

What is the contribution of religion and belief in the local community? (key stage 2-3)

Learning Outcomes

Emerging

- Offer a definition of 'community', including at least three factors
- Explain, with reference to two examples, how working as a community might help achieve goals

Expected

- Define 'community', including one religious non-religious and one non-religious factor
- Offer a supported view as to what enables communities to work together to achieve hopes and dreams
- Offer a supported view as to the contribution of religion and belief in a community achieving their goals

Exceeding

- Contrast religious support in the community with non-religious support
- Offer a supported view as to whether there is a difference on religious and non-religious supports to the community

Key words and concepts

- **religion:** 'an organised collection of beliefs, cultural systems, and world views that relate humanity to an order of existence' (Wikipedia, as at 10/02/2014). But note that 'religion' cannot really be captured in a single definition. Where are the dividing lines between religion and culture, and religion and ethnicity? Can religious identity be properly separated from other ways of identifying oneself?
- **belief:** acceptance that something exists or is true, especially where there is no actual proof. Also refers here to religious convictions, e.g., that God answers prayers.
- **atheism:** the belief that there is definitely no God.
- **atheist:** one who believes that there is no God.
- **agnosticism:** the position of not knowing, or not being sure about the existence of God.
- **agnostic:** one who believes that it is impossible to know whether there is a God.
- **theism:** belief in the existence of God or gods.
- **theist:** one who believes in God or gods.
- **humanist:** a person who follows a life system of values and beliefs that is based on the idea that people are basically good and that problems can be solved using reason instead of religion.
- **community:** usually referring to a small social unit or group of people that share a set of values. Can be understood as referring to people who live in a specific geographic area or to a 'virtual' group connected, e.g., via the internet, by a common interest.
- **responsibility:** having a duty to deal with something or having control over someone.

- **voluntary:** in this sense, referring to work done without payment.
- **inspiring:** filling with encouragement to do something, especially something creative, ambitious or helpful; sometimes accompanied by an elevated feeling.
- **character:** qualities that distinguish a person, e.g. type of temperament, qualities of mind, their 'nature', attitudes or dispositions.

Learning activities

This scheme is designed to take place over several sessions with one or two years in between Parts 1 and 2, e.g., Part 1 in Year 4, and Part 2 in Year 6. Alternatively, the scheme could be undertaken as a cross-phase unit from primary to secondary schools.

You will be using clips from the film *Rise of the Guardians*.

Part One

- Explain to the pupils that they are going to finding out some more about the place where they live and the groups and individuals in their local communities: the focus here is on Christianity and humanism, but you could choose different worldviews as appropriate. Pupils will be able to explore the things that interest them most in this context and what they start to investigate in their present class, they will be able to follow up in one or two years' time. The key concept for investigation is 'community'.
- Ask the pupils to talk to a partner about their ideas of the local community: what different groups are they aware of? What different buildings, including religious buildings are they aware of? Do they know people, including in their own family, who are involved in any voluntary activities? What celebrations or processions are they aware of? Have they been to any big family events recently: baptisms, naming ceremonies, weddings, funerals? Which ones had a *religious* context and how could they tell?
- Get some feedback and then ask them in pairs again to think of different community leaders, e.g., mayor, council leader, priest, imam, minister, vicar, rabbi, sports coach, music group director, cubs/scouts/guides/brownies leader etc. and to talk about what each one might do to fulfil his / her role. What do they think makes a good leader of a community? Where do they think that religious belief might make a difference?
- Focus attention on the idea of people's hopes and fears and dreams and nightmares. Introduce the film, *Rise of the Guardians*, and play an extract: Scene 2, where the main characters are introduced: the Guardians whose task it is to protect children's hopes and dreams, and 'Pitch Black', the character who wants to replace hopes and dreams with fears and nightmares. Stop the film where the Easter Bunny says, 'Jack Frost is many things but he is not a Guardian' (6' 27")
- Ask pupils to say what they think about these characters and what might make a good 'guardian' for children. What do they think is the biggest influence on themselves and others: hopes and dreams, or fears and nightmares?
- Next, play Scene 5, where 'North' (i.e. Santa Claus) questions Jack Frost about his character and uses a Russian Doll to illustrate his point. Stop the film when Jack says, 'I don't know' (2 minutes). [You could use a Russian Doll, if you have one, to illustrate the point.]

- Ask pupils to think of the layers of a person's 'character'. Ask them to reflect on what they show to the outside world and what is kept hidden deep inside. What kinds of things might be at a person's *centre*? Can they give examples of hidden strengths that might emerge at times of need? Make a list of suggestions on the board.
- Ask pupils to draw the outline of a person in the middle of a page, to select at least three words from the class list to describe 'hidden qualities' that could best help people and to write them inside the outline. Then, from each word, encourage them to draw an arrow moving outside the outline and to describe a situation where that quality might be of help, e.g., *honesty* --→→ admitting you have broken your mum's flower-vase; or *calmness* --→→ not panicking in an emergency; or *loving* --→→ forgiving someone who has offended you.
- Next, focus pupils' attention on the idea of the power of belief and play Scene 12 where the boy Jamie talks with his toy rabbit and then Jack Frost. Stop the film just after the point where the Easter Bunny says, 'He made you believe... in me?' (4' 45").
- Ask pupils to say what they think this part of the story is about and what questions they would like to ask about it? Point out the questions that go deeper into the meaning of the story. How do their own ideas and questions compare with others in the class? Do they think that believing in such things as Jack Frost, the Tooth Fairy, the Easter Bunny, the Sandman (creator of pleasant dreams) and Santa Claus are a waste of time, or is there a point to such belief? What happens when children stop believing in such characters?
- Next, play Scene 13 where the Guardians and the children make a stand against Pitch. Stop the film where Jamie says, 'I've got it. I know what we have to do' (6' 30").
- Ask pupils to say what they think is important in this scene. In what sense have the children 'grown up'? How important do they think it is that the other children supported Jamie when he decided to stand up against Pitch? What questions would they like to ask Jamie or the other children if they could? Can they say whether they, or anyone they know, have been helped by anyone to overcome their fears and nightmares?
- Ask them to 'hot seat' (a) Jamie and (b) Pitch. Choose pupils to take their parts and ask the rest of the class to take turns asking them questions and noting the replies. Some pupils might like to suggest alternative replies.
- Finally, play Scene 14 where the Sandman returns, defeats Pitch and restores the children's dreams, and Scene 15 where Jack becomes a Guardian and tells Jamie that he has become a Guardian too. Stop the film when Jack and the Guardians take off in the sleigh and the children wave (6' 46"). There's no need to include the final lines of the film where Jack says, 'If the Man in the Moon tells you something, believe him!', as this may be somewhat of a distraction!
- Ask pupils to say what message they think this scene is giving about human beings. What questions would they like to ask (a) Jack Frost and (b) Jamie? What answers do they think these two characters would give to their questions? In what sense might this film be called a 'religious' film?
- Encourage pupils then to work in small groups to produce a poster in two halves indicating in words and drawings: hopes and dreams on one side and fears and nightmares on the other.
- When the pupils have finished or are close to finishing their designs, ask them to add comments on how being part of a community might help (a) fulfil some of the hopes and dreams (b) keep people safe

against their fears and nightmares. Ask them to visit other pupils' designs so that they can compare ideas.

- Explain that the class is now going to enquire into a big question: 'What is the contribution of religion and belief in the community? They will have the chance to identify important features, to reflect upon them and to apply them to their own situation.
- Display a series of pictures (at least A4 size) of different community events and features around the room, such as:
 - A food bank
 - Bereavement counsellor or prison visitor
 - Religious charity shop
 - Religious funeral
 - Religious youth group or festival
 - A demonstration or protest
 - Military chaplain
 - People offering comfort to someone in trouble
 - People worshipping in a church or cathedral
 - A religious ritual
 - Street evangelists
 - Sunday school
- Ask the pupils to circulate around the displayed pictures for a while and then to stand by the picture they find most inspiring, interesting, confusing or different. Go round the class asking for explanations, then ask the pupils to move again if they want to, to stand by the picture they now find most inspiring, interesting, confusing or different.
- Take the two most popular pictures and move them to a prominent position at the front of the class. Share some key aspects of knowledge about the chosen pictures, e.g., which religious/belief tradition the picture features, if any, and some of the beliefs and/or practices of the group.
- Encourage the pupils in groups of 5 or 6 to come up with one or at most two questions comparing the two pictures; remind them that 'open' questions that go beyond the pictures themselves are likely to be harder to answer and more interesting. Ask them to write their questions on A3 paper. These can then be displayed around the room, on a cleared floor space or on tables.
- Ask pupils to circle round the displayed questions. If possible pupils can add comments and extra questions on Sticky Notes and put them on each A3 paper. Invite comments and links. Clear up any ambiguities and ask pupils to stand by their favourite question. Narrow these down by single transferable vote system until one question remains. Ask the group whose question is voted for by the class to explain their rationale and their thoughts. Tweak the question if necessary to make more open / philosophical.
- Issue pupils with two tokens / cards, indicating the maximum number of contributions to the discussion that can be made. Steer the enquiry around the main question, building towards better understanding of the issue(s) being raised by the pupils. [In a large class, invite the question generators to make some

summary comments about what has been said, indicating, with respect, where they agree or disagree.] Invite a few more comments from those who have not said anything or much, up to this point.

- Self-evaluation: pupils raise hands according to whether they have done the things indicated at the start. Did they *identify* some important features of religion and belief in the community? Did they *reflect* on what these features might mean? Did they *apply* their reflections to their own lives?

Part Two (To take place over several sessions in the Middle / Secondary school, e.g., in Year 5, 6 or 7)

- Remind pupils (and inform new pupils) of the investigation being undertaken into the contribution of religion and belief in the community, the film *Rise of the Guardians*, the pictures of community events and features, and the question(s) they came up with in the first part of the investigation.
- Explain that they are going to take this investigation to a deeper level, enquiring into specific contributions of religion and belief groups locally and how their practices / ways of living reflect beliefs about what is most important in life.
- Get pupils to recall parts of the story of the *Rise of the Guardians*. Bring out the idea that 'Pitch Black' is trying to destroy children's hopes and dreams and replace them with fears and nightmares. The characters who fight against him represent hopes and dreams: Santa, the Easter Bunny, the Tooth Fairy, the Sandman and Jack Frost.
- Show pupils Scenes 14 and 15 near the end of the film, where the children get together against 'Pitch Black' and say, 'I do believe in you. I'm just not afraid of you', and the scene where the Sandman returns and Jack tells Jamie that he has also become a kind of Guardian (6' 46"). Stop the film before the final sentence about the Man in the Moon.
- Ask pupils to say what they see in the film that perhaps they didn't see when they first watched it. Bring ideas of *community* and *responsibility* into the discussion.
- Ask pupils to then work in small groups to produce a poster of messages learnt from the film. Ask them to reflect on what people can do today to fight fears and nightmares. Prompt their thinking by pointing out that distress, anxiety, loneliness, feelings of worthlessness, etc, all have **causes**, and provide a list of such possible causes: bullying, violence, poverty, addiction, hunger, disease, illness, lack of love and affection, inequality. Can they add others?
- Engage the small groups in a 'Give an example' activity, where they agree on a good example of where such causes [bullying, violence, poverty, addiction, hunger, disease, illness, lack of love and affection, inequality] have led or could lead to making life worse for people. Get some feedback from the groups on their examples and ask them to say how they think such problems can be solved. Are such problems easier for people to solve if they are members of communities?
- Show pupils the list of possible contributions made by religion and belief communities on page 4 above. Ask them to narrow the list down to the one or two that seem most interesting or important to them. Can they give reasons for their selection?
- Ask pupils to prepare for the visit of a member of a local community of religion/ belief by preparing questions they would like to ask about their beliefs and practices as members of that group. [Invite and prime your visitor to expect such questions!]
- At the next session, introduce a visitor from a particular community group to the class. Encourage the

visitor to offer a brief presentation outlining how they came to be in that group and on what sort of activities the group engages in, including any festivals, celebrations, and different sorts of religious and other meetings. Then invite pupils to ask their questions.

- When questions and answers are exhausted, encourage pupils to work in small groups on a (digital) presentation that addresses the question, 'What did religions and beliefs ever do for us?' If it's possible for your visitor to stay, encourage them to circulate around the groups offering suggestions and insights. Remind pupils about their work on the *Rise of the Guardians* film, and ask them to add any ideas they have on:
 - the way different groups, including religious and humanist groups, might have an impact on people's hopes and fears, dreams and nightmares;
 - why people may belong to different religion and belief communities;
 - what challenges that might bring;
 - whether having *religious* beliefs makes a difference;
 - further unanswered questions.
- Ask pupils to work on their presentations ready to show in the next session.
- Allow some time for pupils to complete their presentations and then to show a selection. [Others could be made ready for upload to the school website.] Offer feedback in terms of pupils achievements in answering the set question.