Teachers’ Guidance

Visions and Prophecy

We are looking for evidence of students grappling with content such as this in response to the theme of visions and prophecy. Winning work will take the words and images of the world’s prophets or visionaries and express creative and thoughtful ideas in the light of them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visionary</th>
<th>A person who offers original, radical and innovative ideas about the future, which come to them in dreams, trances or from a supernatural being</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prophet</td>
<td>A person who makes claims and warnings about the future, often unpopular or shocking. Prophets speak truth to power and are often excluded and stand outside society, or risk violence when those in power hear their words.</td>
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**A vision that started a religion: Sikhism**

The man who would become known as Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, had a vision that would change his life and start a new religion.

Born in 1469, he grew up in a Hindu household yet was keenly interested in learning about all religions. At the age of 11 he would not to wear the thread sacred Hindu to mark him out as Brahman, refusing to see himself as superior to others. He argued with local Hindu and Muslim religious teachers, convinced that observing religious rituals such as fasts and pilgrimage were pointless without true devotion to God and compassion for other people.

He disappeared while praying by the river. His family feared he had drowned, but he reappeared three days later claiming he had received a vision from God of what life could be like if people treated each other with equality and love.

In 1496 he left his job, wife and family and set out to become a preacher, teacher and wise man. His followers were known as Sikhs, or ‘learners’. Today fundamental Sikh teachings follow his original vision that devotion to God can be found equally in earning an honest wage and sharing what you have, as through prayer and religious observance.

**A vision of social justice: Malala Yousafzai**

On 9th October 2012, Malala Yousafzai was shot in the head by a gunman as she took the bus to school. She was 15 years old.

Malala had grown up in the Swat Valley in Pakistan. Her father, a diplomat and education activist, had always encouraged her education, even though many families in the region do not educate their daughters. When the Taliban, a militant Islamic group, took control of the Swat Valley they severely curtailed the rights and freedoms of women and girls, including banning girls from attending school.

The Taliban (ironically the word comes from ‘talib’ meaning ‘student’) justify their brutal misogyny using Islamic passages. However, Malala and many others do not accept their version of Islam. Passages such as Qur’an 33:35 suggest that men and women have an equal responsibility to learn about the world. The necessity to educate women as well as men is supported in various Hadith. For example the Hadith of ibn Maja (in al-Sunna 1:81 s224) states that, ‘Acquisition of knowledge is binding on all Muslims (both men and women without any discrimination).’

Malala showed incredible bravery in still attending school. She ran a daily risk of violence, as did her family. She wrote a blog about conditions for women under the Taliban, enabling the world to witness the brutality.

Having survived the attack, and after life-saving treatment in Birmingham, she continued to speak in international forums about the importance of girls’ education. In refusing to accept an inferior place as a woman, she shows the world that we must all stand for more justice and more equality. Malala reminds us that justice and equality cannot be a bad thing, saying, ‘extremists have shown what frightens them most: a girl with a book.’

**A vision of the end of days: John’s revelation**

The last book of the bible, The Book of Revelation, is written by a ‘John’, who seems to have been an early Christian prophet but probably not the apostle of the same name. The book has left us with lasting images of suffering and destruction; the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, the Whore of Babylon, the Battle of Armageddon and the Beast with the mysterious number 666. What do these lurid and frightening visions mean? What is John trying to say?

Some scholars believe they refer to the current political struggle for freedom from Roman oppression. Some argue the visions are a future warning of destruction, such as in the form of climate change. Others argue the visions are an allegory of the struggle between good and evil, and the need to stay spiritually strong. The powerful and disturbing message of prophets often mean they stand outside society, seen as crazy or different. Their honesty makes them unpopular with the powerful. The voice of God in their minds drives them to behave in strange ways. Maybe you have to live outside society to see it clearly. It might be hard to understand a prophet and visionary, but should we listen more closely?