

3. Humanism for Schools: Teaching Toolkits

The resources below can be found on the British Humanist Association's web pages at:

<http://www.humanismforschools.org.uk/index.php>

Each of the Teaching Toolkits includes PowerPoint presentations, video clips, images, curriculum notes and teaching information. They are comparable to the exemplar Schemes of Work provided in the Non-Statutory Guidance for Religious Education in Kent Schools, Section 1.

(Note: Teaching Toolkit 1 is said on the web pages to be for Key Stage 1 but is probably more suitable for Key Stage 2.)

The 'Humanism for Schools' web pages also include 'Humanist Perspectives' – resources for students of all ages outlining how humanists approach a range of issues.

Toolkit 1: What Makes Us Special? (Key Stage 2)

Introduction

For humanists, one of the most important attributes of humans is the ability which we have to ask questions about the world around us and investigate those questions.

This attribute is important for humanists for two reasons: it means that we can find out about and understand the world around us, and it means we can use the answers to our questions to change the world around us. Humanists do not look to any god or sacred texts for guidance in life, but look rather to our own human ability to ask questions, explore the world, reflect on our own experience, and find answers.

Humanists say that our curiosity, and the intelligence, imagination, creativity, and empathy with which we seek answers to our questions, demands responsibility: we can change the world we live in and we are responsible for our own actions.

The aim of this toolkit is to introduce pupils to these ideas and to stimulate them to explore their own responses to them.

Learning Objectives

Pupils are able to give their own answers to the following questions:

- What makes us special?
- How have our questions changed the world?
- Is it always a good idea to think about lots of questions?

Pupils are able to compare their answers with those of humanists and other people.

Pupils are able to explain why humanists say that thinking about questions is special.

Summary of Activities

The pupils explore the questions they themselves are interested in, using the creative skills with which they feel most at home. Using photos of people at work (for example a doctor, a scientist) and thinking about the questions they ask and the effect the answers have, the pupils find out about and reflect on ways in which human questioning has changed the world.

Pupils then explore the humanist 'happy human' logo and watch video clips of humanists talking about their ideas, in order to find out about the humanist idea that being able to think about questions makes people special because it means we can change our world and think for ourselves.

Pupils demonstrate their learning by collaborating to produce a display showing the humanist ideas they have encountered, discussing, with reference to their own and humanist ideas, the question of whether it is always a good idea to ask lots of questions, and expressing what they think is special about being human using artwork, stories, drama, dance, constructions, or other forms of creative expression.

Curriculum Links

Religious Education, in particular the themes of 'believing', 'symbols' and 'myself'

Art and Design, sections 1a, 2 and 3

Citizenship, sections 1a, 1b, 1d, 1e, 2a, 2b, 2c, 2e, 2g, 4a, 4b, 5b, 5c, 5f, 5g

English, opportunities for speaking, listening, group discussion and interaction, and drama

ICT, 2a, 2b, 2d, 3a, 3b

Science, 2a, 2b, 2f, 2g

Toolkit 2: What Do We Celebrate and Why? (Key Stage 2)

Introduction

The aim of this toolkit is to explore the humanist idea that our relationships with others are important. Humanists say that it is our human relationships, and the love, commitment, and responsibility in those relationships, which give us the love and support we need in life. Humanists do not believe there is any god who looks after us.

Humanist new baby ceremonies and weddings/civil partnerships reflect this idea. New baby ceremonies focus on the love, commitment, and responsibility of the parents and wider family and friends towards the child. Weddings and civil partnerships celebrate the love, commitment, and responsibility of the couple towards each other and the support which friends and family can give.

While not all humanists choose to have such celebrations, the British Humanist Association helps people who want to have humanist ceremonies by providing booklets, ideas, and celebrants. A celebrant helps the participants to plan the event and choose readings and leads the ceremony on the day.

This toolkit offers the opportunity to look at new baby ceremonies and weddings/civil partnerships. You can choose to focus on just one of the ceremonies. The plenary activities can be related to both or to each one separately. Finally, using the assessment sheet (Worksheet 2c) pupils can record what they have learned and what they have enjoyed doing in this piece of work.

Learning Objectives

Pupils are able to

- Explain why many humanists may hold new baby celebrations and weddings/ civil partnerships and say how and why these celebrations differ from or are similar to those of some religious traditions.
- Explain what they themselves feel is of value and worth celebrating and compare their ideas with those of humanists and others.
- Use correct vocabulary to express ideas.

Summary of Activities

The pupils think about different kinds of celebrations, using the stimulus of images on screen. They reflect on what they themselves celebrate and what is important to them about those celebrations. Using two short video films the pupils investigate humanist new baby ceremonies and weddings/civil partnerships. They compare and contrast the significance of these two events and new baby ceremonies and weddings/civil partnerships in some religious traditions they have studied. The plenary section then offers a choice of activities which enable pupils to present and reflect on their learning in creative ways.

Curriculum Links

Religious Education, particularly the themes of 'Beliefs and Questions', 'The Journey of Life and Death', 'Religion and the Individual' and 'Religion, Family, and Community'.

Citizenship/ PSHE 1a, 2a, 2e, 2i, 4a, 4b, 4c, 4f

English, opportunities for speaking and listening, group discussion and interaction, drama, reading, and writing

Opportunities for Art and Music

Toolkit 3: How Should We Treat Other People and Why? (Key Stage 2)

Introduction

The aim of this toolkit is to explore the ways in which humanists make moral decisions. It focuses on two key ideas: the Golden Rule and the use of reason. Humanists say that our ability to reflect on issues of right and wrong comes from our own human nature. We have the ability to empathise with others. We can imagine ourselves in another person's place and think about how we would feel. We can see that everyone would want to be treated well by others and therefore we should treat others as we ourselves would like to be treated (the 'Golden Rule'). As humans we also have the ability to reason. We can work out from the available evidence the likely consequences of an action, the harm or good which is likely to result from it. Humanists say that on this basis we can judge how far an action is right or wrong.

Humanists say that our moral values have developed along with our evolution as social animals. Our values are based on our common human need to live together harmoniously in groups. We need the kind of rules and behaviour that enable social groups to work well.

Humanists argue that our shared human nature and needs explain the considerable agreement among religions and societies about what is ethical. They believe that the Golden Rule is so widespread across the world and in most religions and philosophies because it is based on our common humanity - we all want to be treated well and we all need to live together harmoniously.

The first two activities in this toolkit give a scenario with an ethical dilemma and summarise humanist ethics in relation to it. The third explores the Golden Rule and compares humanist ethics with some religions and other philosophies. The fourth gives examples of how humanists apply their ethical views in practice.

Learning Objectives

Pupils are able to

- Understand two key concepts that humanists use to make moral decisions
- Compare some religious views and humanist views about ethics
- Explain their own views on how we should treat others and compare their own ideas with those of humanists.

Summary of Activities

The pupils reflect on an ethical dilemma. They think about their options and debate what they would do in this situation using a 'traffic light' discussion. Pupils then investigate, using video clips, what humanists might do in this situation and why, and imagine the next scene with a humanist in their place. The pupils explore, using information on screen and their own research, how far some religions and philosophies share humanist views of ethics and why. They record their research on a writing frame. The pupils then revisit the initial ethical dilemma, thinking about what they would now choose to do in that situation and comparing their ideas with those of humanists. The pupils evaluate the ideas they have studied, using challenging questions and exploring them through drama, discussion, or extended writing.

Curriculum Links

Religious Education, particularly the themes of 'Beliefs and Questions', 'Teachings and Authority', 'Religion and the Individual', and 'Beliefs in Action in the World'. Citizenship/PSHE, particularly 1a, section 2, 3f, section 4, and 5b, 5e, and 5g English, opportunities for speaking and listening, group discussion and interaction, drama, reading, and writing History, the European History Study

Toolkit 4: How Do You Know It's True? (Key Stage 3)

Introduction

This toolkit explores the ways in which humanists approach the question of what is true. Humanists use reason and evidence to work out what is or may be true. They look for evidence, weigh up the strength of evidence, look for ways to test the evidence, and look for the simplest explanations of it. Humanists do not think that things can be 'true for you but not for me' or that there are special 'religious' kinds of truth. They prefer to use the word 'faith' for beliefs which are not backed up by evidence, and 'opinion' for matters of personal judgment.

The toolkit shows students how to use reason and evidence. Using the example of the existence of god(s), it explores some of the ways in which reason and evidence are used by humanists to make decisions about what is true and how else humanists might approach the question of whether god(s) exist. It introduces the concepts of belief, agnosticism, and atheism as responses to this.

The issue of truth is huge and complex. This toolkit does not deal directly with questions of how far we can know if there is a world out there, or how language and sensory input mediates our experience of the world, or with metaphorical truth; however, students may raise these ideas in discussion.

Learning Objectives

Students are able to

1. Explain how humanists use reason and evidence to decide what is true and give examples
2. Express their own views on how they decide what is true, giving reasons and examples and compare their ideas with those of humanists
3. Use religious and philosophical vocabulary.

Summary of Activities

The students have a list of statements which may or may not be true. They discuss which they think is true and why. The students then watch some video clips of humanists talking about using reason and evidence to decide what is true. In groups the students research and present the ideas of one humanist thinker about whether God is true. They then give their own views on this question, referring to the ideas they have explored. The students revisit one or more of the initial statements and give their views on whether they think it is true or not, using the religious and philosophical vocabulary they have encountered in this piece of work and explaining how far they agree or disagree with humanist viewpoints.

Curriculum Links

Religious Education, particularly the themes of 'Beliefs and Concepts', 'Authority', 'Religion and Science', and 'Interfaith Dialogue'.

Science, particularly 1.1 'Scientific Thinking', 1.3 'Cultural Understanding', and 2.2 'Critical Understanding of Evidence'.

English, opportunities for Speaking and Listening, Reading and Writing.

History, particularly 2.2 'Using Evidence', and Range and Content (g) 'The way in which the lives, beliefs, ideas, and attitudes of people in Britain have changed over time'.

Citizenship, particularly 2.1 'Critical Enquiry' and 2.2 Advocacy and Representation.

The cross-curricular dimensions of 'Identity and Cultural Diversity' and 'Creativity and Critical Thinking'.

Toolkit 5: How Do You Tell Right From Wrong? (Key Stage 3)

Introduction

In this toolkit students explore the concepts which humanists use to make moral choices. They look at the ways in which these concepts can be applied to practical ethical decisions. They compare the humanist approach to ethics with their own ideas and with those of people from religious traditions they have studied. For humanists the right thing to do is to try to live a full and happy life and help others to do the same. This is what humanists see as the key value in life. Humanists argue that the only guide we have to show us how to do this is our own human nature. We have the ability to reason, i.e. work out for ourselves how to deal with difficult choices. We have the ability to empathise with others, i.e. to imagine how other people might feel.

The concept of 'using reason' involves three basic ideas which humanists apply in any given situation:

1. Ask yourself what will be the effects of your action.
2. Weigh up all the available evidence.
3. Try to work out what will result in the most happiness and the least pain and suffering (Utilitarianism).

The concept of 'using empathy' also involves three basic ideas:

1. Treat other people as you would like to be treated yourself (this is called the Golden Rule).
2. Treat other people as valuable in their own right and don't use them as a means to an end.
3. Do what you would be happy to see everyone do.

The last two points are part of Kant's Categorical Imperative.

Learning Objectives

Students are able to

1. Express and justify their own views about what is right and wrong and why, with reference to humanist and other viewpoints.
2. Use the concepts of reason and empathy to explain how humanists decide what is right and wrong
3. Compare and contrast humanist views with a religious viewpoint.

Summary of Activities

The students explore a moral dilemma, thinking through what they would choose to do and why and investigating what humanists might choose and why. They then compare humanist views with those of a religion they have studied, using one of two options: one research and drama, exploring some practical ethical decisions; the other research and debate, exploring issues of belief and authority. (Either of these will enable students to compare and contrast humanist views with a religious viewpoint.) The students then review their initial responses to the moral dilemma in the light of their learning.

Curriculum Links

Religious Education, in particular the themes of beliefs and concepts, authority, ethics and relationships, rights and responsibilities, and global issues.

Citizenship, particularly 1.1 democracy and justice, 1.2 rights and responsibilities, 1.3 identities and diversity, 2.1 critical thinking and enquiry, 2.2 advocacy and representation, 3d freedom of speech, 3e actions of individuals, groups, and organizations, and 3f strategies for handling disagreements.

English, opportunities for speaking and listening, reading, and writing.

PSHEE, particularly 1.4 relationships, and 1.5 diversity.

Cross-curriculum dimensions of identity and cultural diversity and creativity and critical thinking.

Toolkit 6: What's It All For? (Key Stage 3)

Introduction

The aim of this toolkit is to explore what gives humanists a sense of meaning and purpose in life and why. It focuses on three main points.

The first is that humanists base their ideas about the world on reason and evidence.

The second is that on the basis of reason and evidence, humanists conclude that this is the only life we know we have. Humanists say that there is no evidence of a life after death.

The third is that humanists therefore conclude that as humans we create our own meaning and purposes in life. They say that there is no evidence of a purpose or destiny beyond our own human lives. Humanists say that we create our own meaning and purposes in life using our human attributes, including creativity, intelligence, imagination, wonder, love, and empathy for others. They say that we should make the most of these abilities to live full and happy lives and help others to do the same. This also means that we must look to our own human attributes to deal with the problems in the world.

Learning Objectives

Students are able to

1. Understand that humanists use reason and evidence to answer questions about the world around us
2. Understand that on the basis of reason and evidence humanists say that this is the only life we know we have
3. Understand that humanists therefore also say that there is no 'ultimate' meaning and purpose in life but as humans we create our own meaning and purpose
4. Understand that humanists say we should try to live a full and happy life and help others to do the same.

Summary of Activities

The students play a short game exploring what their priorities in life might be. They watch some short video clips of humanists giving their views on life after death and where they find meaning and purpose in life. They summarise humanist ideas using a writing frame. A choice of creative activities then gives students an opportunity to compare humanist ideas with those from other perspectives and reflect on their own views.

Curriculum Links

Religious Education, in particular the themes of 'Beliefs and Concepts', 'Authority', 'Religion and Science', 'Expressions of Spirituality', and 'Ethics and Relationships'.

Science, particularly 1.1 'Scientific Thinking'.

Citizenship, particularly 1.2 'Rights and Responsibilities'.

Personal, Social, Health, and Economic Education, particularly 1.1 'Personal Identities', 1.4 'Relationships' and 1.5 'Diversity'.

English, opportunities for Speaking and Listening, Reading, and Writing.