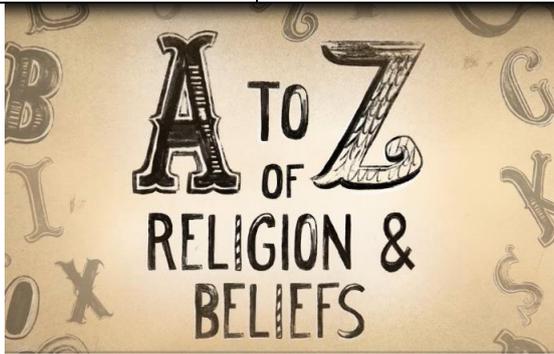


A

ATHEISM



Why is Atheism included in a series about Religious Education? Is that a good thing?

What's it all about?

This clip introduces atheist ideas. Note that the key idea of an atheist is: 'I believe there is no God'. Usually with this the atheist rejects belief in afterlife, heaven, hell, reincarnation, ghosts or angels. But is atheism a belief? Well, if you agree that proof for or against God on either side of the equation is impossible, then it would be over claiming to say 'I know there is no god'. Maybe better to stick with 'I believe there is no god.'

Atheism shouldn't be seen as a negative thing: Humanists, for example, emphasise kindness, love, the beauty of art and of the earth. Morals don't need to depend on religion: humanity can figure out what is right and wrong, good and bad, for ourselves. The same with our sense of meaning: Humanists say 'we may not believe in god, but life is rich, and we believe in humanity.'

Do note that in under three minutes this little clip raises many issues that need more classroom exploration, and students need time to explore ideas in more depth. Particularly here, Humanism is introduced, but there are many atheists who are not 'capital 'H' Humanists'.

Which religions and beliefs?

Atheism: atheists are people who believe that God is unproven, and enormously unlikely or impossible.

Key Questions

- What does the word 'Atheist' mean?
- Why study atheism in RE?
- Are the arguments between atheists and those who believe in God endless, or can they be solved?
- Is an atheist a 'believer' too? A person who believes there is no god?
- How do atheists decide questions about right and wrong and the meaning of life?

Classroom or homework task:

Here are eight reasons for believing in god or not. Sort them first, Which point away from belief in god? Then rank them: which are good reasons to be an atheist?

'The world is full of suffering and pain, which hurts innocent people.'	'Life is short: 80+ years fly by. No one can be sure of anything after death.'
'The world is beautiful, intricate, and nearly perfect for human life.'	'Religions claim to be about love and peace, but often practice hate and war.'
'For 2 centuries, things that used to look like miracles have been scientifically explained.'	'Humanity is capable of huge goodness and also of massive evil. Too random for a god.'
'Human psychology uses religion to prop up our sense of failure or our fear of death.'	'Life is a mystery: there's loads we cannot explain about it.'

Suggested outcomes: students can:

- Give an informed account of the meaning of atheism
- Give reasons for their views about whether gods and goddesses can be proved.
- Handle information and ideas effectively by explaining both their own views and others' ideas about evidence for and against god.

B

BURKA



It would be sexist to think about a religion only in terms of what women wear. There's always more to it than that!

What's it all about?

There are many controversies about religious clothing. Why is this? Clothing is about identity, signifying where we belong – soccer shirts, jeans or Versace say something about us. Religions symbolise meaning through clothing. In Judaism, head covering is a reminder of the Almighty. Sikhs imply human equality with the turban, and modesty, a spiritual virtue to many, is expressed in religious clothing too. But if religions make different requirements about dress for men and women, then is this sexist? In the example of Islam, prominent in the news these days, the hijab, or the burka are seen by many from outside as a way men control women. It's a point of view. But many Muslim women, including Muslim feminists, see it as a matter of choice, and a liberating thing to be set free from the 'male gaze', the pressure of always being evaluated by men for their looks.

Of course this topic is huge and controversial, and a couple of minutes only introduces it. Students should also consider, for example, whether it is a mistake to talk about women's dress so much before learning about Islamic theology in depth.

Which religions and beliefs?

Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Jewish people

Key Questions:

- When people choose religious dress, what does it mean?
- Are religious dress codes sometimes sexist? What should be done about that?
- How do you express your identity through the clothes you choose?
- Should people be free to 'wear what they want' in all circumstances? Does that apply equally to Nuns and Nudists?

Classroom or homework task:

Watch the film, and think about the issues it raises. In a recent famous case, French police forced a Muslim woman on the beach in Nice to remove her 'burkini' style swimsuit at gunpoint. See the story here:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/burkini-swimwear-ban-france-nice-armed-police-hijab-muslim-a7206776.html>

Outline the script and story board for a short two minute film of your own, based on this case, in the style of A-Z, suggesting why the French police's action is controversial.

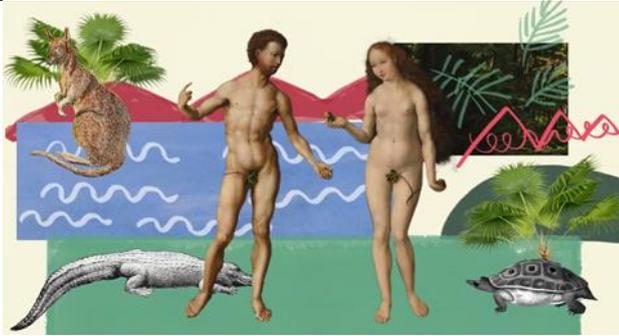
Consider this view: many discussions about 'what women wear' are sexist because they imply that men control how women dress, whether this is a bikini or a burka.

Suggested outcomes: students can...

- Give an informed account of some issues related to religious dress in the contemporary world
- Give reasons for their views about freedom and dress: should everyone always be able to 'wear what they want'?
- Handle information and ideas effectively by analysing examples of controversies around religious clothing in a balanced way.

C

CREATION



What's it all about? Are we made by God, or an accident?

This clip explores creation stories: are we a designed product of an amazing mind, or a cosmic accident? Jewish, Christian and Islamic creation stories claim that God created the heavens and the earth. These stories suggest that life is full of meaning and we are created from love, for love.

Hindus and Sikhs describe the emergence of our universe in different ways, but don't claim certain knowledge. Scientific study shows that the universe was formed after the Big Bang, 15 billion years ago, and the evolution of life on earth over 4 600 000 years has led to the human species, to our own lives.

Most religious people today do not think the universe was made in 6 days, as Genesis seemed to claim. They think God is the designer of a scientifically explained universe, while atheists give accounts of the origin of the universe that don't need a divine power: astrophysics and evolution tell us how we came to be. But the old stories may still be interesting, carrying a message, idea or belief about why we exist at all.

Which religions and beliefs?

Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhi, Buddhism, Atheism

Key Questions

- What different beliefs about our origins come from religious creation stories?
- Why are astrophysics and evolutionary biology important in explaining how we came to be?
- Is the human race made from love, for love, or are we an almighty accident, a huge slice of cosmic luck?
- Do religious scientists have the best of both worlds, believing God is the evolver?

Classroom or homework task:

Three viewpoints: read carefully...

Creationist:

"I am a believer in God, and I think God made the world and everything in it. Genesis talks of 6 'days' but these might be periods of time – each one millions of years. I thank God for our world and our lives. I believe He made us for His own loving purposes."

Theistic scientist:

"I am a scientist and a theist, I believe God is the creator, and the methods God used were the Big Bang and evolution. Genesis is an ancient story, and it is about the purpose of life: we are made to find God! God is like the mind behind the universe."

Atheistic scientist:

"Science is much better at explaining things in the modern world than religion. The universe began with a 'Big Bang' 15bn years ago, and the earth has evolved to support life over the last 4.6bn years. There is no need to talk about God in explaining this."

Tasks:

1. Ask 5 people at least which of the three statements is closest to their own view. Note what they say.
2. Global Christian leader Pope Francis said he believed in God and the Big Bang in 2014. Is it old fashioned to be a creationist?

Suggested outcomes: students can

- Give an informed account of the controversy about whether religion and science are compatible in their views of our origins
- Give reasons for their own views about God and the Big Bang
- Handle information and ideas effectively by expressing reasons for different points of view.