

Key Stage 3

National Strategy

Leading in Learning **Exemplification in religious education**

department for

education and skills

creating opportunity, releasing potential, achieving excellence

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Introduction

The main source of guidance for teachers involved in the Leading in Learning whole-school initiative is the *Handbook for teachers*. These website materials give additional guidance for teachers of particular subjects, to help them play a full part in the initiative by contributing to 3-lesson cycles devoted to teaching thinking skills.

The first section illustrates the distinctive contribution that the subject can make to the development of pupils' thinking skills. This is the perspective that teachers are asked to adopt when, for an occasional lesson, they subordinate subject concerns for a common focus on a selected National Curriculum thinking skill. An aim of Leading in Learning is that pupils should become aware that these skills are applicable to all areas of learning and in everyday life. Committing a small amount of subject time to serving this aim should benefit learning in the subject as well as learning more generally.

The *Handbook for teachers* includes general guidance on each of the following ten teaching strategies:

Advance organisers	Living graphs and fortune lines
Analogies	Mysteries
Audience and purpose	Reading images
Classifying	Relational diagrams
Collective memory	Summarising

The *Handbook* notes on each strategy usually include one substantial example in a selected subject and brief reference to one or two other subjects. In addition, there is an A3 poster for each strategy that illustrates the 3-lesson cycle with selected subjects. To supplement this, these website materials give brief subject examples for each of the teaching strategies. Whether they describe a general type or are more specific in nature, the examples are intended to stimulate teachers to think of ideas of their own. Some of the strategies are readily used in most subjects but others are more obviously suited to certain subjects. However, imaginative teachers will see possibilities that go beyond the examples given. And as the Leading in Learning initiative gathers pace, LEA networks should provide other rich sources of ideas.

Selected references to other publications are included in a final reference section.

Remember that the *Handbook for teachers* is the main reference source on the Leading in Learning approach to teaching thinking skills lessons and includes detailed guidance on each of the ten teaching strategies. These subject examples should be read in conjunction with the relevant sections of the *Handbook* and are not intended to stand alone.

Thinking skills and religious education

Religious education promotes thinking skills through helping pupils to research, select, interpret and analyse information from religious traditions. Religious education encourages pupils to reflect and question their own views and ideas and those of others and to communicate their ideas in a variety of ways. Thinking skills associated with argument, reasoning and logical analysis have a key place in religious education. If learning is to be effective in religious education pupils will need to develop a range of thinking skills that will enable them to gather, organise, store, retrieve, modify and present information.

Information-processing skills

These enable pupils to locate and collect relevant information, to sort, classify, sequence, compare and contrast and to analyse part/whole relationships.

In religious education, teachers should plan for pupils to:

- *Locate and collect relevant information* – for example, when looking up references from sacred texts or collecting examples of the use of symbols by different religious groups.
- *Sort, classify and sequence* – for example, when pupils are asked to sort and classify examples of suffering into natural and man-made disasters.
- *Compare and contrast* – for example, when pupils are asked to compare and contrast the religious arguments for and against the death penalty.
- *Analyse part/whole relationships* – for example, when considering the relationship between different denominations or sects within a particular religious faith.

Reasoning skills

These enable pupils to give reasons for opinions and actions, to draw inferences and make deductions, to use precise language to explain what they think and to make judgements and decisions informed by reason or evidence.

In religious education, teachers should plan for pupils to:

- *Give reasons for opinions and actions* – for example, when pupils are asked to justify and explain the conclusion they came to about the resurrection of Jesus.
- *Draw inferences and make deductions* – for example, when examining the accounts of people who have had near-death experiences.
- *Use precise language to explain what they think* – for example, when distinguishing between fact, belief and opinion.
- *Make judgements and decisions informed by reason or evidence* – for example, when coming to conclusions about contemporary miracles.

Enquiry skills

These enable pupils to ask relevant questions, to pose and define problems, to plan what to do and how to research, to predict outcomes and anticipate consequences and to test conclusions and improve ideas.

In religious education, teachers should plan for pupils to:

- *Ask relevant questions* – for example, when pupils ask ‘What is the significance of religious festivals?’
- *Pose and define problems* – for example, when pupils ask questions like ‘what if...’ and pose the problem of explaining the effects of different religious beliefs and teachings on individuals and communities.
- *Plan what to do and how to research* – for example, when pupils examine the origins of religious ‘laws’ and subsequently investigate the relationship between religious and secular laws.
- *Predict outcomes and anticipate consequences* – for example, when pupils are asked to respond to a given scenario from the perspective of a particular faith background.
- *Test conclusions and improve ideas* – for example, when pupils carry out a questionnaire or survey on whether belief in the existence of God is declining among a particular subset of the population and then refine their ideas based on the results.

Creative-thinking skills

These enable pupils to generate and extend ideas, to suggest hypotheses, to apply imagination and to look for alternative innovative outcomes.

In religious education, teachers should plan for pupils to:

- *Generate and extend ideas* – for example, when pupils use web diagrams to make connections between religious and secular festivals.
- *Suggest hypotheses* – for example, when pupils conjecture about the possible reasons for the declining numbers attending church in Western Europe in contrast to the increasing figures in the developing world.
- *Apply imagination* – for example, when pupils take part in a guided meditation.
- *Look for alternative innovative outcomes* – for example, when pupils are asked to suggest an alternative outcome to the trial of Jesus before Pontius Pilate.

Evaluation skills

These enable pupils to evaluate information, to judge the value of what they read, hear and do, to develop criteria for judging the value of their own and others’ work or ideas and to have confidence in their judgements.

In religious education, teachers should plan for pupils to:

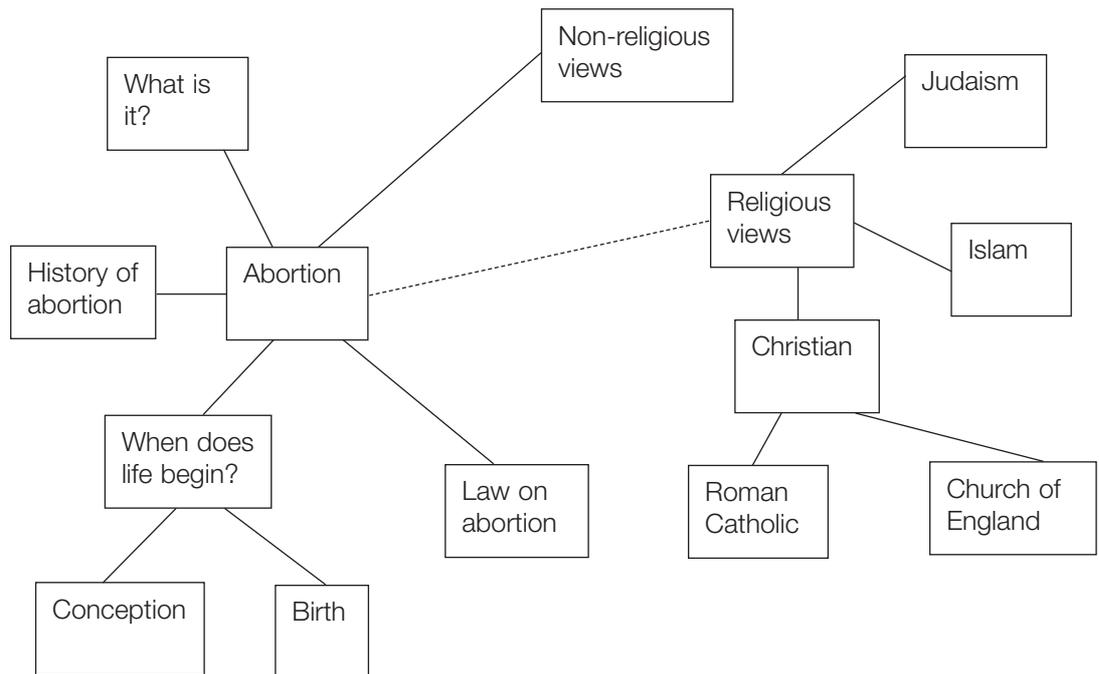
- *Evaluate information* – for example, when they investigate the appropriateness of some religious interpretations for the origins of the universe in a modern, scientific age.

- *Judge the value of what they read, hear and do* – for example, when pupils are asked to evaluate the need for religious education to be taught in state schools.
- *Develop criteria for judging the value of their own and others' work or ideas* – for example, when pupils compare their arguments for and against abortion and establish criteria such as the teaching of scripture, the respective rights of the unborn child and the mother, and medical advancement.
- *Have confidence in their judgements* – for example, when pupils know that their judgement is supported by religious ideas and views.

Advance organisers

Pupils can often become overwhelmed by the amount of new information they encounter in religious education – religious language, concepts, symbols and values. Teachers can influence what pupils learn by helping them to make connections between what they already know and what they need to know.

Advance organisers are one method that can help pupils construct an appropriate mental representation by making the conceptual organisation and causal links more obvious. One effective way of helping pupils to ‘see the wood for the trees’ is by using a graphic organiser. For example, a teacher might make use of the following graphic organiser when introducing a series of lessons to familiarise pupils with the arguments for and against abortion.



Graphic organisers can be used at either the beginning or the end of topics and are particularly useful aids for revision.

Analogies

Analogies are frequently used in religious education to attempt to bridge the gap between the known and the unknown, or to give expression to that which is inexpressible. The following example could be used to introduce a unit of work on signs and symbols, or as an introduction to religious language.

Ask pupils, in pairs, to describe orally a 'headache' to their partner. Get the pairs to give feedback to the whole class and focus the discussion on the language used in the various descriptions, with particular emphasis on the times pupils use the phrase *'it's a bit like...'*. Then ask the pupils to look up the account of Pentecost in the New Testament (Acts) and to read carefully the words used to describe the events recorded. Emphasise that the author of Acts states that what was seen and experienced was 'like' fire, 'like' wind. In other words the author made use of analogy.

Another possible activity, focusing on the symbolic nature of analogy when used in various religious traditions, would be to show pupils an image of a flaming torch (the old road sign for a school) and ask what they think it could be a symbol for. Their ideas are discussed and the answer is revealed only if they do not reach it themselves. They might then explore how useful the lighted torch is as an analogy for the process of education (going to school). Pupils might then be asked to consider whether they think the 'torch' is a good or appropriate symbol for a school road sign, and why it was thought necessary to change it. When the teacher is confident that the pupils have appreciated the need for a more appropriate symbol for contemporary road users, they are asked to apply this observation in terms of religion. This is done with groups of three or four, considering the following questions:

- *Are some of the symbols or analogies found in religion less meaningful because they are now outdated?*
- *What symbols or analogies would they put in this category?*
- *What new alternatives might be used that would have greater relevance for people today, but which still retain the meaning of the original?*
- *Just as people did not think schools had lost their relevance or importance when the school road sign (torch) lost its relevance, would more people become interested in religion if some of the symbols or analogies they used were modernised?*

Audience and purpose

When pupils are given opportunities to communicate ideas and justify reasoning in religious education they enhance their understanding of fundamental religious ideas and concepts. The 'Audience and purpose' strategy can be used effectively to cultivate pupils' awareness of the appropriateness of the form and style of language they use in the subject, including the choice of symbols, analogies and metaphors.

One example of how the strategy might be used in religious education is to provide pupils with between four and six suggested pieces of text for 'With deepest sympathy' cards and a similar number of scenarios. The pupils are then asked to match the text for the cards with the scenarios. For example:

Texts for sympathy cards

1. *'Life has not ended, simply changed'*
2. *'You are in our prayers'*
3. *'God cradles the sunset of each soul and treasures its beauty so deeply'*
4. *'Our heartfelt sympathy is with you'*

Possible scenarios – card to be sent to:

- A. Family of an elderly woman who was a life-long atheist.
- B. Family of a Christian Aid volunteer killed in a road accident while working in South America.
- C. Family of a Hindu woman.
- D. Family of a Jewish rabbi.

It is important to stress that a task like the one above would not necessarily be the main 'thinking episode' of the lesson. The pupils need to be encouraged to reflect on how they decided which text went with each scenario.

Other ideas include:

- matching pieces of music with 'rites of passage' ceremonies such as baptisms, bar mitzvahs, weddings and funerals;
- writing a brief explanation for the origins of the universe from the points of view of a religious believer, an agnostic and an atheist.

Classifying

Misconceptions in religious education can often arise because pupils have a limited experience or perception of a particular term or concept. When pupils develop concepts and ideas for themselves they are likely to be more meaningful and, therefore, understood and remembered.

When devising examples allow for different ways of categorising and ensure that there is some ambiguity as to how particular cards might be classified, in order to stimulate debate.

The following is a card-sort activity and could be used to introduce a unit of work on religious festivals. In pairs, the pupils would be given the cards (listed below) and asked to sort them into a minimum of two and a maximum of four different categories.

Diwali	Christmas	New Year
Easter	Ramadan	Eid
Passover	Pentecost	Pesach
Halloween	Summer solstice	Birthday of Guru Gobind Singh
Yom Kippur	Holi	Baisakhi

Categories that pupils might devise: *Religious festivals and Non-religious festivals, Christian festivals, Islamic festivals, Judaeo festivals, Hindu festivals and Sikh festivals.*

In all cases, teachers need to consider possible classifications when devising the set of cards. It is very important not to present these categories to the pupils, as the aim of the 'Classifying' strategy is to tap pupils' inductive thought processes as a means of helping them to gain insight into the principles and structures of the subject.

Collective memory

The 'Collective memory' strategy is particularly effective in religious education because it is a subject that makes extensive use of visual and symbolic representations such as religious icons, religious symbols or patterns.

Pupils could be arranged in groups of three or four and given a sheet of plain A4 or A3 paper and some coloured pencils. The pupils are told that as a group they will be asked to reproduce, as accurately as possible, something that is covered up at the front of the classroom – each group sending one member at a time to look at the image for 10 seconds.

Images that could be used include:

- the plan of a Christian church, Jewish synagogue, Islamic mosque, Hindu or Sikh temple;
- symbols of the major world religions;
- photographs of famous religious figures of the modern world;
- photographs of artefacts used by the major world religions (or just a particular religion being studied).

Living graphs and fortune lines

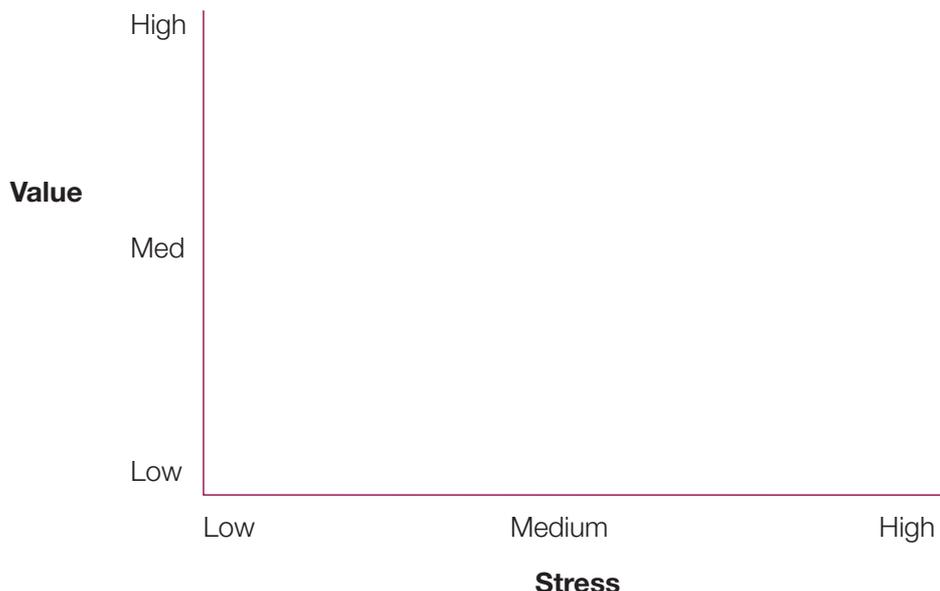
Religious education is well placed to develop thinking skills through the use of the 'Living graphs' strategy, because the strategy encourages pupils to suggest hypotheses and to give reasons for opinions. The fact that the statements and the line graph can be connected in more than one way requires pupils to justify their decisions and makes them think, talk and ask questions.

'Fortune lines' often start with a narrative and use the plotting points as a route to exploration of meaning. Gradations of phenomena such as emotion or power are often easier to explore through a graph than by words. A good example is included in the *Handbook for teachers* (page 72).

For another example, the graph below is an illustration of 'A week in the life of a Catholic priest'. The pupils are given a series of tasks and/or appointments that a Catholic priest has engaged in over a given week. The pupils then have to plot various appointments and tasks according to their value and the stress that they may or may not induce.

Possible tasks and appointments of a Catholic priest:

1. Lead assembly at the local infants school.	4. Conduct the funeral service for a 12-year-old boy killed in a road accident.	7. Talk to a couple who are thinking of getting married.
2. Give the last rites to an elderly lady dying in a hospice.	5. Preach at another Christian church as part of Christian unity week.	8. Visit patients at the local hospital.
3. Talk to some Year 11 pupils about the teaching of the Church on abortion.	6. Visit the mother and father of a local soldier recently killed in action overseas.	9. Go on a day retreat.



Mysteries

Often in religious education pupils are asked to suggest an answer to a single question or a series of questions, to which there is no single correct answer, for example: 'What do we mean by the truth?', 'Is there life after death?', 'Was there ever a time when there was nothing?', 'Why do people and animals suffer?'.

The following mystery is provided to give an idea of the strategy:

An elderly widow (Ann) has lived alone for the past two years following the death of her only son in a car accident (her husband died only a couple of years after their son was born). She lives in a remote cottage on the site of an old monastery. Since her son's death Ann has become a recluse who rarely goes out or receives visitors and her doctor has been treating her for depression. On a recent visit to see her doctor she appears to be fully recovered from her depression. Ann tells the doctor that some three weeks previous, whilst watching the sunset, she was aware of a figure walking towards her from the wood at the bottom of her garden. The figure was bathed in light and radiated warmth and calmness. From that moment she felt at peace and began to see things with great clarity for the first time in a long time. She has not taken the anti-depressants prescribed by her doctor since that date and has begun visiting friends and relations again for the first time since the death of her son. When examined by the doctor she was found to be perfectly healthy, her blood pressure is normal and she appears to be totally content with life. The doctor could offer no medical explanation for her apparent recovery.

Possible cards that might be used for 'solving' this mystery could include the following:

Ann was drinking the night before seeing the figure bathed in light.	Ann is a very religious person.	Ann is on medication for depression.
It was a hot summer's evening.	Ann gets a phone call from a friend who had also lost a loved one in a car accident.	Ann has an hallucination.
Ann has a religious experience.	Ann's house is built on the site of an old monastery.	Ann has developed a positive mental attitude.

The open question might be: 'What or who is responsible for the old lady's recovery?', 'Must there be an explanation?'. In pairs, the pupils would then use the cards as prompts to help them formulate their answers to the question.

As a follow-up, encourage pupils to discuss how one might set about evaluating the truth or validity of the explanations that have been suggested.

Reading images

Religious education has always made extensive use of imagery. Many of the world's religions emphasise the difference between looking and seeing and this strategy is well placed to help pupils see beyond the superficial and gain a better, deeper understanding of the spiritual.

For example, in introducing a unit of work on the death and resurrection of Jesus, the teacher would use a particular set of images relating to the crucifixion of Jesus to stimulate thinking and discussion about how various artists seek to portray Jesus. Having divided the class into groups of three or four the teacher might begin the activity by asking the pupils to discuss (in pairs) what the images tell them about Jesus as a person – for example, do the images stress Jesus' humanity or his divinity? It is important to stress to the pupils that they will need to explain their answers later on in the lesson.

As the lesson unfolds, the pupils can be invited to work in pairs and to speculate about when each of the images was first produced and the background of each of the artists responsible for the various images. They can be encouraged to reflect on some of the basic theological ideas that the images may suggest, such as whether Jesus really suffered or pretended to feel pain.

Pupils could then reflect on which of the images they find the most and the least appealing and be encouraged to offer a suggested title for each of the images. This is an excellent way to challenge them to employ a higher level of thinking.

Other images which might be used include:

- images of places of religious worship;
- images of God portrayed through art;
- images of creation.

Relational diagrams

The 'Relational diagrams' strategy provides opportunities for making extensive use of specialist religious vocabulary and developing a sound understanding of religious ideas and concepts. The strategy requires pupils, given between two and five collective nouns, to make connections between the terms and identify similarities and differences.

A set of suitable terms to consider might be:

Founder Messenger Prophet Leader

Rather than starting with all four terms, pupils might initially be asked to draw diagrams for just two or three of the terms.

The pupils are then presented with the names of a number of figures taken from one or a series of religious traditions and asked to position them within the diagram. Discussion and questions focus on:

- *What is the basic difference between the 'titles'?*
- *What are the similarities between the figures?*

These discussions might encourage pupils to reconsider their diagrams. When this has been fully explored, the pupils could be asked to extend their diagrams to include more terms.

Other examples include:

- The foods favoured or required by different religious traditions.
- The terms given in the example in the *Leading in Learning Handbook for teachers* on page 98, although it is very challenging if all seven are offered (*Christian, Methodist, Catholic, churchgoer, Muslim, saint and worshipper*). Generally it is advisable to restrict the number of terms to a maximum of five.

Summarising

The skill of summarising is a very useful one for pupils to learn when studying religious education. In religious education, pupils often need to be able to find the main threads of an argument or idea and then make connections between these threads. Summarising is the ability to condense and convey meaning and is a 'composite' of different skills.

A general approach to summarising is to use a 'summarising frame' that helps the pupils to sift out themes and main messages.

One such frame utilises four shapes (heart, square, triangle and circle). It is a useful frame for helping pupils to review a piece of text. Pupils work in pairs and are given a copy of the frame (with the shapes already reproduced) on a piece of A4 paper.

For example, if the pupils were asked to read a piece of writing about the Jewish festival of Pesach they could construct a summarising frame as follows:

- In the upper left-hand corner, the heart, the pupils write the one most important thing they need to remember about Pesach.
- In the upper right-hand corner, the square, the pupils write the four most important concepts or ideas contained in the piece of writing. One concept or idea should be placed in each corner.
- In the lower left-hand corner, the triangle, the pupils should write the three most important facts about Pesach contained in the piece of writing. One fact should go in each corner.
- In the lower right-hand corner, the circle, the pupils should write one, all-encompassing (global – like the circle) statement that summarises all of the important concepts and facts learned in the lesson being reviewed.

Pupils would then compare the frame that they have created with that of another pair before the teacher leads a whole-class review of the text. In the review it is possible to explore the relationships between the heart, the ideas and the facts.

References

Leading in Learning *Handbook for teachers* (DfES 0035-2005)

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