



Good Learning in RE

Films for teachers from NATRE:
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Film 3: A Slave Set Free: Muslim Story with 5-7s

Faith stories raise big themes about, for example, human freedom, the idea of God or what it means to be fair. This Muslim story does! Juliet Lyal, teacher of RE in an infant school, begins work about Islam with a high energy interactive storytelling session where all the children are involved. They listen, but they also giggle, pull faces, watch, gesture, drum, trumpet and respond! They think. They feel.

The story telling draws out Muslim ideas about monotheism and about human equality under Allah that are important in Islam, but sometimes look hard for these 6 year olds. After the story session, carefully structured small group learning activities enable each child to recall and think more about the story, making simple links to their own lives as they do so. The quality of the lesson lies in its deep ideas, simply presented, and the active learning and enquiring approach of the tasks set for the children. It is, in some ways, a brilliantly simple lesson – the product of very wise and careful preparation.

Many Muslims would discourage the *dramatic* depiction of the close companions of the Prophet Muhammad on the grounds that it could be misleading or encourage idolatry. Others would say that as the intentions of a carefully planned learning activity such as this could not be misunderstood, it is acceptable. The intention of the teacher in this lesson is to assist with the storytelling and the understanding of Islam, so instead of using drama, she enacts the story with the help of the children.

Key RE Concepts:

Religion / Islam / Muslim / Prayer / Prophet / the equality of all people.

Key vocabulary and ideas:

- Muslims believe in Allah, the one and only God
- Muslims learn their religion through stories of the Prophet and his companions
- Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) taught that all humans are equal and worthy of kind treatment.
- When Muslims gather to pray, a human voice calls them – Bilal was the first Muezzin (Prayer Caller)



Pedagogy and Learning Method:

- This film shows off some good examples of story based learning. Never underestimate the power of story: religion uses storytelling not just for 5-6 year olds, and RE should do the same, to communicate ideas, to explore interpretations and to have fun.
- Creative learning in this film is facilitated by teaching that uses props, tension, activity and team skills to help every child make progress. The accurate targeting of activities to what children can do, or are ready to do next, makes the active learning follow up to the story-telling effective as it gives ways of exploring meaning. Good RE needs well thought out and planned activities like these.
- The stimulus from within a religion is usually an important component of successful RE lessons. Great story is used to open up ideas for young minds to some core ideas in Islam. The children reflect on the ideas.

Links to key RE strands:

This programme illustrates ways to engage with strands of learning for 4-7s about beliefs and stories, and about values and commitments.

Lesson outline:

Children sit in circle time and the teacher uses props to tell a Muslim story about the slave Bilal, who was chosen by Prophet Muhammad to become the first Muezzin, the person who makes the call to prayer. Rather than act out the story, the teacher gets all the children to help her with the props and activities she has chosen to use. After this dynamic story telling session, some careful activities with a play-ful character are used to help children go on exploring what the story means. The story teaches Muslims about the unity of God: 'one God only' is an important idea for children to think about. It also has a strong emphasis on fairness and kindness: key values in Islam.

Learning intentions:

In this lesson we wanted pupils to learn:

- To recognise the Muslim religion (L1)
- To identify some key characters in a faith story such as Abu Bakr and Bilal (L1)
- To talk about the meaning of a Muslim story for themselves (L1)
- To retell the story of Bilal simply (L2)
- To respond sensitively to the big ideas in the story: slavery and freedom, God and prayer (L2)
- To suggest meanings in the story for themselves (L2)



What makes for good learning in this example?

There are many features of good RE learning in this short film.

Religious material – lots of it, in the end - is introduced in small steps. In this class, with a small number of Muslim children in it, though there are nearly 20% in the school, small steps are needed for all pupils to begin to name and recognise simple features of Islam. Juliet helps children to take their own next steps.

The use of space is exemplary. It's not a huge classroom, but pupils make the story circle and the teacher draws each one individually into the action, using a cloth, a cane, or some plastic money. There are lovely examples of kinaesthetic learning: 'Show me your kind face.' 'What sort of face would be mean and cruel?' These devices in story telling keep all children focused and involved. When the story is done, the group activities are each self contained, so that children can focus on their own tasks, but then at the end of the lesson they come together again and share their learning. Many children have become 'mini-experts' on their own task.

When pupils laugh at an unusual name – 'Abu Bakr' – she reinforces the seriousness of the lesson, ignores the laughter and moves on. The class go with this example of clear leadership from their teacher: laughter diminishes, and a classroom culture of respect takes a small step forward: other people's names may be different, but it's better not to laugh at them. That's not what we do in school. This is typical of the small steps towards respect for all RE offers to learners. The 5 classroom team activities use all sorts of thinking, creative skills, learning technology and language abilities.

Running the lesson: what do you need to do?

Before doing this lesson on Islam, share activities about a Christian and a Jewish Faith story, so the children will be familiar with what a Faith story is. Whilst these activities are unique to the story, the format of gathering together to share a faith story in RE will be the same so the children should be quite comfortable.

The aim is to share the Story of Bilal, a retelling by the teacher using a range of 'props'. In the film, there are two shawls (for rich and poor), a large stone, a cane stick, a sun picture, building bricks, sand coloured fabric, large speech bubble with call to prayer, Key vocabulary cards (character names, mosque, muezzin). Assemble your own set of aids to story telling. Remember that Muslims do give special respect to the Prophet and his Companions, and it is good RE practice to model this as well.

The children in the film are used to sitting on the carpet, facing their teacher. She explains: "we are going to share another faith story" and, holding up the Muslim symbol asks the children if they can tell from which religion/faith they think the story will be. Use your own strategy to establish links and prior learning: children often pick up confusion about religion in their lives, but RE clarifies this. Talk about who they think this story might be especially special for, and who might find it a helpful way of learning more about how Muslims live their lives. Talk about links to their own lives and their favourite stories.

The children move into a circle and watch carefully: props taken out of a special basket are introduced to stimulate curiosity. Children comment and informally share ideas. Questions such as 'I wonder why I need a stick in this story?' or 'I wonder why I need two different types of shawl?' 'What is this?' (a speech bubble) 'I wonder why it says "God is most Great" and "Come to prayer"?'; 'What do you think the story might be about? All contribute to generating curiosity and interest, giving pupils who know a little more than most a chance to share – this can be good for Muslim pupils in a class.

After retelling the story, have a minute of 'thinking time', just to mull over thoughts and feelings about the story. Then move the class to one of these activities, carefully prepared.

Activity 1: Talking about the people in the story

Ask the children to discuss with their Learning Partner who and what they liked / didn't like in the story. Which character do the children think they could learn something from? Bilal – never giving up. Umayya – always wanting his own way. Abu Bakr – who helped Bilal, and was kind.

On their whiteboards, each child draws a picture of the character they think has taught them something.

Activity 2: Hunt the puzzle piece / retell and respond

In the film there were 6 puzzle pieces hidden in the classroom. The puzzle retells the story in 6 sections in picture form, also making one complete picture. When they find and assemble the puzzle, get children to retell a bit of the story, and ask them what they remember, and what they can say as they respond thoughtfully and sensitively to the story. As the children find a piece they bring it back and sit down holding it. When all children are reassembled, the pieces are then laid out on the floor. Ask someone to start putting it together. Each time ask what is drawn on the piece, and discuss the character/part of the story. Have a short 'question time' for children to ask more about the story and about Islam. Asking the children what they might 'call' out to others, as Bilal did: what words might be worth shouting out every day to help people live their lives?



Activity 3: Express a part of the story yourself

A way of showing how we understand this faith story and why it helps us learn more about what most Muslims believe is to tell the story ourselves. Children can do this through drawing, painting, construction, role play, writing (a single word). A respectful approach to Islam uses Islamic rules: no pictures of the Prophet or of God for example, and no dramatic play making. So children follow these rules as they work.

Children could work in different groups to:

- Create one or two pieces of their own puzzle picture showing something (an object) that matters in the story.
- Paint the turning point of the story – when do you think that story ‘changes’?
- Use building bricks to make a model of a mosque. Where would Bilal be standing? Why? Now build another structure that you would choose to stand to ‘call’ out something important to others.
- Write on the speech bubble blanks deciding what they would shout out if they were calling people to prayer/ record their ‘call’ onto the ICT speech bubbles/use the digital blue cameras to video their partner ‘calling’ people to prayer.

Plenary

Children could tour the work other groups have been doing and explore all the ideas and examples that have been expressed. Comments and questions should be invited. On the carpet, discuss what the children feel they have learnt in the session.



- What would they like to learn more about? Is there anything they'd like to listen to again?
- One final question: What do the children feel mattered most of all to Bilal / Umayya / Abu Bakr?
- Talk to learning partners and tell them what matters most of all to you.
- Tell the children that for people inside a religion, their faith or their God is often what matters most to them.

Creative Curriculum Connections

The work here links RE to some other curriculum areas including, especially, literacy. Good speaking and listening tasks energise learning, and the story could be the basis of a unit of literacy work on stories from different cultures or on traditional stories. There are potential good links to history as well.

Resources

From RE Today (www.retoday.org.uk): Opening Up Islam (2011), edited by Fiona Moss has lots of good Muslim story strategies in it. See also Opening Up Respect and Opening Up Communities.

RE Today's 'Talking Pictures' is a photo pack for good 4-7 visual learning in RE with lots of ideas for teaching Islam.

Also see: www.reonline.org.uk

Notes written by Lat Blaylock, with thanks to all the teachers and pupils involved