Teachers’ Guidance

Could Britain be a Rainbow Nation?

We are looking for evidence of students grappling with content such as this in response to the theme of diversity and respect for all. Winning work will explore instances of justice and injustice, community and diversity, and offer thoughts on the role of religion in a more equal country. The material below are only examples we look forward to seeing art inspired by a wide variety of stimuli.

The original ‘rainbow nation’
The phrase ‘rainbow nation’ was coined in 1994 by Desmond Tutu, and used by Nelson Mandela, to describe their hopes for the newly-democratic, post-Apartheid South Africa. In indigenous Xhosa culture the rainbow signifies a bright future, while in Christianity the rainbow symbolises God’s message of hope to his people. However, some commentators see ‘rainbowism’ as a superficial gloss to avoid looking too closely at entrenched racial and economic divisions in South African society.

Multiculturalism
The rainbow nation is a vision of multiculturalism, a country comfortable with its diversity, some would say a country like Britain. A multicultural society creates a shared public space where people from all backgrounds work, think and play together. Critics argue multiculturalism traps people in cultural boxes and ignores the fluidity of human experience. It also ignores structural exclusion by prioritising beliefs and outlooks while ignoring external economic and political context. However, it is an idea that won’t go away. We seem to like it. Could Britain be a rainbow nation?

Diversity in the UK
Find concrete examples of diversity, discrimination and community relations on the Equality and Human Rights Commission website (www.equalityhumanrights.com), tagline ‘creating a fairer Britain’.

For example, find out about the police training to spot ‘unconscious bias’ in Stop and Search procedures, how pregnancy affects women at work or how Britain’s invisible army of cleaners suffer unfair employment practices.

We need to know about injustice in order to fight it; but does exposure always lead to change?

What role does religion play?
The religious traditions all offer ideal visions of how we should treat each other, such as the teachings often grouped together to form the ‘Golden Rule’. Does an articulation of the ideal human community have to come first, before individuals can be inspired to essential to create it?

Give examples of when faith has inspired people to put their beliefs into practice to create a more equal world, such as Christian liberation theologians, Muslim development charities or the Sikh langar on the streets of Britain. What religious inspiration underpins their work? Can we understand how religion inspires courageous individuals to change the world?

What happens when ideal versions of human communities are warped? Can religion be used to justify attitudes of separation and alienation? How can members of a religious community guard against this?

What does it mean to be a ‘rainbow nation’? Some questions to explore:

South Africa has made steps towards a more equal society, but barriers to full participation are powerful. Britain is also a melting pot nation of languages, religions, outlooks and cultures. What is going well in Britain? Explore successful examples of British multiculturalism (or pluralism if ‘multiculturalism’ is a loaded term for you). What works? What are still barriers in Britain to full participation?

What do we need to be truly equal? Explore this from different angles:

- **Poverty**: what needs to change economically and politically? What would true ‘equality of opportunity’ look like? You might like to start with private education, interesting if you teach in an independent school!
- **Gender**: the Church of England has introduced women bishops and political parties talk about women-only shortlists. What seem to be the necessary conditions for female empowerment? What does this mean for men?
- **Race**: can we afford to make repayments for slavery? Even if we don’t give a penny, do we need to admit how much slavery and colonialism has enriched the West? How far is a more racially equal society about economic and structural support, and how much is about looking honestly at racial discrimination in our history and present?
- **Islamophobia**: a glance at certain newspaper headlines reflect a powerful Islamophobic discourse. How can Muslim and non-Muslim Brits address this? Is this about religion, or fear of the ‘other’? What role can British Values play here: to divide an already divided nation, or to begin a much-needed conversation about our shared values? Is the RE classroom a good place to have these conversations?