

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

LEARNING OUTSIDE the CLASSROOM (LOtC)



Whatever the time of year, there are always opportunities for LOtC experiences. This guide provides some ideas to make the activities engaging, thought provoking and challenging; to bring pupils into contact with faith communities, or to enable them to reflect on what there is both on their own doorstep or in the world beyond.

The Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationdetail/page1/DFES-04232-2006> describes ways in which such experiences can meet the needs of every child. In addition, well planned LOtC experiences in RE should provide opportunities for spiritual development, to ask big questions, allow time for reflection and moments for wonder or inspiration. The Out and About Guidance <http://www.lotc.org.uk/Out-and-about-guidance/> Introduction of the LOtC website is a very useful section which will help with all aspects of planning.

Before

- We all know how much additional work is involved in taking pupils on a visit, however the benefits of such occasions can have long lasting impact. Sound planning and preparation are therefore vital when designing compelling and creative LOtC learning experiences to make them as valuable as possible.
- It will depend on the distance, but if possible make a preliminary visit. In addition to exploring the space and collecting literature, there may be an opportunity for discussion with a guide or education officer. Practicalities can also be fully investigated. Having seen and discussed what the place has to offer, you will then be able to plan the learning more effectively.



- If a preliminary visit is not possible, a phone call is essential to success. The place needs to know your learning objectives if it is going to provide a package to support this. There may even be options to tweak or tailor make an experience.

During

- Key to success is how the learning is structured during the visit. Although worksheets have a place, we have all experienced 'death by worksheet' with simple knowledge based questions which do not encourage any depth of thinking, reflection or creativity.
- Try to focus the learning objective around a key question. An example might be, 'Why do things change?' In early years or lower primary, this could be linked to a story about change (e.g. The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle, or Tadpole's Promise by Jeanne Willis) and take place in an outdoor setting such as a pond in a faith garden. An example could be to focus on new life in the natural world. Children could reflect on what it means to change and be encouraged to ask or respond to big questions, for example: 'Would it be a good thing if everything stayed the same?' 'What would happen if nothing changed?' It could also provide opportunities to look at rites of passage. An example of how this can be developed can be found in this case study <http://www.refuel.org.uk/sacred-space/cs20/>. The Sacred Space <http://www.refuel.org.uk/sacred-space/index/section> of the REOnline website also provides many other examples of LOtC experiences.
- The question, 'Why do things change?' could also be used in a secondary context and provide good opportunities for reflection or making creative personal responses. Pupils could be studying the Buddhist concept of *anicca* (impermanence) at a Buddhist monastery or centre. Students may have been

asked to plan and consider questions which they could ask a Buddhist during the visit. Such encounter and dialogue could provide a rich vein of inspiration for a poetic or artistic response.

After

- The value of the experience should not finish at the end of the visit. Provide a range of creative ideas from which pupils can choose to respond. Remember to give space for reflection and to ask questions and be prepared for the unexpected! It only takes one pupil to have observed something special or to have shared an 'I wonder' question for there to be a rich seam for further RE or spiritual development. The visit itself should be at the core, but quality follow-up activities must be an intrinsic part. These might include inviting a member of the faith community back to school to see an art exhibition or presentations inspired by the visit. The key question is: What lasting impact will this experience have on pupils' learning in RE?

Where?

The list is endless! Examples could include:

- arboretum
- art gallery
- cinema
- faith garden
- graveyard
- memorial or monument
- museum
- outdoor space
- outdoor space with a religious/spiritual connection
- peace garden
- place of worship
- school grounds
- sculpture park
- theatre



What?

- LOTC experiences provide an opportunity to be creative and think out of the box. Visits can be RE specific but could also be linked to other subject areas in innovative and imaginative ways. How might creative links be made with areas such as architecture, the natural environment, technology or maths?
- Go on a religious trail. Such a trail provides opportunities for pupils to become aware of their local area in ways they may not have previously considered. The RE trails website <http://www.retrails.org.uk/> contains a number of trails around the country. Each has a map, themes to explore, reasons for doing the trail and a range of suggested activities. These ideas could be adapted or developed for exploring your own locality.
- Consider developing a local trail. The RE trails website provides a toolkit giving sound advice and guidance on all aspects of creating a religious trail. Involve parents, members of faith communities and SACRE. Invite them to "trial the trail". Consider innovative ways to bring the trail alive, perhaps with the use of digital technology, photography or GPS mapping. The website is keen to showcase new religious trails which offer high quality learning experiences. If you develop a trail and would be willing to share it, please email admin@retrails.org.uk.
- A visit to an art gallery could be the focus to ask questions about how artists portray such 'big RE' themes such as creation, peace, forgiveness, betrayal, gratitude, evil or hope. Consider a collaborative project with other schools on one theme. Following the visit, pupils could interpret the chosen theme in a variety of media. Approach a local museum or gallery. Ask if they would be willing to host the exhibition. Have an opening event and invite representatives from faith communities, SACRE and civic leaders. Such a project enable the general public to see why RE is such an important and valuable subject and would provide opportunities for spiritual, social, moral and cultural (SMSC) development through meeting and working with pupils from other schools to produce a thought provoking public exhibition.

- A question such as ‘Why is it important to remember?’ could lead to an investigation of memorials, monuments, inscriptions or epitaphs. These could be in a local graveyard, or at a war memorial, a visit to somewhere such as Postman’s Park in the City of London which commemorates heroic self sacrifice or the National Memorial Arboretum <http://www.thenma.org.uk/index.aspx> in Staffordshire. Memorials here are rich in layers of multi-sensory symbolism. Such visits will provide opportunities to reflect on many fundamental questions and to provoke discussion and exploration of many religious, ethical and moral themes.
- Why not have a “focus on feasts and fasts”, but with a difference! The BBC interfaith calendar <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/tools/calendar/> or the Shap calendar of Religious Festivals <http://www.shapworkingparty.org.uk/calendar.html> are both very useful sources of information on religious holy days.

When visiting a place of worship, consider the meaning of the feast or fast. Using this sort of approach enables pupils to understand far more of what it means to belong to a faith. It also provides opportunities for higher level thinking and goes way beyond the level of labelling of furniture. Questions such as, ‘How do such events help to bind a religious community together?’ or ‘How do the underpinning beliefs, symbols or rituals strengthen a believer’s faith or result in positive actions?’ could be used to help pupils to focus on fundamental aspects of faith.

- As many schools will have a place of worship nearby, perhaps even within walking distance, a visit here may not even require transport, or perhaps could be done with the help of parents or the school minibus. Explore a theme such as ‘What does it mean to belong?’. This could involve pupils in investigating the beliefs of the faith community and the actions and activities which stem from these beliefs. Take some digital recorders and ask pupils to conduct interviews. Examine noticeboards and leaflets and look at the ways in which the faith community practises its beliefs. To explore this question in a wider context, a story such as ‘The Island’ by Armin Greder could be used with pupils from upper Key Stage 2 to Sixth Form.

- The Churches Conservation Trust <http://www.visitchurches.org.uk/> has a range of ideas and downloadable resources for KS1 and KS2. Even if one of the churches exemplified is not in your area, many of the ideas could be adapted to a church closer to home.

The school environment

- Take an area of blank wall either inside or outside the school building and design and create a thought wall using some of those big questions that pupils have asked in RE lessons.
- Walk with pupils around the school grounds. Are there opportunities for spiritual development or reflection? Work with pupils, keen parents or a landscape gardener to develop or revitalise a quiet space or garden. The design could be spiritual or have a symbolism significant to the school. The shape, landscaping, materials and the form, colour and fragrance of the planting, will all make their own contribution to developing a special space. Pupils could also design and create sculptures or mosaics to be placed amongst the planting. Shahne Vickery’s book, ‘Creating a Multi-Sensory Spiritual Garden in Your School’ provides many ideas for making the most of an outside space.
- ARC http://www.arcworld.org/projects_overview.asp - the Alliance of Religions and Conservation website provides a wealth of information on conservation projects both in this country and abroad and ideas for places to visit. There is also information for example, on faiths and ecology. Put “trees” into the search box to find a treasure of information from different faiths which might inspire an RE based eco-project in your community. Such a project would leave a lasting legacy.
- The REEP website <http://www.reep.org/resources/features.php> contains some inspiring ideas and information on Buddhism and gardens, creating a miniature Islamic garden, Islamic gardens of the world and a garden in a term.



Who?

- Why not use an LOtC experience to forge or strengthen links with another school? This could be one in your locality or in another part of the country or a cross-phase partnership with older and younger pupils working together. Inform the local media of your brilliant school partnership visit and see if they will cover it. Share the outcomes digitally with your partner school. Such a linking project would provide many opportunities for SMSC development.
- Are there any parents, or members of the local community who could support or help to organise a visit which had a religious or spiritual development focus? If parents or other helpers are willing to accompany a visit, a little time spent in explaining the learning objectives will enable them to support pupils far more and this will result in improved outcomes.
- If you have something special in mind, approach your local SACRE. Not only might they have a budget to support small projects, but they may also be able to advise you about resources or people to contact which would enhance the LOtC experience.

How?

- Although originally designed for the new secondary curriculum, personal learning and thinking skills (PLTS) are an excellent way to enable pupils of all ages to achieve. Use LOtC experiences to provide opportunities for: independent enquiry, creative thinking, reflection, working as part of a team, being a self-manager and for effective participation.
- Thinking Actively in a Social Context <http://www.tascwheel.com/> (TASC) provides a cyclical framework in which pupils work independently and collaboratively to produce, revise and communicate their outcomes.
- If the outcome of a study of the local area was to design a multi-purpose sacred space which could be used by more than one denomination or faith, a technique such as Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats could be employed to explore different perspectives of the issues involved in creating such a space.

- As with places for LOtC experiences, the range of possible activities which will achieve high quality outcomes is vast. When devising activities, use words which require pupils to transform what they have learnt rather than regurgitate it. Examples include: plan, consider, design, invent, devise and create. Such activities require pupils to use higher order thinking skills to produce an outcome. Activities such as:
 - ▶ poetry: cinquain, elegy, epitaphs, haiku, rap
 - ▶ music: instrumental, song
 - ▶ written word: letters, reports, Wordles
 - ▶ art: draw, design, paint, sculpt
 - ▶ debate or discussion
 - ▶ record: audio and video
 - ▶ photography: still and movie
 - ▶ digital collage which brings together movie, text and images

Wow!

- It's the wow moments that pupils (and teachers) will remember long after the event. Learning Outside the Classroom gives a real focus for providing memorable RE experiences. In addition to the spontaneous, "Wow!" which might occur when experiencing or reflecting on something special, here are some WoW themes which you could develop into LOtC activities:
 - ▶ Ways of Worship
 - ▶ Week Of Welcome
 - ▶ Widening Our World
 - ▶ Win Our World
 - ▶ Windows On Windows
 - ▶ Window On the World
 - ▶ With Out Walls
 - ▶ Wonder Of Wonders
 - ▶ World Of Wonder



As you can see, all these themes lend themselves to engaging with others - parents, the local community and faith communities and developing something innovative and inspirational!