

RESOURCE 5.5

What do non-religious teenagers think about life after this life? Extended teaching and learning ideas

The resources on pages 22–25 provide students with opportunities to:

- analyse the positions other young people take
- consider the influences of different viewpoints on the responses in our sample
- respond thoughtfully to issues about the consistency of belief, the question of evidence for belief about the intangibilities of life after this life and about their own views
- reflect on ways in which the rise in the non-religious is influencing death and burial rituals.

Here are some resources and activities to add to those on pp. 20–21.

a. Key words. Do students understand these 14 words? Can they use them in their work?

humanist	atheist	agnostic	materialism	secular
consciousness	life after death	out-of-the-body	Dharmic	reincarnation
atman	Brahman	survey data	influence	interpretation

b. Mainstream views. Here are two accounts of mainstream views on life after death, from Hindu and from atheist traditions. Explore the teenagers' responses, to discern which have been influenced by one or other of these accounts.

Hindu teaching about reincarnation	Atheist ideas about the one life we have
Millions of Hindus accept the teaching that the 'real you' or the 'spark of life' within the physical body is a manifestation of Brahman, the Ultimate Reality, which does not die. When the body dies, it is like wearing out your clothes: the real you will get new clothes, another body. This process of the 'transmigration' of the self, or reincarnation, may happen thousands of times in the cycle of life (<i>Samsara</i>) before the self finally achieves <i>Moksha</i> , the bliss of liberation from this cycle of life and death.	Atheists down the ages have often rejected all beliefs in an afterlife. Materialistic atheism asks whether the 'soul' or any part of the 'mind' can exist without the physical body, and finds no evidence for this. We are natural, and our bodies naturally die. We will not be reborn, and we will not meet our dead relatives – or pets! – when we die. This may not be what we wish for, but it is based on evidence. It is realistic and grown-up to accept that death is the end. We live on for a while in the memories of those who loved us, but they all die too.

c. Collecting more data. For homework, or working with younger students, as appropriate, collect some more examples of answers to the research question. The sample we have provided is slanted: we only included replies from non-religious young people. But what will your class expect when they interview a local population? Compare what they get to what they expected, and to the sample they have already been studying.

d. What do you believe? See the snowflake on online Resource 5.6. Ask students to fill it in. They put an X on each line; the more they agree with its statement, the closer to that statement they put their X. If they totally disagree with the statement, they put their X near the centre of the snowflake. The resultant shape gives an easy and visual way to see where students agree and disagree with one another. Get them to talk about where they disagree and why.