

Good Learning in RE

Films for teachers from NATRE:
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Film 4: Sharing Shabbat / 5-7 year olds

This lesson, in the context of work on Jewish family life, aims to help pupils understand how and why rest on Shabbat is practiced in Jewish family life. They learn not just what happens, but that Shabbat is an occasion of delight, treasure and rest. Children are prompted to think about rest in their own lives, and make simple comparisons. The teacher uses and exemplifies two key learning strategies, one is a careful use of 'Kim's Game' which explores the meaning of some key artefacts, the other a creative team task that enables children to use 'making time' as 'thinking time' in creating their own copies of some Shabbat artefacts and food. It's interesting to watch how the creative task feeds the rigour of children's learning in this case: they put new words and ideas into use at once. The learning is a 'spiral': prior learning is reinforced in this lesson, then taken further.

Key RE Concepts:

Jewish practices and way of life, questions of belonging, questions of meaning, signs and symbols.

Key vocabulary and ideas:

- Vocabulary and concepts: Jewish people, belonging, Shabbat, rest, Creation, specific names of Shabbat artefacts.
- In the broader context of a unit of work on how people celebrate 'Special Times' children encounter a range of ideas about Shabbat: a special meal for Jewish families. Themes to think about include: welcoming, resting, treasuring, delight.



Pedagogy and Learning Method:

This is a child centred lesson. Here, children learn words and concepts, make links and connections, decode symbols, and use 'realia' – artefacts, food and so on – for thoughtful learning. This film begins by showing how Juliet reminds children of prior learning about rest in Jewish life, linking to the creation stories of Genesis, the Ten Commandments and the practice of Shabbat. A cloth covered with artefacts, foods and objects is a 'field of observation'. Can the children identify, name, label and describe each object? The progression in skills is clear, and accommodates a wide range of ability in the classroom. The children in teams make contributions to creating the class's Shabbat kit, and excellence comes from enjoyment – the enthusiasm and creativity in the classroom gets every child involved in creative RE, with an audience of younger children in the Reception class. The lesson covers a lot of ground, but gives children time to think – e.g. with the whiteboards, the memory game, the creative work, the writing task.

This is a good example of creative classroom activity that is linked to deep thinking: creative RE is not really about paints or clay, but about activity that stimulates thoughts.

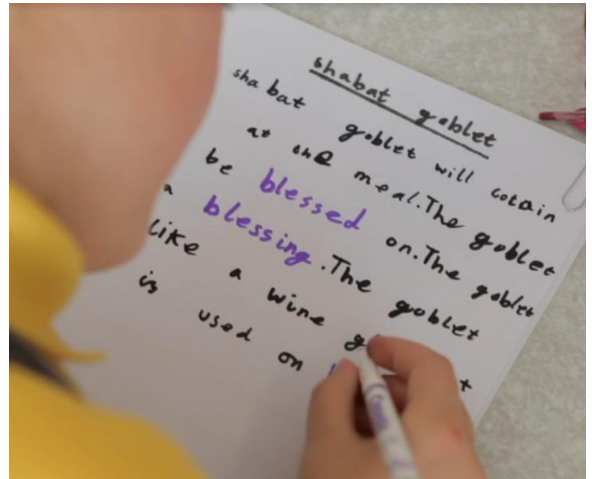
the children themselves, as they investigate and respond. Higher achievers are challenged to write about their work on behalf of the whole class. Lower achievers find a task they can tackle, and their confidence is reinforced. Each child accesses the work by a creative response – and each child's thinking steps forward through the creative tasks and the time and talk they spend on them.

Thinking skills matter in RE: the simple device of having four 'irrelevant' objects on the cloth for the 'Kim's Game' nudges the children to think about what really matters in Judaism. They are repeatedly challenged to think about the ideas behind the practice of rest, delight, treasure.

Resources are used well. The artefacts are not very expensive, and can sometimes be borrowed. Here they are used for all they are worth, and contribute a real feel to the learning, especially as children make their own versions of each one.

Running a lesson like this: what do you need to do?

This lesson needs up to 90 minutes. It could be part of an RE day or an RE week, or it could be done in two separate sessions – but something is lost if it is fragmented. Set up your lesson so that children enter and find a cloth spread in the centre of the floor with 10 objects spread out on it. Juliet used: Shabbat candles, havdalah candles, challah bread, challah cover, a spice box, a Kiddush cup. At Cunningham Hill Infants, where this film was made, these were borrowed from an RE centre or used from the schools' own artefacts boxes. You might borrow from a local Jewish families as an alternative. There was a card with a blessing, some cutlery, a jar of jam, and a plate. The children are asked to walk around the cloth and objects once and then sit in a circle.



The teacher might ask: If the children were entering the home of someone and found the table laid out like this what would be your first thoughts? What could you tell about the family? What do you think is about to happen? Which faith group does this family belong to? Through these and other questions and answers about some of the objects draw out from the children the themes of 'welcoming, resting and treasuring' Shabbat and talk about what each object has to do with Shabbat. Discuss why Shabbat can be referred to as the 'Day of Delight' Have some key vocabulary cards for children to place next to the objects, and include ones that don't just name the objects, but refer to their symbolism: treasure, blessing, rest, delight. This is good SEAL vocabulary.

Ask the class: Are all the objects on the cloth needed for Shabbat? Which objects could be removed without spoiling the Shabbat meal? 3 children can be invited to remove the cutlery, jam and plate. Ask again: Is there anything missing? Some children might notice that there is only one challah loaf bread instead of two. Does it matter that there is only one? What can we do about it? (Make some more? Yes!) Tell your class: "Today we are going to decide together what really matters for Jews at Shabbat. We are also going to think about what objects might help make a Jewish person feel close to God. And we are going to talk about times when we share something with our families and feel really close together."

Activity 1: Kim's Game

Give the children 30 seconds to look at the objects one more time. Then cover them with another cloth. Children have no more than 2 mins to write/draw on their whiteboards all the objects they can remember. They can share answers with another pair. This activity encourages talk about names, identifying objects, meanings and the ways they are used.

Ask: Which object do the children think matters most to a Jewish person? Discuss with Learning Partner. Is there a right / wrong answer? There often isn't in RE – but there are good answers. The objects help Jewish people to celebrate Shabbat but what really matters is the welcoming, resting and treasuring.

Activity 2: Make a creative Shabbat Set

Show the children a plain box. Ask a child (choose a good reader) to open it and take out what they find inside. They then read it. The card asks the class if they can make a Shabbat Kit which can then be used to help other children learn about Shabbat and why it is such a special day of the week for Jews. This device puts the onus of enquiry and investigation into the hands of the children. Of course the teacher has clay and so on at the ready, but it is crucial that RE is a lesson where the children work out what to do – in 'bad RE' the teacher tells the children facts, and they forget them. In good RE, children plan their own learning.

With Learning Partners, the children discuss what would need to go inside the kit and why. Share ideas with the whole class and record them on a flip chart. (Shabbat candles and holders; havdalah candle, challah cover, 2 challah loaves, spice box, Kiddush cup, card with a blessing)

How would you explain about 'welcoming', 'resting' and 'treasuring' in your Shabbat Kit? Could you include, for example, a 'To do' list for getting ready for Shabbat; some 'delightful' ideas for resting; something to treasure? How would you decorate the box to hold the Shabbat Kit? What signs or symbols might you decorate it with?

Children choose which activity to do, at least in part: ask for volunteers for each task, and then they work in small groups to prepare the kit. Whilst the children are making the objects for the kit, teachers and TAs can move from group to group asking them what they are doing, what it means, what symbols they have noticed, and how their work is something to do with treasure, delight or rest.

As the objects are completed, children bring them to the table and place them around the box. When everything is ready, each group describes what they have made and how it might help to make a Jewish person feel close to God. Discuss / comment / feel good!

In the plenary, you might talk in these terms: "We've thought about Shabbat and why it is such an important day for Jewish people. I wonder if this has made some of you think about times when you are with your family? What sort of things do you do together as a family that make you feel really close together?" Encourage children to share own thought and feelings.

Maybe next time we have RE, you could make a special kit just for your family full of objects that are special for you and that bring you all together.

Creative Curriculum Connections

The work here links RE to some other curriculum areas including art and design (children make a lot of things!). Connecting to SEAL and PSHE, they think about the balance of work and rest in life. There is lots of good speaking and listening work, and well targeted writing for these 6 and 7 year olds: it's a good example of RE making contributions to literacy work. Connect these ideas to other religions too: could there be a similar lesson on Puja in Hindu tradition, or the Last Supper and Good Friday from Christianity?



Resources

- From RE Today (www.retoday.org.uk): Opening Up Judaism, 2012, edited by Fiona Moss, gives lots of material for this age group. Opening Up Belonging and Opening Up Values in the same series are useful too.
- Also see: www.reonline.org.uk
- The lesson has created resources which will be used in the future by the school as well.

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