

How and why do people pray? (8 – 12 years)

Learning outcomes

Emerging

- Compare and contrast verbal and non-verbal communication
- Offer a supported view as to what sort of communication prayer is

Expected

- Explain, with examples, the purposes of verbal and non-verbal communication
- Use a passage from the Bible or Qur'an to explain the purpose of prayer in Christianity, Islam or both
- Answer the question, with evidence 'why do people pray?'

Exceeding

- Offer a supported view as to how far prayer is a religious form of communication
- Using information about Christian and Muslim prayer, contrast prayer in the two religions

Key words and concepts

- **communication:** the exchange and sharing of information, ideas and feelings through different means such as speaking, writing and reading
- **non-verbal communication:** communicating without words
- **body language:** the deliberate, conscious or unconscious use of the body in conveying meaning to others through gestures, postures and actions
- **interpretation:** the act of understanding and explaining that understanding to others
- **symbolic:** a thing which represents something else
- **Orthodox Church:** An early established yet extant Christian church and community located mainly in Southeastern and Eastern Europe as well as Egypt and Syria
- **Minaret:** the tower attached to the Mosque used for the purpose of calling people to the prayer : the adhan
- **Adhan :** the call to prayer
- **salah:** the name of the muslim prayer performed five times a day
- **Wudhu:** the ritual ablution before the prayer
- **Rak'ah:** one cycle of movement within the prayer. Different prayer times have a different number of cycles
- **Qiblah:** the direction of Mecca to which a Muslim faces during the salah

- **body language** (in prayer) – the use of the body to communicate through symbolic physical movements or positions whilst in prayer;
 - **non verbal communication** (in prayer) – this refers to aspects of the prayer generally that focuses that involve the body to the exclusion of verbal aspects;
 - **salah** (muslim prayer) consisting of *takbir*, *qiyyam*, *rukhu*, *sajdah* and *taslim*; which are the names of the different positions in the prayer, each having their own symbolism.
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Learning activities

The following activities are structured in a manner which is heavily scaffolded for the teacher initially but later tapers off. In this way, while the first and second sessions are laid out in more detailed form, to be used, discarded or adapted as required; by the third session there is less session detail and more content.

One integral aspect to all of these activities is the emphasis on getting the pupils to try and *interpret*. An essential aspect of RE is that it should help pupils in learning how to make meaning out of things – and interpretation is an aspect to this. It must be stressed to them that it is not important whether their answers are the correct ones held by people of the given faith but that they have made meaning out of what is before them. The faith interpretation can be provided afterwards. Strangely, more often than not the pupils' interpretations are connected to and sometimes enrich the faith interpretation.

The following breakdown of activities is suggested:

1. Philosophy for Children discussion around verbal and non-verbal communication and its relation to the act of prayer.
2. Activity based session on non-verbal and body language.
3. Sketching and discussing different Muslim prayer movements, learning further information about the call to prayer and aspects of the mosque associated with prayer in Isla.

Session 1

Aims

- a. To bring pupils to have some understanding of communication as a means of expressing information, ideas, thoughts, signals, feelings and emotions to others.
- b. To bring pupils to have some understanding that communication can be verbal or non-verbal, (or a mixture of both).
- c. To bring pupils to understand that non-verbal communication can be as effective as verbal communication.
- d. To bring pupils to understand that prayer is also a type of communication and can be both verbal and non-verbal.

In this initial session pupils are asked through the medium of philosophy for children to distinguish the act of

communication. There are many things which people do, but they do so unconsciously and part of philosophy is to distinguish and highlight such things to build awareness, consciousness and depth to such human activities. Children are as capable of this as adults.

In this first session the teacher should try to mediate and steer, (but most importantly not dominate) a conversation allowing the pupils understanding that communication is a process of exchanging information, ideas, thoughts, signals, feelings and emotions. In the process of communicating the 'sender' uses a type of communication to a 'receiver'.

- Explain that there are basically two types of communication – verbal and non-verbal – and that praying is a form of communication that has verbal (sound, words, speaking and language) and non-verbal forms (gestures, touch, body language, posture, eye contact and facial expression). Non-verbal language can be extremely effective and in fact research shows that 80% of inter-personal communication is through body language.
- **Activity 1:** Have some Marcel Marceau and Jerome Murat clips set up for pupils to watch. Ask pupils to make up three implicit questions about what they have seen, stressing that implicit questions are different than explicit questions. Implicit questions arise from seeing the mime, (i.e. more universal questions; 'Can people communicate without words?'). Explicit questions are about the mime, (i.e. How does the mime artist make it seem as if there really is a wall?') If the teacher considers it necessary provide a few examples? Try to steer the questions towards questions like the following :
 - How can people communicate
 - Why do people communicate?
 - Who do people communicate with?
 - What do people communicate with?
 - Is communication only through using words?
 - Can you communicate without words?
 - How could you communicate without words?
- Write the questions on the board and get the pupils to vote on two questions to discuss. Start the discussion by asking the pupils who posed these questions why they asked these questions. Then open the discussion to others, teacher may have to interject from time to time to steer the discussion towards the aims set out.
- After some time try to conclude the discussion by summing up the conversation and writing the summary of this on the board.
- Split the class into groups. Then show the pupils a picture of someone praying, or in a contemplative moment in a place of worship or outdoors. Issue pupils with three of the following questions below per small group. Ensure a mix of questions, so that each group has questions about prayer as well as general communication questions. Ask them to agree a response to each question in their group and to say what they think a religious believer might answer, especially in terms of how they think a that person might benefit from certain forms of communication and certain forms of prayer:
 - Why do people pray?
 - Is praying communicating?

- Who or what do people think they are communicating with when they pray?
- Can you be not religious and pray?
- Can you be an atheist and pray?
- Is prayer a very serious matter?
- Is praying just another way of asking?
- Could someone pray without words?

Session 2

This session is about getting pupils to be aware of how they can communicate without words by using their bodies. The class should be split into different groups of about 4 – 5 pupils each. A series of activities could be set up in the classroom and the different groups move around the room engaging in these for approx. 10 minutes each.

Aims

- a. To further develop the idea for pupils that body language and non-verbal communication can be as expressive, (if not more) than verbal communication.
 - b. To get the pupils to apply some of their gained experience of body language and non-verbal aspects of idea of prayer.
- **Activity 1:** Pupils work together to list different ways of expressing feelings in non-verbal ways. Point out that at least some of these will be offensive but all can be very powerful, so need to be used with care!
 - **Activity 2:** Teach pupils how to play 'Charades'. After the rules and format of the game are quickly explained ask pupils to choose one of the following quotations from the Qur'an, (paraphrased for easier comprehension) and start acting them out:

'...surely by remembering God the hearts are made peaceful' (Quran 18: 28)

'...be patient with what people say against you, and pray constantly to God... so that you may have joy' (Quran 20:130)

'And be regular in prayer at the two ends of the day and at the approaches of the night: because good things takes away bad things' (Qur'an 11:114)

'...there are those who think about God standing, and sitting, and lying on their sides' (Quran 3:191)

'...give to the poor and bow down your heads with others who bow down in prayer' (Quran 2 : 110)

- **Activity 3:** Have 8 different 'tableau' scenarios written down. Examples :
 - a. People showing a variety of reactions when suddenly coming upon someone praying by a busy roadside.
 - b. A group of people who are looking for something lost with one of them very happy and thankful at suddenly finding it.
 - c. A football player falling to the ground on his knees after scoring a crucial goal.
 - d. A mother and father with their reluctant children, telling them to pray.
 - e. A group of people begging someone in authority on some urgent matter but who is rather haughtily ignoring them.
 - f. A group of people who have just received something special with only one very thankful person amongst them.
 - g. A playground scene where a fight is just about to break out with someone begging his friend not to get involved while others are egging him on.
 - h. A car scene with onlookers where one driver is very angry and the other is admitting having committed an error and is saying sorry.
 - i. A person asking forgiveness from someone whose feelings they have hurt with a crowd of people around them
- Each group must pick one of these and make the scenario, freezing in their position. Use a digital camera to make a photo of each tableau.
- After this get the whole class together, show the tableau photographs and get them describe their reactions, demonstrate some of the charades sequences, etc.
- Remind them of the discussion concerning the type of communication in prayer. Ask them in their groups to think of some of the things they have seen which shows a prayerful attitude through the body positions. Ask the children to think up words that believers might use to describe these positions and expressions and what types of prayers the positions might resemble?

Prayer in Islam.

- Show an image or video of the prayer positions in Islam. Using all the questions and ideas generated about the nature and purpose of prayer, and the nature and forms of communication, talk about what each position seems to be saying or symbolizing.
- Sketch each position, labelling it to explain what each action communicates.
- Learn about aspects of the mosque that enable prayer, such as:
 - The minaret to call from
 - The Adhan, or call to prayer
 - The washing area so Muslims are spiritually clean before they pray
 - The shoe rack to store shoes which are removed for prayer
 - The collection of prayer mats or large carpeted floor, to ensure the floor is clean for those wishing

to pray

- The mosque angled towards Mecca, called Qibla, the direction Muslims face to pray all over the world
- Listen to the Adhan, there are many clips on you Tube.
- Look at images of Mecca in Saudi Arabia, birthplace of Islam and home of the Hajj, where all Muslims face and they pray.
- Prepare a brief amount of information on each aspect of the mosque. Ask groups to conduct further research and make explicit links between their aspect of the mosque and how it aids prayer. Create a class collage entitled: The Mosque: a House of Prayer.