

Talking about beliefs in the 21st Century through art

These materials ask students to address these questions:

1. How do some Christians and Muslims express their beliefs about God/Allah through art?
2. Responding to that understanding: How can I and others in my class express our beliefs through art?
3. How can we create shared work and respect other's right to difference?

One possible end outcome of these materials is to create a 'Belief Dialogue through Art' Exhibition to place in the school foyer, a local library, a church or another place of worship .

isay: (a)

Starter: (15 mins)

Use four examples of Muslim art and four of Christian art. These can be taken from many websites:

www.yellowbison.co.uk This website has some good images on the PowerPoints about Islamic art.

www.vam.ac.uk
The Victoria and Albert Museum has some good images for Islam.

www.nationalgallery.org.uk
The National Gallery website has many useful images.

www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/walker
The Walker Gallery in Liverpool also has a good collection.

www.flickr.com/photos/jordoncooper/sets/72057594066906732
This site offers some interesting contemporary images of Jesus.

Clearly label the images either Christian or Muslim.

Ask the students in small groups to work out from the images:

1. *What are the main differences that you can detect between the two sets of images?*
2. *Can you guess the reasons behind the differences?*
3. *Are there similarities between the sets of images?*

(These questions are included on Lesson 1 PowerPoint)

Take feedback from the groups and scribe it on the board, trying to draw out the main distinctive differences and beliefs outlined in the teacher's notes below.

Background information for teachers:

Muslims: In most Islamic art humans cannot be depicted.

Idol worship is forbidden. One interpretation is that this is due to a belief that only Allah can create: to copy the act of creation of the human form is to try to be Allah, which is not allowed (haram). Some images of humans may be allowed but this is not widespread, and often the facial features will be omitted out of respect to Allah.

This restriction has resulted in the heightened expertise of other aspects of artistic expression. Islamic art is therefore rich in the use of calligraphy, geometric designs called arabesque, depictions of nature and images of gardens of paradise.

Christians: In Christianity there are varying artistic traditions.

Some Protestant churches emphasise the simple and plain, and insist on a lack of visual imagery in keeping with their view that God is beyond human understanding.

However, since Christians believe that God is the Trinity and as God the Son came to earth in the human form of Jesus, his image remains a focus for worship and artistic expression of belief in Christianity.

Christian artists have used the human form to express their understanding of God and the relationship God has with people since the 1st Century AD.

Key questions:

What are the central differences in the way that some young Christians and Muslims express their beliefs through art?

Learning outcomes:

1. Students will be able to explain the main differences in the art that Christians and Muslims created to express their beliefs about God, themselves and the world.
2. Students will be able to respond to and evaluate art made by young Christians and Muslims in Bristol that expresses their beliefs about God, themselves and the world.

Resources needed:

- Lesson 1 PowerPoint
- Lesson 1 Materials
- 4 images taken from Google / Photopacks from each faith tradition
- 2 images from each tradition in the project with appropriate text (support materials lesson 1)
- Appropriate Islamic and Christian music downloaded / bought



isay: (a)

Introducing the isay:usay:wesay Art Exhibition (10 mins)

Either explain simply that an exhibition of art created by young people in Bristol aged 12 to 17 who worshipped in mosques and churches was held in the summer of 2010 in the Central Library or you could show a PowerPoint of the exhibition (part of the pack/downloadable isay:usay:wesay Exhibition PowerPoint with suggested accompanying music downloadable from iTunes and other songs taken from "Expressions of Faith" which is available from mcbdirect@mcb.org.uk (see Suggested Playlist document).

- *Young Muslims involved in this project have abided by the above rules to depict their faith. They have worked in acrylic paint on canvas to depict the aspects of their faith that they felt were most important. They have chosen images rich in symbolic meaning with an emphasis on the use of expressive colour to enhance this.*
- *Young Christians involved in this project were asked to remain within the tradition that uses the human form. They explored their own humanity, their relationship to God, and the extent to which God dwells within or outside them. They depicted their beliefs located within an image of themselves. They drew around each other on large rolls of paper, superimposing electrical tape on their drawings to represent the boundaries between themselves and the world. To this they added symbols and colours resonant with their lives and their faith.*

Discuss why the different wording has changed the focus of the debate (draw analogies with exam questions?)

Extension question:

In what other ways could you change the question and how would that effect the debate?

Homework:

Find images from the Muslim faith and the Christian faith. In a minimum of 6 sentences and a maximum of 12 explain:

- The differences between the images.
- The reasons for those differences.

Main activity: (25 mins)

Some people involved in this project have answered the question:

"What do I believe about Allah, the Muslim faith and the world?"

Other people involved in this project have been answering the question:

"Where am I and where is God - what is the relationship between myself and God?"

1. Give out the four images (Lesson 1 PowerPoint). Students must decide which images are answering which question. Why do they think that?
2. What difference has the question set made to the finished art?

Plenary: (10 mins)

A room-divide debate:

"I can depict (draw/paint/sculpt) God"

Ask students to stand in the room at the point that most sums up their opinion.

Agree

Disagree

Not sure

Ask students to explain their view and respond to other views.

Change the statement to:

"People should depict God"

Ask them to move if they think their response to this question would be different.

Ask a few opinions...



isay: (b)

Starter: (15 mins)

Re-cap from last lesson by giving out 'Islamic and Christian Art – True and False' sheets (Lesson 2 Materials). Pupils complete sheets individually. As a whole class discuss answers.

Main activity: (40 mins)

Create your own piece of artwork which expresses your own beliefs or life philosophy. Choose a title from:

- *God*
- *Truth*
- *The Meaning of Life*
- *God, Truth and the Meaning of Life*

(These pieces could be sent to the Spirited Arts Competition run annually by NATRE <http://www.natre.org.uk/spiritedarts/index.php>)

Students are now going to be able to express their own beliefs within either the Islamic or Christian rules for art.

They need to decide which tradition they are going to choose. Then:

1. Make a pencil draft of their ideas.
2. Make an A4/5 final piece using crayons/chalks/pastels/collage etc. to make their image.
3. Write a short piece of "exhibition notes" to explain your artwork.

Hand out the Exhibition Notes prompt sheet. Gifted and Talented may be allowed to be freer in the pupils explanations.

Plenary: (5 mins)

Ask some students who have progressed well to showcase their work and offer explanations of their work to the class.

Homework:

Research and find out about an influential artist within the Christian or Islamic worlds.

- Find out what their best works were like.
- What inspired them?
- Explain why this work inspires you/confuses you/makes you want to ask this question.....

Key questions:

How can I express my beliefs through art?

How can I explain my art to others?

Learning outcomes:

1. Students will be able to express their own beliefs about God, Meaning, Truth or the Purpose of Life, demonstrating a use of symbolism and appropriate use of colour and expression.
2. Students will be able to explain their art (expressive choices, symbolism, colour etc.) in written words.

Resources needed:

- Lesson 2 PowerPoint
- Lesson 2 Materials
- A3 sugar paper and art materials (crayons, felt tips, pastel crayons, chalks)



wesay: (a)

Starter: (15 mins)

Why pray?

Give out Worksheet 3.1 (Lesson 3 Materials). In pairs students fill them in and feedback to the whole class .

TRANSITION TASK:

Show pupils Worksheets 3.2 and 3.3 in groups of 2/3. Explain that this is the work that the young people in the project decided was the most important thing they shared.

1. From these panels can you decide what those involved in the project decided was shared?
2. Can you see any differences between the two panels?
Why do you think that might be?
3. Why do you think they decided to do two similar parallel panels and not one?

What do you think it shows? (2 mins chat) Feedback to class (3 mins).

Main activity: (40 mins)

An exploration of two central texts for the prayer-life of two major world faiths:

The Al-Fatiha and the Lord's Prayer (see Worksheets 3.4 - 3.7 Lesson 3 Materials).

It would be good to start by asking them to listen to both prayers whilst reading them from the sheet (see Suggested Playlist document for musical versions of each).

Plenary: (10 mins)

If someone has written a prayer that could be prayed by people of both faiths read it out - give praise - open up for questions.

Why do you think the young people decided that the central thing they shared was prayer?

A room-divide debate:

Agree

Disagree

"Prayer is the most important activity in religion."

Again you can ask students how the debate might be changed by altering the words.

Homework:

Research and find: 3 facts about the Al-Fatiha and 3 facts about the Lord's Prayer.

The young Muslims and Christians involved in the project decided that the most important thing they shared was that they were people of prayer.

Key questions:

Why is prayer central to Muslim and Christian faith?

What do the central prayers of Islam and Christianity share?

Learning outcomes:

1. Students will be able to explain why prayer is important to Christians and Muslims.
2. Students will evaluate and respond to the central prayers in the Muslim and Christian faith.

Resources needed:

- Lesson 3 PowerPoint
- Lesson 3 Materials



wesay: (b)

Starter: (15 mins)

Finding the middle ground exercise (see Lesson 4 Materials).

Students need to use the opposing categories and decide upon a middle category that would bring the two together so they are no longer in opposition.

Extra questions:

What if you couldn't find any middle ground?

What would be the right way to proceed then?

Main activity: (40 mins)

(This will cover 2 lessons)

Returning to the artwork created in pairs in Lesson 2 - give out the previous artwork.

With someone with a different view to yourself, make a joint piece of work that addresses the title "God, Truth and the Meaning of Life".

You have to agree and it must represent both of your beliefs or life philosophy.

Give out Worksheet 4/5.2 (Lesson 4/5 Materials). This should help the paired students to plan their joint work.

a) In rough, work out what you have agreed to do from your planning sheet.

b) On a large piece of paper create your final piece of work.

c) Explain your final design - how you made it, what compromises were made, why you included what you have included and why you have designed it that way.

(using Worksheet 4/5.3 wesay: Exhibition Notes)

Plenary: (10 mins)

Ask students with finished or nearly finished pieces of work to display them on the front tables (without explanatory notes).

Give other students Post-It notes and ask them to write down what they think the images are trying to convey and what the colours and the symbolism might mean. They should then attach the Post-It notes to the bottom of the relevant pieces of artwork.

Hold a couple up, read the Post-It notes and ask the artists if the comments are accurate.

Does it matter if other people have a different understanding about your work than what you intended?

Final questions:

1. *What wasn't easy about working together?*
2. *What did you learn from working together?*
3. *How can you negotiate when you disagree about something that really matters to you and you are sure is right?*

Key questions:

How can **WE** express **OUR** beliefs through art?

Learning outcomes:

1. Students will create a shared piece of art that will express the beliefs that they have in common.
2. Students will be able to explain the significance of the images, symbolism and use of colour in their finished piece and be able to explain the process that occurred to agree upon the final image(s).

Resources needed:

- Lesson 4/5 PowerPoint
- Lesson 4/5 Materials
- A2/A1 paper, art materials and Post-It Notes

