

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

FOUNDATION STAGE



RE is something to celebrate with the youngest children in your school by doing things with them that they will enjoy and remember. Start them young! This is the time to grab them with the excitement and mystery of religious material. Stimulate their curiosity, challenge them to ask questions, feed their imaginations and bring them to a sense of wonder.

Celebrate the language and religion of children

Talk and encourage children's talk; the words are fascinating! As long as children can say the words, they can use them as a receptacle for storing images and ideas. Whatever you are teaching about, choose some (say three) key religious words, use them in your teaching and wait to see how well children pick them up and use them too.

The biblical story of Jonah is a favourite, especially with sound effects! Inside the belly of the big fish, Jonah prays to God because "salvation comes from you". Use the word *salvation* in the context of the story and explore it; let children say the word aloud and enjoy the sound of it. Use it again later in another story, for example: Jesus and Zacchaeus: Luke 19:1-10 ("Salvation has come to this house today") perhaps adding *forgiveness* as



another key word and then maybe, after a few more stories, you will have children, as I have had, asking if there is going to be another story about salvation today...

Celebrate diversity

One of the best ways to introduce children to the richness of religion is to use religious artefacts; they are exciting and accessible to children. Reveal a mysterious object, slowly and deliberately, and then put it into children's hands. This brings the religious world alive and makes it concrete and very exciting. Bright, colourful Hindu shrine figures are captivating. Use one to introduce learning about a festival like Krishna's birthday or Diwali. Celebrate with people of faith and invite children to talk about how they celebrate in their families. Use a small pocket icon or a *retablo* to introduce stories about Jesus. Give children time to look, touch, ask questions and share their ideas before telling them stories.



Celebrate and feed children's imaginations

Wherever possible, create a response in RE that allows children to make the material their own. Give them lots of opportunities for role-play.

The story of the Nativity, set in the context of a book that is holy for some people, can be told and then played out in a variety of ways, including using puppets or knitted figures or

making a role-play stable. Any visits to places of worship or learning about celebrations or religious ceremonies can be relived in the child's own imagination in a role-play situation. It does not matter if the doll-baby is baptised "in the name of the father and the brother..." or the waving of the paper chauri over the class book of the visit to the gurdwara is accompanied by the chanting of "Wally...wally...wally" (instead of Waheguru!) The experience has been captured and is being internalised.

Celebrate religion in the community

Invite people from the community into school to talk about religion as it is lived out by local people. Ask the local priest to bring her vestments into school and dress up and talk about what she does, maybe even to role-play a baptism or wedding. Then use a priest doll, which can be dressed and undressed, to take children's learning further through play. Invite parents into school to talk about how festivals are celebrated in their homes and give children the opportunity to taste celebration foods.

Celebrate children's faith

Listen to the voice of the 'religious' child and celebrate the living faith of real children. If you're fortunate to have a rich diversity of faiths represented in your school, allow the children to speak for themselves; if your community is not diverse, create the presence of those children virtually, through photographs. Meeting faith in one of their own age contextualises for the young child what it means to have a religious faith. Whether it's the little girl who sings her Hallelujah song because she "has God in her heart" or the little



boy who stops playing to go to the mosque when he hears the Call to Prayer, or the family that celebrates Janamashtami, the festival of Krishna's birth, at the mandir, or any one of so many examples, the message is clear: these are real people, doing these things because their faith in God is important to them; it makes a difference to their lives. As in all good RE, these encounters raise questions and give children a lens through which they can look at their own lives.

Learning about a Bismillah party when four year old Muslim children celebrate going to Islamic school to begin learning the Qur'an prompts questions about what other children do after school, why they have parties and what they learn by heart; it is also an opportunity to talk about learning and how we celebrate learning.

Celebrate religion in your local environment

Go for a walk; make good use of the local environment by taking children out. Open children's eyes to what is around them and encourage them to raise questions about what buildings are for. If your school serves a diverse community, there will be a rich choice of buildings to focus on; go out and let children photograph them. If that resource is not open to you, use one or two local churches but also photographs of traditional buildings of other (maybe three) faith communities.



Give children a selection of photographs of buildings and invite them to talk about what they can see, drawing out common features and then differences. Either invite a child from a religious family to talk about going to the place of worship or tell children a story about

two fictional children going to church and about what they do there. Invite children to suggest why some people like to go to church and what might make it a special place for them. Do the same with another place of worship, either in the community or elsewhere and then, if possible, go on to explore what it might be like to visit a place of pilgrimage like the Golden Temple, again creating the presence of a child of the faith.



Encourage children to go out into the local environment (and beyond, with their parents) with a digital camera to record the religious buildings they see.

Celebrate religious story

Above all, **tell** children stories. Celebrate the richness of the narrative traditions at the heart of all religions. There is a place for reading aloud to children, but RE is the place for telling stories, maintaining eye contact with your listeners, maximising the impact with your timing and wowing them with every dramatic effect you can muster!

Every story has an impact on the listener, but none more so than sacred stories, amongst the most powerful of all. The influence of story in our lives is profound and, for that reason, children deserve to be able to access even a faith story fully, to enter it and be part of it. But if the story occupies sacred ground, it can only be found through faith ...or through the imagination.

In the classroom, and especially with young children, it must be the latter and to ensure that they do not step over the crucial threshold into religious belief, they need



to be brought into the presence of the story and then taken away from it somehow. Simple entering devices like lighting a story candle, or ringing a bell or holding a thread or playing some notes (the same notes) on chime bars at the beginning of a story invite the child to enter the story and be emotionally part of it. Repeat the sound or action at the end to enable the child to leave the story, having fully engaged with it, without being compromised in any way.

So... immerse children in the great religious stories, for example: Holy Week and Easter; Moses and the Israelites; the Night of Power; the Call of Guru Nanak; the birth of Krishna; the Buddha's Enlightenment, and many more; they are not beyond the young child. Begin directly without preparation, except for the entering device, and tell the stories simply, allowing them to raise questions about children's own lives, for example:

- When have you been really frightened?
- How does it feel to wait for something?
- What has ever surprised you?
- Who do you love?
- What makes mothers afraid?
- Where do you think ideas come from?

And enjoy!

