

ASSEMBLY & FORM ACTIVITIES 05

WHAT DOES FAITH MEAN NOW?

The discussion of faith can often be emotional and passionate. In Pakistan different interpretations of religion have brought about death and destruction with terrorist attacks on shrines and religious gatherings. In Episode 05, the team talked to young people from different religious backgrounds, as well as questioning an Islamic scholar, to gain a sense of what faith means to people in the 21st Century.

LEARNING FOCUS

- Explore what faith means to different people in the 21st Century

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Learn that there are many different views about faith and religion
- Consider the effects of stereotyping and prejudice on those with beliefs
- Debate the positive and negative aspects of religion

ASSEMBLY ACTIVITY

What does faith mean now? (10 minutes)

During Day 05 of the expedition, the team focused on religion. A number of themes emerged from the workshop with Pakistani students and the discussion with an Islamic scholar:

- The need for interfaith understanding and appreciation of interfaith friendship
- Position of women in society and the difficulty of distinguishing between cultural norms and religious beliefs regarding women
- Religious discrimination, in particular the treatment of minority groups
- The difference between faith and religion and how people who do not follow a particular religion view faith

Choose one of these themes to focus on. Perhaps one that is most applicable to the pupils at your school.

1. Introduce the expedition using the presentation from the first episode, if you have not used any of the expedition resources before
2. Show pupils Episode 05: What does faith mean now? (download the film file or view online at www.offscreenexpedition.com/2010_pk/home/episode/episode-05-what-does-faith-mean-now)
3. Use one or more of the discussion points above to focus the assembly on a specific point that is relevant to your school

FORM ACTIVITIES

Why is interfaith understanding important? (10 minutes)

Show pupils Episode 05: What does faith mean now? (download the film file or view online at www.offscreenexpedition.com/2010_pk/home/episode/episode-05-what-does-faith-mean-now).

Use slides 2-4 from the presentation 'Faith & Religion Discussion Points' to debate the following statements:

- It is important to understand other religions and faiths
- People from different religions can be friends
- "...those with no educational qualifications were twice as likely to have negative attitudes towards Muslims as university graduates." Source: [Daily Mail](#)

Why does religious discrimination exist? (10 minutes)

Members of the team were shocked and surprised that Pakistani Christian pupils faced discrimination and discomfort in their daily lives and were made to feel that they didn't fit in.

1. Remind pupils of the video from the previous session
2. Using slides 5-7 from the presentation 'Faith & Religion Discussion Points' debate the following statements:
 - Religious minorities face discrimination and prejudice
 - It's ok not to belong to a religious group
 - Religion is used to discriminate against women

You may also wish to ask pupils in the class about their own experiences. Depending on your class/school it may be appropriate to ask pupils not to share personal stories.

What does faith mean now? (2 x 10 minutes + homework)

During the workshop at St Mary's Academy, Rawalpindi, the students produced posters looking at the positive and negative impacts of religion before presenting these to the class.

1. Divide the class into groups of 4 pupils
2. Give each group a focus - either the positive or negative impacts of religion
3. Tell each group that they have 5 minutes to come up with as many examples as possible for their theme
4. Pupils then create a poster to present to the class
5. Posters can be completed as homework before presentations

RESOURCES

- Video** episode-04-2010_pk.mov (QuickTime movie, 155MB)
Note: you may need to download the free QuickTime player from www.apple.com/quicktime/ to view this video.
- Presentations** Episode 05 Faith & Religion Discussion Points (Powerpoint, 8MB)
- Info Sheets** Episode 05 Khurshid Nadeem on 'What does faith mean to me?' (see next sheet)
Episode 05 Learning about religion in Pakistan: Al Mawrid & FACES (see last sheet)
- Other** Information on teaching sensitive issues in the classroom from Croydon Local Authority (www.croydon.gov.uk/contents/departments/education/pdf/appendices.pdf)
Online poll, student team blogs, videos and galleries all at www.offscreenexpedition.com/2010_pk/episode/episode-05-what-does-faith-mean-now/

CURRICULUM LINKS

These activities link to:

- Citizenship - identity and diversity, cultural understanding, issues of discrimination
- Religious Education - interfaith understanding

CROSS-CURRICULAR THEMES

These activities link to:

- Identity & Cultural Diversity
- Global dimension
- Creativity

INTERNATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

If you have school partnerships, exchange examples of the posters that you have made or conduct a internet chat to discuss issues around faith and debate different points of view.

KHURSHID NADEEM ON 'WHAT DOES FAITH MEAN TO ME?'

Apparently we are living in a secular age when the role of religion seems to be minimizing in day to day affairs. At the same time we cannot deny the fact that religion has been the most important factor in society. The impact of religion is obvious from surveys conducted. The interest of people towards religion is increasing day by day. This leads us to the conclusion that if we use religion's role for the betterment of society, religion can provide a great service to humanity. This entirely depends upon the question that what does religion mean to us?

Religion is essentially a metaphysical concept. It purifies the inner self where the bases of human personality develop. This makes a person responsible towards society and answerable towards God. Religion is all about morality. It emphasizes virtues such as honesty, tolerance, sacrifice, truth and tolerance. This is true about each and every religion. Every religion wants to develop a God-oriented personality. In this context they are not contradictory, but supportive to each other. If we look at the Abrahamic tradition (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), Islam is the last in the sequence. The Prophet of Islam, Mohammad (pbuh), denies many times that He is presenting a new religion. The Holy Quran tells the Prophet (pbuh) that He is guided to the path of those who have gone before.

“God wants to guide you, explain to you the customs of those who lived before you, and grant you forgiveness. He is All-knowing and All-wise.” (4:26).

It is unfortunate that religion is being portrayed as a force of destruction and hatred. Although every religion presents itself as 'the only truth,' at the same time it gives everyone the right to choose. For example, some claim that Islam is the only religion near God, but the Quran says there is no compulsion regarding the religion.

“There is no compulsion in religion. Certainly, right has become clearly distinct from wrong. Whoever rejects the devil and believes in God has firmly taken hold of a strong handle that never breaks. God is All-hearing and knowing.” (2:256).

It shows that the believers of all religions can live together in harmony and peace. A pluralist society is not against the teachings of a religion if it allows the adherents of every religion to act upon the teachings of their own religion. Some minority groups try to distort the teachings of religion when they make the religion a symbol of hatred. They corrupt the verses of the sacred texts and give them the meanings of their own choice.

As a Muslim, Islam means to me a religion which assures me the salvation in the afterlife and teaches me to live a life beneficial to the entire humanity by practicing what God commands me through His last Prophet (pbuh). It forbids me to affront the gods of others which may provoke them to say something unpleasant about my God, the Creator of this world. (6:108). This understanding of religion is a blessing to humanity, not a curse.

This text has been adapted from a blog post written by Khurshid Nadeem, an Islamic scholar, writer and broadcaster, for the Offscreen Expedition blog (www.offscreenexpedition.com/2010_pk/blog/khurshid-nadeem-what-does-faith-mean-to-me/). Khurshid Nadeem is a member of the Al Mawrid Foundation (www.al-mawrid.org/). Some of the language has been altered from the original to make it easier to understand. Also the quotes from the Quran have been replaced with translations of the same verses by Muhammed Sarwar, as this version is written in a more modern style of English.

LEARNING ABOUT RELIGION IN PAKISTAN: AL MAWRID & FACES

We knew we wanted to have a focus on religion during the expedition. Islam does not have the same hierarchies as popular forms of Christianity in the UK, such as the Church of England or the Roman Catholic Church. It seemed like a bit of a minefield wondering who to speak to. Eventually, the obvious answer came to us. We would ask the Pakistan students who came to the UK, who they would go to. Universally, they replied Javed Ahmad Ghamidi, founder of the Al Mawrid Institute

The reason for the popularity of Javed Ahmad Ghamidi was that he offered young people advice that was rooted in tradition but applicable to the modern age. One example we were given was the question of whether photography or the internet is *haram* or forbidden. The explanation given was that Islam does not make a judgement about technology in itself, but that the Qu'ran does make a judgement about various moral issues. This means that it is what you do with the internet or photography that is *haram* or forbidden, for instance taking indecent photographs.

Whilst in Pakistan, we also worked with NGO FACES Pakistan. One of their projects focuses on interfaith dialogue. Our students met with 6th Form pupils from St Mary's Academy in Rawalpindi to discuss the positive and negative aspects of religion. One of the groups consisted of two Muslims and two Christians. The two Muslims were from the expedition team of UK students and the two Christians were pupils at the school in Pakistan. This certainly challenged stereotypes.

One of the most striking images produced during the day was the word 'God' in shards, representing the view that God is one, but people have broken this word into their own competing definitions causing strife and bloodshed over the centuries.

Useful links:

Al Mawrid Institute Official Website - www.al-mawrid.org

Al Mawrid Wikipedia entry - en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Mawrid

Javed Ahmed Ghamidi Wikipedia entry - en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Javed_Ahmed_Ghamidi

FACE Pakistan Official Website - www.facespakistan.com