

RE Today: socially distanced learning in groups for 5-14s

A. The Chalk Circle of Enquiry

These flexible suggestions for teachers provide outdoor or socially distanced learning ideas for groups of pupils in the 5-14 age range. As schools follow demanding guidance about distancing, these ideas can be used creatively with your pupils to provide good RE out of doors or in larger indoor spaces, making a varied learning diet possible. The activities can lead on to individual work at desks, but bring some energy, movement and interaction from RE to the class. Flexible ideas - you can tailor these easily to your needs.

Engaging socially distanced learning

This is one of a series of separate session ideas which we are making available in this learning pack, via the NATRE website. Each idea within the pack involves some engaging learning out of doors, or in larger indoor spaces, some thinking all together and some opportunities to take the learning and record thoughts and ideas individually afterwards through good RE writing activities. We hope these ideas will flex across the 5-14 age range.

The activities in this pack are:

- A. The chalk circle of enquiry (you can use masking tape on an indoor floor instead)
- B. The religious knowledge memory test. In which a 20 or 30 piece factual account of a religion is tested and pupils count their scores with leaves or stones.
- C. The walk of faith-exploration. In which a faith community's practice is understood at increasing depth, example from Islam
- D. The shouted story. In which a faith story in 30 pieces is related by pupils in groups of 8-20 in size
- E. The Golden Rule explored through movement and decision making.
- F. Feeling sad? Feeling happy? Feeling brave? Feeling miserable? Four squares on the floor to identify your responses, linked to some sacred texts.
- G. Bring It All To Me – a musical lesson derived from the Psalms, holy text for Jewish, Christian and Muslim people.

The Chalk Circle of Enquiry:

a dynamic 'big voice' discussion strategy for socially distant learners.

For this dynamic learning idea, you need a chalk circle on the playground, or one made from masking tape, on a large indoor floor, big enough for the pupils to stand 2 metres apart on the circumference. For 20 pupils that is about 7m diameter. These activities probably work best for groups up to 20 in size. Take whatever your current RE topic might be – Big Questions? Life after death? Wealth and Poverty? Religions and worldviews against racism? Life after lockdown – can religious visions help us build a new world?

Prepare a set of 6-10 'hot button' quotations on the topic and explain before you go outside how it will work: learners stand just outside the circle, with their toes on the line. Teacher (or a pupil you appoint) reads out the quotes in a loud voice, twice, with a pause of ten seconds (thinking time) between each reading. Then signal that those who have something to say step over the line into the circle (e.g. shout 'Something to say? Step forward today!' – after the first use of this magic sentence, have the class chant it together). Make it fun. The teacher or appointed pupil asks each one to say their piece. Others can step in if they want to speak during the activity. All step back, reflect and think if they will include what they have heard in their writing back in class. Read the second quote, or prompt, and repeat.

Variations

- Use this for storytelling, where pupils each have two numbered sentences in a 30-piece story and take turns to deliver their bit of a narrative.
- Use it for dramatic reactions to a story you tell – for example, tell the life story of Dr Hany El Banna (founder of Islamic Relief) or Pandurang Shastri Athavale (the great Hindu reformer) and punctuate it with questions: guess what happened next – give two alternatives – step in if you think... and out if you think...
- Use questions about the topic (scripture, prayer, belief, ethics) and invite those with something to say to step in and speak up.

Exemplar quotes and questions on the next page

For 7-11 year olds

Sample quotes to use with 7-11 year olds about prayer – based on comments from 9 year olds gathered at one of our pupil conferences.

- A. "I don't really pray myself, but I think sometimes people get comfort and strength from praying." (Ask: what did this child mean? Does prayer give people strength? Comfort? How?)
- B. "It is important to respect the different ways people pray to God in different religions" (Ask: why is this important? What happens if there is no respect?)
- C. "I believe that God hears all our prayers, but sometimes we don't get what we ask for, maybe because God knows best." (Ask: what does this child think about God? Do you agree that God might say 'no' to some prayers? Why?)
- D. "I think prayer is like whistling in the dark. It can make you feel better." (Ask: do you agree? Why? How could praying make a person feel better?)
- E. "I think praying is a waste of breath. It is better to do something to help someone than to say a prayer." (Ask: do you agree? What kind of things could a person do instead of praying?)
- F. "I love to pray because it makes me feel close to God. It's not like having a shopping list, more like talking to my friends." (Ask: what does this pupil mean? Do you agree? Do you think God is friends with humans?)
- G. "I say my prayers using words from our holy book but I also like to talk to God in my own words." (Ask: which do you think is better, saying a daily prayer like the Lord's Prayer or the Muslim daily prayers, or talking to God in your own words? Why?)

Invite pupils to give a quote of their own about prayer to discuss.

Back in class, give pupils these quotes and ask them to give their views on the three they find most interesting in a piece of written work.

For 11-14 year olds

Sample quotes to use with 11-14 year olds about ethics, wealth and poverty.

- A. "Money can't buy me love." (Ask: why not? What does this mean? What else is more valuable than money and why?)
- B. "The richest 26 people in the world own as much money as the poorest half of the people on earth – the poorest 3 600 000 000 – three point six billion. This is wrong, and God didn't mean us to live like this." (Ask: why is it wrong or right? Does God have an opinion on things like this? What is your opinion?)
- C. "Being rich is not wrong. It is refusing to help the poor that is wrong. Bill Gates is the richest person in the world but he gives away more than anyone else too." (Ask: Do you want to be rich? Why? Is it actually harder for rich people to be generous than people who are not so rich? If you were a millionaire, would you give it away?)
- D. Jesus said: 'You can't love God and money.' 'Sell what you have, give to the poor and come and follow me.' (Ask: do you agree with Jesus' teaching? Should churches be sold and the money used to feed people who are hungry? Jesus was a poor man – should his followers be poor?)
- E. Guru Nanak taught: the mouth of a hungry person is the treasure chest of God. (Ask: what did he mean? If someone gives to people who are hungry, will God reward them? What other reasons are there for giving to charities?)

Invite pupils to give a quote of their own about wealth and poverty to discuss.

Back in class, give pupils these quotes and ask them to give their views on the three they find most interesting in a piece of written work.