students to consider whether they think there is a difference between <i>believing in</i> and <i>believing that</i> (e.g. 'I believe that I will go to sleep this evening and wake up tomorrow morning', 'I believe that I will become a world-famous cricketer when I leave school', 'I believe in the existence of aliens', 'I believe in the idea of justice'...). Which type of statement do students think has a better claim to truth and why? Ask students to look back at the statement of belief – can these be categorised as <i>belief that</i> or <i>belief in</i>? How would students categorise them and why? What does this mean for the beliefs that are being described in these statements?</p> <p>https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02yhvkh (David Hume on believing witnesses of miracles)</p> <p>Ask students to complete the following sentences, showing their process of reasoning:</p> <p>"We take lots of things on trust, for example, that we will wake up each morning. This is important because..."</p> <p>"Everyone believes something. It is important to explore what different people believe because..."</p>
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<p><i>What is religion?</i></p>	<p>Thinking:</p> <p>Ask students to think about members of their own family. What things do they all have in common? Are there certain shared values or beliefs? Are there certain key family events that get everyone together? How would you know that they all belong to the same family? How does someone new (e.g. a new partner/spouse/baby) get introduced and welcomed into the family?</p> <p>Ask students to carry out the same process in relation to a religion: what things do members of that religion have in common? Are there certain shared values or beliefs? Are there certain key events that bring the religious community together? How do you know that people belong to that religious group? How is someone new introduced and welcomed into the religion? (See here for some examples from different religions.)</p> <p><u>Different Definitions of 'Religion'</u></p> <p>Explain to students that, despite the fact they are in an RE lesson, there is actually quite a lot of disagreement about what 'religion' actually is. There are various different definitions, e.g.:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A formalised system of belief, teaching (doctrine) and practice 2. Devotion to a particular thing (secular or divine) 3. Belief in supernatural beings, e.g. animism (belief in spirits), polytheism (belief in many gods), monotheism (belief in one God)
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	<p>4. Something that reflects the needs of society</p> <p>5. A broad category with certain ‘family resemblances’</p> <p>6. A subjective term that enables scholars to study different beliefs, practices, cultures, questions, etc.</p> <p>(See here for more detail on these. You could also see these interpretations of religion.)</p> <p>Ask students to record the different ways of understanding a religion. They could do this by producing a podcast, a vlog, an app or e-learning course, an animation, a piece of structured writing, a visual diagram, etc.</p> <p>Ask them to select which definition they find the most persuasive, showing the process of reasoning that has led them to this conclusion.</p> <p><u>Why does this matter?</u></p> <p>Ask students to reflect on why the definition of ‘religion’ might matter for Religious Education.</p>
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<p><i>Why does it matter?</i></p>	<p>Thinking:</p> <p>Ask students to reflect on the different subjects on the school curriculum; why do they think they need to study English, Maths, Science, History, etc.? Do they think there are any subjects missing from the school curriculum that it would be useful for them to study? What is the purpose of studying at school – to prepare for life beyond school, to find out more about humanity and the world, for the sake of learning itself...?</p> <p>Ask students why they think it is important to study Religious Education – what sorts of things might they learn about in RE that they may not encounter anywhere else on the school curriculum? Why might this be useful for them in school and in life beyond school?</p> <p>Introduce the term ‘religious literacy’.</p> <p>Ask students to explain what they think it means. Ask them to describe a religiously literate person and a religiously illiterate person – what is the difference between them? Why might this be important?</p> <p>Provide a few definitions of religious literacy (e.g. https://rlp.hds.harvard.edu/definition-religious-literacy, http://religionandprofessions.org/religious-literacy-toolkits/what-is-religious-literacy/, https://candleconferences.com/blogsyncre/, https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/news/nr/comment-religious-literacy-what-is-the-future-for-religion-and-belief-1.570731</p>
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	<p>https://blog.edx.org/religiously-literate-matters</p> <p>https://balancedre.org.uk/</p> <p>Ask students to identify the similarities and differences between the definitions. They could also consider whether it matters if there is no one clear definition of religious literacy. Ask students to make a connection between religious literacy and Religious Education as a curriculum subject in school.</p> <p>Introduce Improving Religious Literacy, a report produced by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education in 2016. Focus on paragraphs 6.1 to 6.4 and 6.8 to 6.10.</p> <p>What are the key conclusions being drawn by this report? What does this report consider a religiously literate person to be? How might learning about religion and belief in school help students develop their own religious literacy and how does this relate to the findings of the report?</p> <p>What are the wider implications of a society that it is/is not religiously literate? (e.g. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OO7BbvbM9gc – religious literacy and journalism; https://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidelines/religion - religion and the BBC Charter)</p>
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<p><i>What is Religious Education?</i></p>	<p>Thinking:</p> <p>Ask students to mind-map words they associate with Religious Education (good and bad!) – introduce the idea that you need to rebrand the subject – what do you think it could be called if it weren't called Religious Education?</p> <p>Ask students to explore different pathways from school to university if you study Religious Education up to A Level: https://www.russellgroup.ac.uk/media/5272/informedchoices-print.pdf (cf. reference to Religious Studies on pp. 28-29) https://www.ucas.com/job-subjects/religious-studies https://www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/news/a-level-religious-studies-entries-remain-high/ https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/subjects/what-can-you-do-theology-degree</p> <p>Introduce the key disciplinary areas involved in Religious Education on the school curriculum:</p> <p>Theology (believing – exploring what people believe): e.g. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJNPCL1ZurA (what is theology? Christian perspective); https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6_ARMEhk5A (difference between Theology and Religious Studies – American perspective)</p> <p>Philosophy (thinking – exploring how people think about themselves and the world around them): e.g. https://www.philosophybasics.com/general_what_is.html</p>
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	<p>Human/Social Sciences (living – exploring the different ways in which people live according to the things they believe and the way in which they think about themselves and the world around them; Religious Studies at university level would fit here): e.g. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6_ARMEhk5A (difference between Theology and Religious Studies – American perspective)</p> <p>You can find out more information about these areas here.</p> <p>Ask students to produce a visual map of these three key areas – ask them to think about how their learning in RE relates to these areas as the year proceeds.</p>
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