

Exploring iconic images

The King's School, Ottery St Mary: Ed Pawson

Purpose

To create a compelling learning experience by helping learners to make greater sense of religion and religious attitudes through the interrogation of iconic images.

Main emphasis

Beginning with an arresting picture stimulus, students observe, question and discuss, gradually gaining access to complex, interrelated aspects of understanding.

Further pictures may be chosen to help students to explore religious teachings, attitudes and practices, developing a greater understanding of the topic.

Links may be highlighted that show how the picture can be a stimulus to study related concepts in other curriculum areas

School profile

Total number of learners	1,100
Age range	11-18
Specialist status	Sports College
Level 5 and above in key stage 3 tests (2007)	Above national average
Five A*-C at GCSE (2007)	77%
Special educational needs	Below national average

The King's School is of average size with a growing sixth form. It is popular and heavily oversubscribed and is restricted for space. Students come from a relatively affluent but still diverse area. The number of students from minority ethnic groups is low. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average but the school's recently acquired additional specialism in cognition and learning in special educational needs is starting to attract students from outside the catchment area. As well as having an established specialist status as a sports college, the school is also now a training school. There is shared sixth form partnership with neighbouring schools.

Question 1: What are we trying to achieve?

What were your learners like at the start?

Students at The King's School demonstrate a largely positive attitude towards the learning process, although they can be inclined to be rather passive in their approach and they often fail to see how topics link across and between different subjects. They are not very well-informed about contemporary moral, cultural or political events, seeing such issues as lying outside their sphere of interest.

They tend to be rather insular in their understanding of what it means to be British, seeing culture, ethnicity and society through a largely 'white' focus. They show interest in knowing more about the complexity of the world we live in, but often lack the skills and opportunities

to gain a greater understanding. They are often rather passive and conformist in their approach to the learning process.

What differences did you want to see in your learners?

The priorities for this curriculum development are to enable students to:

- **gain a greater knowledge and understanding of:**
 - beliefs, teachings and concepts of differing religious groups/cultures;
 - the diversity of ideas, beliefs, cultures, identities, traditions, perspectives in contemporary society;
 - the influences that inform different ethical choices;
 - issues such as relationships, identity, wealth, poverty and conflict;
 - issues relating to political, legal and human rights.
- **develop skills of:**
 - analysis, evaluation, interpretation, expression of opinion, reflection, justification, persuasion;
 - independent learning.
- **develop attitudes and behaviours of:**
 - awareness of the diversity of opinions within culture, beliefs, moral values, law;
 - respect for difference;
 - openness to learn new things and meet new people;
 - commitment to build bridges not create barriers.

Question 2: How will we organise learning to achieve our aims?

How did we set about making a change?

The learning sequences were aimed at Year 8 and 9 students. Using specific picture stimuli as starters, sets of learning sequences were devised that inspired interest and curiosity. Each picture gave access to a number of topics to be explored in a different ways through a variety of subject areas across the curriculum.

In order to provide a clear RE focus for the activities, contemporary images were selected that we felt made links with two of the six key concepts in our new agreed syllabus:

- (AT1 – area B) practices and ways of life and
- (AT2 – area F) values and commitments.

Investigative ‘prompts’ were then developed for each image that encouraged students to ask their own questions relating to these concepts and to work out their own insights and answers.

Use was made of *Philosophy 4 Children* techniques to explore the issues raised by the images, enabling the class to become a ‘community of enquiry’, with the teacher acting as a guide and resource rather than a provider of information and ready answers. This encouraged skills of observation, questioning, enquiry, dialogue and reflection.

Assessment criteria were set in relation to the RE attainment targets in our agreed syllabus. Broadly speaking, students were working across Levels 4 to Level 6. It was expected that most students would describe why people belong to religions and explain how similarities and differences within and between religions can make a difference to the lives of individuals and communities (AT1), and that they would ask questions about things that were important to them and to other people and suggest answers which relate to their own and others' lives (AT2, level 5).

Digital technology can allow us to view images in a way we have never been able to before and provide students with access to information sources that can inspire and challenge. The context for their learning can therefore be much more visual and imaginative, whilst still relating to the broader aims of the subject.

Examples of exercises:

Unit 1: What does it mean to be Unwanted?

Picture stimulus: Joseline Ingabire and her daughter Leah (see winner of the Photographic Portrait Prize at the National Portrait Gallery, 2007, or look on www.foundationrwanda.org).

Students work in pairs. With the focus on 'practices and ways of life' and 'values and commitments' they observe the image and describe the people, place, expressions, body language. Next, students develop their own questions to explore why this picture should be entitled '**unwanted**'. Students are encouraged to examine issues of motherhood, family, identity, violence, fairness, justice, forgiveness, hope.

Explicit RE prompts were then introduced to the investigation: 'From which religious beliefs and practices might Joseline gain courage and hope for her future and for her daughters?'

Students were encouraged to be inquisitive and creative in their questioning and dialogue.

Unit 2: Hijab: is equality about sameness or difference?

Picture stimulus: women wearing the hijab on a demonstration against the headscarf ban in France, contrasted with a picture of British Muslim police officers outside Scotland Yard, wearing official police hijabs.

Students were asked to explore the images, discussing their possible context and significance. They were asked to consider the issue of equality. In what ways does school uniform, for example, aid or hinder equality? How is respect for difference best achieved? To what extent is the hijab a symbol of oppression and to what extent does it offer women freedom, privacy and protection? More broadly, students were asked to consider what *lifestyle choices* and what *values* were most likely to lead to more equality in society, and what differences there were amongst Muslims in answer to this question.

Unit 3: Non-violent resistance

Picture stimulus: Buddhist monks being beaten in Burma.

Students were asked to work out who the different participants are and why they were behaving in such a way. They were then introduced to some Buddhist teachings about the nature of self, Dharma, bhikkhus, precepts, conflict and use of violence.

Students were then asked to use the principles of the community of enquiry to arrive at their own key question in relation to the picture and to investigate that question in small groups, working towards a presentation of their findings to the class. These presentations would be guided to encourage students to show how Buddhists might give different answers to their question and relate such answers to their own and others' lives.

Relevant links to some other subject areas:

- **Citizenship:** 1.2 a Exploring different kinds of rights and obligations and how these affect both individuals and communities.
- **English:** 1.2c Using imagination to convey themes, ideas and arguments, solve problems, and create settings, moods and characters.
- **History:** 1.2 Cultural, ethnic and religious diversity.
- **Art and Design:** 1.4b Engaging with ideas, images and artefacts.
- **Geography:** 1.7 Cultural understanding and diversity.
- **Modern foreign languages:** 1.4 Intercultural understanding.
- **Personal wellbeing:** 1.1 Personal identities, 1.4 Relationships, 1.5 Diversity.

Question 3: How well have we achieved our aims?

What differences are evident? What impact have we made on our learners?

Knowledge and understanding

Students learned about topics relating to real issues in contemporary society, putting into perspective ideas and events, and linking them with beliefs, ways of life, values and attitudes. This allowed them to explore complex personal issues in a context that connected both with their own experiences and with wider cultural themes, making greater sense of religion and religious attitudes. They were engrossed in some of the images, full of questions and demanding meaning.

Skills

Group work and independent study were popular, and the quality of responses was excellent. Skills of interpretation and reflection seem to come quite naturally when faced with arresting images that demand analysis.

Attitudes and behaviours

Development of greater awareness of contemporary topics, encouraging increased discussion on causes, justice, rights and responsibilities.