



RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

Children can readily access images and information dealing with world religions using the 'Worlds of Faith' BBC CD. The CD ROM can be installed on a PC or MAC and offers an introduction to six of the world's major religions for senior classes. There is also a teacher's section with a collection of lesson worksheets and links. The CD can be purchased from www.festivalshop.co.uk

(Information provided in this teaching pack does not purport to represent the absolute views, principles or practices of the belief systems mentioned. Within any one religion, there are a number of different branches, and within these groups there are further branches. Religious festivals, rituals and customs vary from country to country, culture to culture, and individual to individual. The pack does not aim to reflect all different attitudes and beliefs, but aims to give general information that may promote further research.)

IDEAS TO EXPLORE WITH YOUR CLASS

The theme of religions is brought to the fore in *New Beginnings* when the winter show is approaching, marking the end of the school's first term. Abbi, Sanjay and their friends decide to write a song about the common theme of festivals of lights. Many religious traditions use music within ceremonies, rituals and festivals; many believe that music is a way of both communicating with deities and celebrating faith.

- Children in the class could write the lyrics to a school anthem or compose a song for special events coming up in the school community, eg sixth class graduation, whole school assembly, fundraiser etc.



The CD – 'Celebrating Festivals' is available to purchase from <http://www.festivalshop.co.uk/> for approx. £14.95. The CD has a collection of tracks with traditional music to accompany religious festivals. This resource could be used in the class as part of Listening and Responding in music, or at assemblies when marking various religious celebrations.

In Sanjay's home, we can see a picture of Ganesh on the wall. Ganesh is one of the many Hindu gods and is easily recognised because of his elephant head. Ganesh symbolises wisdom and intelligence and is also known as a remover of obstacles.

- Referring back to *New Beginnings*, ask the children what obstacles to having a good life were in Sanjay's path? What obstacles were in Sanjay's father's path? Do the children think it is symbolic that Sanjay's family have an image of Ganesh on their wall? Have the children themselves ever encountered an obstacle they have had to overcome? Discuss what the obstacles were and how the children may have overcome them. The children might like to feature drawings of Ganesh on positive message cards for display, using advice they have heard, or they might give advice from their own experience, eg 'Never give up', 'Trust your friends', 'Slow and steady wins the race', 'Count to ten', 'We learn from our mistakes'.

Elephants are the largest land mammal and the second tallest animal on earth (the giraffe is the tallest). Elephants are very protective of their family and can communicate with one another over large distances.

- Carry out a class elephant project exploring the lives of the African and Asian elephants and their symbolic usage.

RELIGIOUS DRESS AROUND THE WORLD

When there is an important religious event, people often wear specific clothes to show that they are celebrating or marking a special religious occasion. In Ireland, many Roman Catholic children get Holy Communion or Confirmation outfits to wear. Some Muslim children celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr (at the end Ramadan, the time of fasting) by wearing new clothes and/or painting their hands with henna designs.

- Collect a series of images of religious clothing for the class to explore. Using cut-out cardboard figures, create fabric and fibre wall hangings that are representative of a selection of religions. (Remind the children that not all people choose to wear traditional religious clothes.)

Some examples may include: Amish, Buddhism (monks' robes), Aboriginal (body paint), Bedouin (head dress), Hindu (sari), Sikhism (turban), Judaism (kippah/tallit), Roman Catholicism (First Holy Communion dress), Islam (henna/mendhi designs).

RELIGIOUS ART

RANGOLI PATTERNS: During the Hindu/Sikh festival Diwali, many people paint *rangoli* patterns on their doorstep to welcome Lakshmi, the goddess of good fortune, into their homes. *Rangoli* patterns are intricate designs traditionally made with colourfully dyed grains of sand. Monks create the patterns by hand and when the design is complete, they blow away the sand, undoing all their hard work. This action is symbolic of the delicate nature of life and death. Why not create your own *rangoli* patterns by drawing with coloured chalk on white or black card.

ISLAMIC PATTERNS: As Muslims believe that no iconography should be used in holy places or in texts, many places of worship are adorned with colourful mosaics and tile work. Why not explore geometry through Islamic art? Explore 2D shapes and their properties using this lesson as a starting point: <http://www.teachingideas.co.uk/maths/files/islamicpatterns.pdf>. After looking and responding to a number of images, children could design and create their own design, using any media of their choice.

THE MOON

A lunar calendar is based on the phases of the moon. The Islamic calendar is solely based on the lunar phases whereas Hinduism has two astrological calendars, the solar and lunar. The timing of certain festivals is based on the phase of the moon, eg Ramadan does not end and Eid-ul-Fitr does not begin until a full moon. Chinese New Year also is determined by the phases of the moon, as is Easter in the Christian calendar.

- Explore the lunar cycle, incorporating the appropriate language, eg full moon, quarter, gibbous, half moon, and crescent moon. When two full moons occur within one month, the second is called a 'blue moon'. Children could create and follow a moon chart over a month, taking turns to observe the moon each evening and drawing their observations the following day.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN BELIEF SYSTEMS

Many belief systems have customs and rituals in common. As well as celebrating our differences, let's explore some similarities.

Naming ceremonies

Naming ceremonies are common in the six major religions. Secular naming ceremonies (humanist ceremonies) are also becoming popular, where the baby is named and the child is celebrated without any religious associations.

- Discuss why a naming ceremony is a 'rite of passage' for many cultures, whether faith-based or not. Children could interview their parents about their own naming ceremony, or interview their grandparents to compare and contrast how traditions may have changed. Children could research what their name means, and share their findings with their classmates. (See also notes on *The Memory Box*.)

CHRISTIANITY – BAPTISM: Holy water is sprinkled over the baby's head and prayers are recited. It is common for a baby to wear christening or baptismal robes that have been passed down from generation to generation. A party usually follows, where family and friends gather to celebrate.

ISLAM – AQIQAH: When a baby is born, the *adhan* (call to prayer) is whispered into the baby's right ear. On the seventh day, the baby's head is shaved and the hair is

subsequently weighed, and families then donate the equivalent in gold or silver to charity. Prayers are said, and honey is put on the baby's lips to symbolise making the baby sweet, obedient and kind.

JUDAISM: ZEVED HABAT (for girls) is the naming celebration carried out on the first Sabbath after the birth of a baby girl. **BRIT MILAH** (for boys) is held eight days after the birth of a baby boy, and coincides with circumcision. Traditions vary within the branches of Judaism.

HINDUISM – NAMAKARAN SANSKAR: This naming ceremony occurs any time within ten days of the birth. The celebrations depend on the culture of the family.

BUDDHISM: A naming ceremony takes place approximately seven days after the baby is born. The form of celebration depends on the family's traditions.

SIKHISM – AMRIT: A verse is read from holy scriptures and songs are sung. In general, Amrit takes place in the *gurdwara* (place of worship) in the presence of family and friends.

PILGRIMAGE

A pilgrimage is a long journey in search of religious and/or moral significance. A pilgrim's destination is usually to a place that holds particular meaning in that person's faith or beliefs.

- Have the children ever travelled on long journeys? Carry out a survey to discover how long, on average, their longest journeys have been. For pilgrims, the destination holds significance but it is the spiritual journey that holds the learning and growth that many pilgrims search for; discuss the saying, 'The journey is more important than the destination.'
- What would pilgrims need to pack before beginning their journey? Would there be an emphasis on material goods, or would pilgrims pack the essentials only? What might prevent or excuse people from undertaking a pilgrimage? (Some answers might include a person's financial situation, age or health.) Children could locate some of the destinations listed below on maps, or by accessing Google Earth.



CHRISTIANITY: Many Christians travel to 'The Holy Land' in the Middle East, visiting places such as Bethlehem (Jesus's birthplace) and Nazareth (Jesus's home town).

Roman Catholics travel to Rome and Lourdes, and Eastern Orthodox Christians travel to Istanbul (home of the ecumenical patriarch and location of Hagia Sophia, an ancient church).

ISLAM: One of the five pillars of Islam is the pilgrimage (or Hajj) to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. When praying, Muslims face Mecca, the birthplace of Muhammad.

JUDAISM: The Western Wall (or Wailing Wall) in Jerusalem is visited by Jews in the belief that it is the last original wall of the Second Temple, built by Herod, and at the centre of the Jewish religion.

HINDUISM: Hindus aim to undertake a number of pilgrimages throughout their lifetime. Many visit the seven great rivers of India, eg the Ganges. Hindus believe that bathing in those rivers is symbolic of washing away sin. Varanasi (also called Benares) in India is known as 'The Holy City'.

BUDDHISM: There are four main locations that hold importance for Buddhists, all relating to the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama. They are: 1 Lumbini in Nepal, where Buddha was born; 2 Bodh Gaya in India, where Buddha first attained Enlightenment; 3 Sarnath in India, where Buddha first taught the Dharma; 4 Kushinagar in India, where Buddha died.

SIKHISM: Many Sikh pilgrims travel to Amritsar in India, believing it to be at the centre of Sikh faith. The 'Golden Temple' (also known as Harimandir) is located there alongside other buildings of religious significance, such as Akal Takht, where historical weaponry used in the Sikh fight for justice and equality is housed. Anandpur Sahib, also in India, is another favoured destination for pilgrims as it is believed to be the birthplace of the community of Sikhs in 1699.

FASTING

When people partake in a total or partial fast, they willingly abstain from certain or all food and drink. There are many reasons other than religious belief why people fast: before certain medical procedures, to show solidarity with people in challenging situations, to stand up in political unity, to raise funds for charity, to raise awareness of a cause.

- Discuss: Have the children ever spent any long periods of time without food, either willingly or unwillingly? Have they had to deny themselves any specific type of food, either on religious or health grounds? How difficult can it be not to give in to temptation? Why is it important to give up something we need or really like? How do these actions benefit us? Discuss the saying, 'Character is who we are when no one is watching.'



CHRISTIANITY: Roman Catholics fast during a period in spring known as Lent, which lasts for forty days (not counting Sundays) before Easter. The forty days are reminiscent of the time Jesus spent in the wilderness to confront temptation. Lent is a time to show repentance, solidarity with the poor and to prepare for Easter. Eastern Orthodox Christians also fast during Lent, as do some Protestant groups.

ISLAM: Fasting (known as Sawm) is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. Muslims fast during Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Ramadan marks the time when Muslims believe the Koran was revealed to Muhammad.

JUDAISM: There are six days of fasting within the Jewish calendar year. One of the most important falls on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) when Jews fast for twenty-five hours.

HINDUISM: Fasting is a central element of the Hindu religion. The spiritual ritual of fasting depends on local Hindu beliefs or customs. Maha Shivaratri, Saraswati Puja, and Durga Puja are common festivals involving a form of fasting, whether it is abstinence from all food or limiting oneself to one meal a day.

BUDDHISM: Like Hindus, Buddhists believe that fasting helps to free the mind and soul. It is common for certain branches of Buddhism to choose not to eat after the main meal at noon.

SIKHISM: Sikhism does not have any rituals regarding fasting. The belief within Sikhism is that fasting does not bring the Sikh faithful closer to God.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fasting#Religious_fasting

<http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/2001/02/Fasting-Chart.aspx>