

## Rubbish RE: The Ten Worst Examples We Could Find

‘Ten tips’ articles from NATRE and RE today are always popular: we publish articles giving ten tips on many different aspects of RE free on the website. There are well over 100 ideas there, and we’d like it if you would add another ‘ten tips’ article of your own.

Just for entertainment, here are ten different ways to make RE worse. Don’t take this too seriously.

1. **Repetition.** Taken over the key stage, pupils study Noah’s Ark, the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan, Divali and the Holocaust five times each. They don’t study anything else. They don’t study anything else. Except Divali. And the Good Samaritan. And Noah. Again. And again.
2. **Boredom.** Teaching concentrates on facts, never asks pupils what they think, and avoids controversy like the bubonic plague. A learning diet of word searches passes for pedagogy and there is plenty of ‘colour the sea blue on the map of the Mediterranean’ (‘Miss, what parts are the sea?’). Children long to watch grass grow. They hurtle out of RE feeling excited because observing drying paint is the activity in the next lesson.
3. **Stereotypes flourishing.** In this RE all vicars are naughty, all Rastas are high, the only Muslims we study are three boxers, Cat Stevens and some suicide bombers. All Pagans dance naked and children model a turban for each other out of toilet paper. Gandhi is mentioned often but living Hindus never, and we usually study dead white men, not living women of colour. All atheists are immoral and all Jews wear forelock hairstyles and prayer shawls all the time. Diversity? Too complicated.
4. **No time, no reflection.** Time for RE is short, so we’d better concentrate on the facts. Teachers are scared of bigger questions, so when children ask ‘Miss, why do we die?’ they are told ‘You’ll learn about that at university. Colour in your picture.’ The normal experience of pupils is that work is unfinished, but they don’t care too much as they are about to forget it anyway. Teachers think ‘Well, RE is last lesson, and science has over run again, so it’s hardly worth doing for 28 minutes.’ They think slowly, and then there is only 27 minutes left before the end of the day. ‘Tidy the classroom children’.
5. **Dissipated RE in cross curricular work.** Pupils make a Jewish Mezuzah out of a cigarette packet, and insert their own scrolls stating their own beliefs (‘roll your own’). The more profound ones say ‘I believe in Tottenham Hotspur’ and ‘I believe in my pets.’ The effort is slightly decent design technology, but poor RE: it doesn’t engage with Jewish ideas about the Almighty or the sacred text. Holocaust studies spend a fair bit of time on Hitler’s nastiness and children draw swastikas in their books, but no one ever asks what the impact of the holocaust had on Jewish beliefs about G-d. A bit of History and a bit of Citizenship, but no RE at all: Jewish people are seen as victims, their function in the classroom narrative is only to be persecuted by Nazis.
6. **All the same.** Teacher gives the message that religions are all the same, all agree and all are as bland as a puddle of skimmed milk. No breath of disagreement is ever allowed in this

RE. Teachers may feel that the purposes of community cohesion are best served by conflict avoidance, but this lie is not a good starting point for learning. Children learn some fairly obvious things in 'all the same' RE, including that religions say we should be nice, his Holiness the Pope is not a protestant and the activity of bears in the woods includes excretion.

7. **Covert indoctrination.** The teacher might be an atheist or an Evangelical, a liberal or a Catholic, and they have a secret intention: that pupils will end up thinking what they think. This is hardly ever successful, but it manufactures hatred for the subject in the heart of the learner with unerring accuracy. Forty years after RE began to become the opposite of indoctrination the job is still not quite complete.
8. **Misinformation.**  
'Miss, what religion was the Good Samaritan?'  
'Well, he was middle eastern, so I expect he was a Muslim.'  
RE's minimum standard for accurate information about religions is 100%.  
Teachers should be ashamed if they don't know enough, but even more if they make it up as they go along.
9. **Integration to the point of invisibility.** The head teacher says that RE is integrated into PSHE. Teachers do sometimes make casual and stereotypical references to Catholic ideas about abortion when they're doing sex education, but if you ask the pupils, they are certain that they don't do RE.
10. **Specialism? Don't make me laugh.** A secondary school asks Historians to teach RE. Kids learn more about medieval architecture than about contemporary Christianity. A school has no teacher with an RE qualification higher than a GCSE. Rather than appointing someone or seeking advice, they decide that everyone can use their PPA cover for RE, and dump the issues of planning and delivery on some HLTAs. The TAs often do very well, but they ought to be paid teacher~wages for that. Children realise that RE doesn't matter in their school, and repetition and boredom set in. See numbers one and two above: bad RE can be cyclical.

All these examples are taken from real life. Have you seen worse? Please get in touch

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