

RESOURCE 4.1

Lives of unbelief: teaching and learning ideas

Use these activities to support students in examining the portraits and interviews on pages 18–19.

1. Tags

Photos uploaded onto the internet are usually given tags. These are the key words that sum up what the picture shows, so that if you were searching for lots of images of a particular subject, the search would link to the photos.

Ask students to work in pairs to think of the five keywords, or tags, that sum up what three of Aubrey's pictures show. At the simplest level the tags will be purely descriptive (e.g. indoors, outdoors, two people, clothes), but tags can be linked to mood or emotion or other concepts (e.g. calm, peaceful, powerful), and the students' tags should include some accurate terminology (e.g. humanist, atheist).

2. Comparing accounts

Ask students to look closely at two or three photos and the accompanying accounts (including the extended accounts, Resource 4.2 online). Compare and contrast (any three) accounts. What beliefs or attitudes do any of them hold in common? What are the key differences? Students can record these on a Venn diagram.

3. Pictures at an exhibition

Aubrey's photos are for exhibition. Ask students, as a class, to come up with titles for each of the pictures. Each title needs to help people looking at the picture to know what it is about, but it also needs to be interesting, to make people *want* to look.

Imagine that there need to be two descriptions of the picture – one for younger children, a little lower down the wall (using short words and short sentences), and one for taller, older people, higher up (using longer words and longer sentences). Technical words should be used, and explained.

4. So, what is an atheist, then?

All these people were chosen for portraits because they describe themselves as being atheist – at least, they say that they do not believe in God or gods. Imagine that they represent a good cross-section of atheists. From the accounts given, list the beliefs, attitudes and ways of living that could be included in a description of what

it means to be an atheist. How helpful a list is this? Are there any contradictions/surprises/gaps – and if so, what are they? Is it possible to come up with a comprehensive definition of 'atheist' from these accounts? Does it matter?

5. Religious/non-religious: an unhelpful binary?

This book is on 'non-religious worldviews'. Aubrey's exhibition is about 'unbelievers', specifically people who do not believe in God/gods – but this is just one dimension of non-religion. It does not mean that they have no spiritual or even religious beliefs, or that they do not conform to ways of behaving or forms of belonging. Note how Robert identifies as a member of a liberal Jewish community while being '100 per cent atheist'.

Ask students to draw a Venn diagram with two overlapping circles, labelling one circle 'religious' and one 'non-religious'. Using the extended interviews (Resource 4.2 online), ask students to put examples of words or phrases, or beliefs or actions from the four interviewees into the appropriate parts of the diagram. Does the initial size of their overlap between 'religious' and 'non-religious' need to be adjusted?

6. Worldview journeys

Some of the individuals photographed chose to say what they left to become what they are. Ask students to draw a simple timeline and describe some changes the people photographed have made. What was their pathway to their current worldview? What might a picture from earlier in their life look like? What might the next picture be like? Ask students to think about their own ways of thinking and living. Have they changed their ideas or behaviour? How and why? (*If it is appropriate to ask*) How important are the turnings/choices on the worldview journey we all make?