

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

# RELIGION AND COMMUNITY CELEBRATING RE



**We tend to confine religion, belief and religious education to particular places but if we want to celebrate RE beyond the bounds of the classroom or place of worship we need to look further in to the community. Here are some ideas that you might find useful in planning event for the national RE festival – Celebrating RE.**

### Outreach

One simple way of celebrating what the school does in the community is to get pupils' work where it wouldn't normally be seen. Here are some ideas:

- Working with local libraries and museums – all libraries and museums have spaces, many of them galleries – why not ask if some of their space can be used to display pupil work? Explore the possibilities that this would open for them. Perhaps they have a collection of books or artefacts that could go alongside the pupils' work. If you wanted to be really clever you could work with the library or museum to see what they have, design some work for pupils around it and then co-display.
- Shopping centres. Local shopping centres are rich as places of outreach in a number of ways:
  - ▶ If there is display space ask if it can be used for the period of the celebration and if, possible, have times when pupils could be there to talk about their work
  - ▶ Work with shops and banks to have something in their space. Hence, in a bank you might have a small display about ethical issues your pupils have been investigating like investment or interest/usury. In a shop you might have pupils' work on fair trade or a religion's attitudes to buying and selling – such as Jewish attitudes to advertising.

- ▶ Where shops/units are closed down it is sometimes possible to get the owners to let you use the window space to promote educational ends. That way the shop looks attractive from the outside and the school benefits from people walking by seeing its work and activities.

Most shopping centres have a manager so talk to them to see what the opportunities are for celebrating the work of the school in RE.

- Town/City/County Halls are good places to display work. They often have displays of work or art done in the local community and this is a great place for a school to put its high profile work and celebrate its RE. It is usual for there to be some one in charge of displays so find out who they are and work with them. You might want pupils to do something like a demographic profile of the local area focussing on religion and belief (such as in the local area profile on the National Census website like the one for Bournemouth Unitary Authority, see: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/profiles/00hn.asp>) or to find out about what issues people from various faith and belief communities (such as a local Humanist group) have in that locality and then ensure they are shared with a wider audience. Good for RE, good for pupils, good for communities and excellent for local government.
- Bus stations and train stations – even tram stations in some parts of the country. Often these places have supervised waiting rooms where work can be placed safely. Talk to the manager and see if you can get in there.



- Sports clubs – many professional sports clubs are part of the Playing for Success (PFS) network. They provide out of school education in deprived areas and for ‘hard to reach’ young people. If there is a professional club in your area or a willing sports club not part of PFS you might still approach them either to participate in an event or sponsor an event. Wayne Rooney is often quoted as having RE teaching as his second career choice so perhaps there are many budding religious educators out there. Whilst PFS started with professional football clubs it now includes a variety of sports. Go to <http://www.playingforsuccessonline.org.uk/> for more details. Funding for PFS is due to end in March so it might be worth contacting them sooner rather than later if there is one in your area.

In all of these scenarios a key consideration is: what is going to be the benefit for those participating? One obvious benefit is that if publicity is done well then people will want to see it and that will increase ‘footfall’ which is important for libraries and museums as well as businesses. Lots of businesses want to have better links with the community and one way of doing this is to link with and support the work of schools. If the project is linked to local faith communities then so much the better as that will generate more local interest and be seen to be relevant to the locality in which the business, library or museum finds itself.

Working with SACRE or the local authority, it might be possible, via something like the Chamber of Commerce, to sponsor a prize for work done in RE, especially where that also works with other subjects. One East Midlands school worked with a covered shopping centre to provide art going up to the first floor on the theme Stairway to Heaven. The work was done with the Art department and focussed on Y10 and Y12 pupils. The prize was £100 of art materials for the student. After an agreed time the work was moved to the school and displayed there on the stairs leading to the RE department.



## In-reach

One of the big issues in RE is that pupils are often unaware of what is around them and the social importance of religious groups. Many town centres now have street pastors, virtually all towns and all cities have drop-in centres and soup runs sponsored and supported by faith communities. Why not invite some of these people in to explain what they do, why and what/who their inspiration is? This could then generate work that could go back out into the community – whether in the form of churches, community centres or other public spaces.

Museums, art galleries and libraries often have collections with some religious significance. (Information and opportunities for RE at the V&A and the British Library can be found in the ‘What can you do?’ section of the *Celebrating RE* website [www.celebratingre.org](http://www.celebratingre.org).) Why not get them to come into the school to share these with a year group or class? It might be interesting for someone from a library to talk about the stock they have, how stock has changed due to demand and what that tells us about people’s religious quest. Similarly someone from a local bookshop might want to explore why they think the ‘soul-mind-body’ section has increased but the religious section decreased over time and look at buying habits of the local population. They might even want to explain why ‘mind-soul-body’ is thought to be different to religion, or why books that are anti-religious are put in with religious books when you wouldn’t put an anti-exercise book in the sports section. This could lead to some interesting work that pupils might do in their own time by going out and having a look for themselves.



If you have a professional sports club in your area invite members of the team to come and talk about the importance of faith to them – how many times players cross themselves in a game or raise their hands to heaven might be an interesting study on the basis of the recent World Cup.

Lots of places, not just hospitals, have chaplains. Invite in a local chaplain to talk about their work either in retail centres, industrial sites or in connection with transport.

## Local groups

For the Celebrating RE month you might be able to encourage local groups to become involved in celebrating the place of religion in our culture.

Here are some ideas:

- Choral groups – why not invite them to do a selection from some of the great oratorios? Local faith communities or cultural associations could be invited to sing traditional songs at an RE event organised by the school
- Drama groups – why not suggest a piece of drama that explores a religious theme? This could be a re-working of a mystery play for modern times.
- Dance groups – exploring story through dance. This might be an opportunity to re-tell a familiar story, such as the Prodigal Son, or a new story for many, the Birth of the Khalsa.

In each case it would be important to find a venue that was publicly accessible and relevant. Parish churches are often great spaces and welcoming to new groups. This could be a real collaboration between local faith communities, the school and the wider community.

Similarly the public spaces mentioned above – the shopping centre, the town/city/county hall, libraries, museums and sports clubs could also be places where these events take place. Street oratorio could be a way for the future expansion of this art form and you could be its instigator.

In all of these settings pupils could be asked to work with groups to develop ideas if that was appropriate.

## Conclusion

If we are really going to celebrate the importance of religious education, we need to move it beyond the school and classroom into the community.

Contrary to popular belief the community beyond the school is interested in religion and belief and is interested in what schools are doing. By building relationships with community groups and getting RE 'out there' we do a service to RE, to religious communities and to the community as a whole. If you need an umbrella under which to place this work it fits well within the remit of the planned actions a school ought to be making in fulfilling its duties in relation to community cohesion. If we only celebrate RE within the confines of faith communities we won't broaden a public understanding of what we are trying to do.

