

RE-Juvinating and RE-Inspiring RE Conference 2021

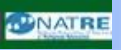
In one hour... (William Blake: 'eternity contracted to a span')

- RE needs creative teaching, imaginative learning, open hearted and broad minded approaches to plurality and every encouragement to pupils to understand the meanings of spirituality
- In an hour, I am going to demo how this works with reference to a theological question, three teaching and learning ideas and two ways to give voice to the thoughts of children and young people themselves.

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#ReReRE2021



“Our nature picture of the Garden of Eden shows the Tree of Knowledge and Evie is playing the part of Eve, taking the fruit. Maybe the Serpent knew that Eve would take a risk. It was only one rule, but they broke it, so they were made to leave the perfect garden of Eden. They had to start working hard!”



Can we use outdoor RE to enable deep thinking about key concepts?

Children exploring the 'Fall of Humanity' at St. Vincent's, Knutsford

We follow Catholic curriculum resource 'The Way, The Truth and The Life, but tend to use it as a starting point, not a definitive way to teach. Studying a unit about Creation, I tried an outdoor lesson, a follow up to a discussion about sin and bad choices. I asked one child to stand up to symbolise God and another to stand beside him. I told a story in which the child stood next to God wasn't always very good. Other children had cards with words like 'envy', 'unkindness', 'disobedience' written on them and as I incorporated these sins into the story, they would come out and stand between 'God' and the little girl. I completed the story by the little girl changing her ways, being forgiven and so coming closer to God. We then looked at the story of The Fall and linked what Eve did to the first activity. This instigated some very interesting ideas: some children felt that Adam hadn't sinned badly because Eve hadn't been clear about which tree she had taken the fruit from. Others responded that that didn't matter as it was Adam's choice to eat it. They questioned why the serpent approached Eve and not Adam: was it because 'boys never listen so Adam wouldn't have listened'? Was it because the serpent knew 'Eve would take a risk'?

Because of these somewhat heated discussions, I felt it needed exploring in a different way where all children could express themselves. We had previously looked at the work of Andy Goldsworthy who made artwork out of natural materials so I thought this may be a good way in. The children were put into small groups and were asked to create a piece of art work which represented their interpretation of The Fall, the aim being to assess their understanding and viewpoint by listening to their discussions rather than what the finished piece looked like. Some groups struggled a little at first as they couldn't agree on how they wanted to do this so a couple of 'splinter groups' emerged. I was expecting the groups to produce an image on the floor but some actually produced an upright sculpture which was very impressive!

While they were working, it was interesting listening to the concepts and vocabulary they were using. They discussed how they could show Eve falling away from God, just like we had shown in the first lesson where the little girl 'distanced' herself from God by sinning. And so, a tree 'falling sideways' was produced to demonstrate falling away from God. One boy then had a lightbulb moment where he suddenly shrieked 'That's why it's called The Fall!! Eve had fallen out with God by disobeying him!'

Why did God...?

As the children worked, the sense of teamwork increased as did their understanding of what they were doing. While creating the serpent from as many leaves as they could carry, one child said 'What I don't understand is if God always forgives us, why did He punish Adam and Eve by banishing them from the garden?' to which the reply came, 'Yes but, He only forgives us if He knows we are sorry. And anyway, if we didn't sin, we would never learn from our mistakes and God knows that.'

Another child, while fashioning Eve out of sticks, said to his partner, 'Just think, if Eve had done as she was told, there would be no sin in the world now. Nobody would have known there was good and evil.'

If I did this again, I would probably ask my more-able children to take it one step further by representing not only what happened in the story but how the relationship between God and Adam and Eve changed. This might have provoked even more discussion and enabled them to continue thinking on a deeper level.

This kind of activity could be done in any RE plan where there is scope for children to use their imaginations and prior knowledge to represent big ideas in this way. For me, it wasn't necessarily the finished outcome that made the lesson so interesting, it was the child-led discussions which took place while they were doing it which demonstrated their questioning and reasoning skills.

Lisa Holland, Deputy Head, St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary, Knutsford

GRACE'S IDEAS ABOUT GOD

Hi, I'm Grace. I'm a Christian. What can you see that I am wearing that is a clue to my religion? I have got five thoughts about God. The first is that God is amazing because he made the world, including cats. I like cats best of all the animals.

My second thought about God is that God loves us. I think that is why we have Christmas, to remind us that God came to Earth to show love.

I also think it is really good that we can pray to God any time and anywhere, and God listens to our prayers (even though he does not always give us what we ask for).

And I think that sometimes people can feel close to God. I sometimes feel God is close when I sing a 'thank you' song at church. And also when my cat is sleeping on my lap.

My fifth thought is that God is a mystery. We don't know what God looks like, and we can't see – God is invisible. I hope I learn more about God when I am older.



Grace

IDEAS ABOUT GOD



SHARING YOUR GOD IDEAS

My first thought about God is

My second thought about God is

My name is

Here is a picture of me.

I also think

And I think

My fifth thought is that God is



**Favourites? Progression
evidence? Setting high
standards of thinking?
Will you enter now?**

