

Good Learning in RE

Films for teachers from NATRE:
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Film 7: Who is responsible for this Abortion? / 13-15 year olds

This lesson aims to help pupils understand the moral complexity and religious significance of issues around sanctity of life at birth. Using thinking skills activities based upon a case study of a young Christian, Becky Williams, RE teacher, provokes deeper understanding and explanations from her pupils. They weigh up the issue of responsibility using a 'Pie Chart' approach to see which of 6 possible parties they think is most responsible for an ethical issue. This case study facilitates the exploration of complex issues in relation to one story. Teachers should also note – and plan to address in their own lessons – the issue that the girl in the case study is 15, so her boyfriend has committed an offence.

Key RE Concepts:

Questions of meaning, value and purpose

Ethics and goodness, commitment, religious belief and teaching. Christian values.

Key vocabulary and ideas:

- Vocabulary and concepts: Termination, Abortion, Responsibility, Pregnancy, Sanctity of Life
- Christian ideas about the sanctity of life are woven into the case study through the perspective of the Vicar in the story.
- Engaging with meaning: whatever point of view pupils take on sanctity of life questions, they may all learn from the views of others, evaluating their own perspectives through the challenge of working with other ideas



Pedagogy and Learning Method:

This film shows a teacher using a thinking skills strategy and a case study. The story of Anna's late termination and her involvement with the Christian community makes the ethical issues specific and particular – one danger in tackling ethical topics is that pupils think of 'issues' in the abstract, but here they work with a story. Many teachers use examples from the Soaps, which may be good, but rarely involve exploring a religious perspective thoughtfully. This specially written case study brings key RE issues to the fore. The learning is not primarily factual here, but a good base of understanding of key terms has already been laid. The aims of the lesson are more to do with developing moral reasoning and critical awareness of complexity. The thinking skills strategy called 'Responsibility Pies' places the job of analysing issues in pupils' hands, using discussion to tease out complexity and ambiguity, and to explore a range of views.

Links to key RE strands:

This work is about religious teaching and authority (AT1, learning about Christianity) and about questions of meaning, value and commitment (AT2, learning from religion)

Lesson outline:

Pupils use 6 cards of information about 6 people involved in Anna's story. The girl herself has decided on a termination. They also read the stories of the parts played by her mum, former boyfriend, church minister, teacher and counsellor. Small groups 'slice' the 'Responsibility Pie' to represent visually their answer to the complex question: who is responsible for this abortion? A further lesson explores issues about the age of consent in the UK, developing the case study further.

Learning intentions:

In this lesson, we wanted pupils across a range of abilities to learn:

- To understand different views on the termination of a pregnancy (L4)
- To apply the idea of responsibility thoughtfully for themselves (L4)
- To explain reasons for who they think is most responsible for an abortion (L5)
- To interpret insightfully a range of possible responsible parties, giving reasons for the priorities they choose (L6)

These use the levels, but relate closely to the learning intentions of GCSE RS as well

What makes for good learning in this example?

There are many features of good RE learning in this short film.

The teacher opens up questions and gives learners time to think about their answers. She makes time and space to 'think about thinking' as well as about abortion (metacognition). She has chosen a detailed and stimulating case study: story makes access easier for lower achieving pupils, but also opens up higher level thinking for the most able pupils.

The pupils respond with interest and tackle the task thoughtfully, reflecting good classroom management and the atmosphere of fascination that often promotes good RE. Thinking is not in straight lines, but spirals around the big issues: Is life sacred? Why does the law set an age of consent for sexual relations? How does responsibility get shared for things going wrong?

Resources are simple, but carefully prepared – the large volume of reading and writing is not an obstacle to achievement because pupils work in groups, where one can read and others listen if this helps. The varied perspectives in the story are subtle.

Higher achievers are challenged to think further: after looking at this case, who would they say is responsible for the fact that there are around 180 000 terminations in the UK each year? The statistic raises questions about social, legal and community responsibility as well as individual responsibility.

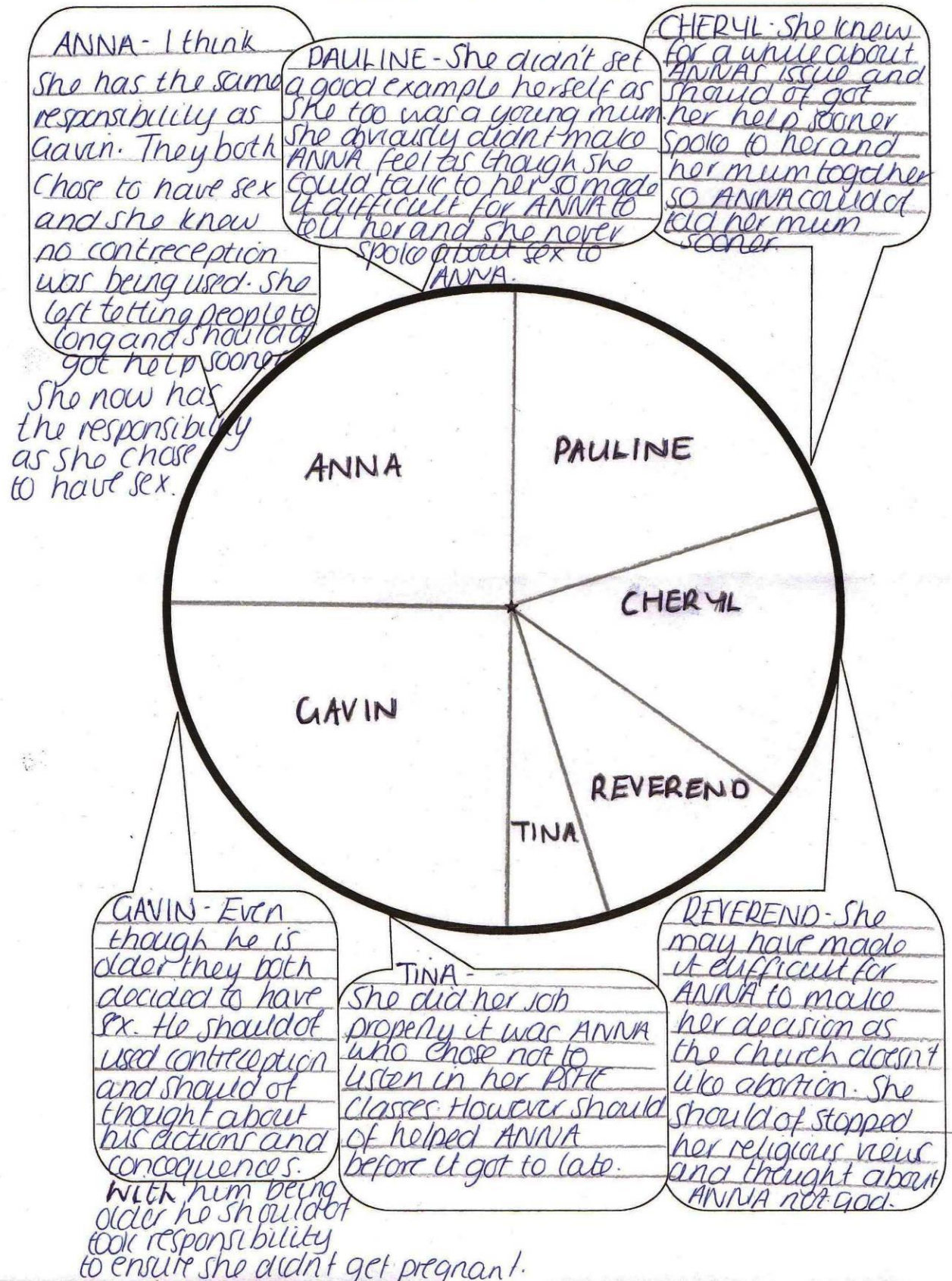
Running a lesson like this: what do you need to do?

The lesson is published in an RE Today book: Questions, Values and Commitment, edited by Stephen Pett, 2012. Equally, you could write your own case study of a girl facing a decision about terminating a pregnancy. Put pupils in small groups – 3s or 4s are good, and give them the stories to read and consider from the cards. After reading each card they discuss how much responsibility for Anna's late abortion rests with this person. They make a list of all the factors which will affect Anna's decision to have an abortion and start prioritising those which you think has had the most affect upon Anna and why.

Key Question: Having considered all factors, which are the most important ones? i.e. Who is most responsible for this late abortion? Students will need to think about the legal, spiritual personal and moral aspects of the case.

Task: Slice the pie: As a group, make your pie diagram into a pie chart showing your agreed and shared idea about which factors are most significant. This task is to be extended by annotating the pie chart with reasons why this factor has been given the 'slice' it has. Here's an example:

Responsibility pies: An RE Thinking Skills Strategy



Ask the small groups to join up with another pair and discuss the results. They should have time to explain the reasons for their choices, written within the speech bubbles around the pie chart.



When you introduce 'Responsibility Pies' to the class it may help to model an example on the board so students understand the task. Afterwards, use some metacognition questions like these to help pupils to observe and consider how their thinking develops.

- How easy was it to make those decisions?
- Did you agree as a pair?
- If so – why do you think you agreed?
- If you disagreed – what did you disagree about?
- Why do you think you disagreed on this issue?

Run a Plenary Whole Class Discussion:

- How did you reach your conclusions?
- What did you learn about the complexity of the issue of abortion?
- In what ways was your partner a help to you in thinking this issue through?
- How would you do this differently if you did it again?
- Did it help you to understand the range of points made when you saw them 'on the pie'? How does this work?
- What did you learn from this activity: about the religious issue? About how you think?

Responsibility Pies is a very good strategy to use when considering any complex issue. Pupils enjoy it, and it opens up ideas about complexity particularly well. It is a very good prelude to an extended writing task, where pupils use the fruits of their discussions to construct arguments, give reasons and explore diversity in an ethical topic. This is a core skill for GCSE success.

Creative curriculum Connections

The work here links RE to some other curriculum areas including PSHE, Citizenship Education and Sex and Relationships Education, where issues about the age of consent will be addressed.

Resources

From RE Today (www.retoday.org.uk): Questions: Values and Commitments, edited by Stephen Pett, 2012

Also see: www.reonline.org.uk

TrueTube has an excellent clip: <http://www.truetube.co.uk/ethics-and-religion/moral-decisions/pro-life-vs-pro-choice> Learners might note down arguments presented on both sides as you watch the clip.

Notes written by Lat Blaylock, with thanks to all the teachers and pupils involved.