

#REsourceNorfolk: Teaching with sacred texts

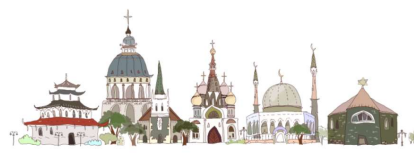
Thank you all for coming along to my presentation at the end of this exciting, interesting and warm day of learning.

How many Primary teachers do we have in the room? And how many secondary? Thank you.

Matthew Lane



RE primary resources – Our new ‘religion and worldviews’ religious education curriculum celebrates similarities



Our new ‘religion and worldviews’ RE curriculum looks at what we all have in common, rather than focusing on differences, says Matthew Lane...

by Matthew Lane

Share

Comparing stories of Noah and Nuh

Events in the Bible and Quran can show children how different religions can share a similar worldview

Religious education is a subject filled with knowledge about people, culture and community. Often, discrete learning in RE is three ways ‘substantive’, or the specific content, skills, knowledge, and ways of knowing, the information, and where children build their own worldview and learning. In this lesson, the stories of one person, two religions Noah (as he used Nuh) can be collected.

WHAT THEY’LL LEARN

How different religions can share similar stories and how these stories influence our lives.

MAIN LESSON

1. MEETING NOAH
Introduce the story of Noah. Explain how he is the same as Nuh in the Quran. Explain how Genesis in the first of the six books of the Bible and Surah Noah in the Quran are similar. Explain how Allah and God are the same. Noah was a prophet of God. The rain in the Bible was a sign of God’s anger. The rain in the Quran was a sign of God’s mercy. Noah was a prophet of God. The rain in the Bible was a sign of God’s anger. The rain in the Quran was a sign of God’s mercy.

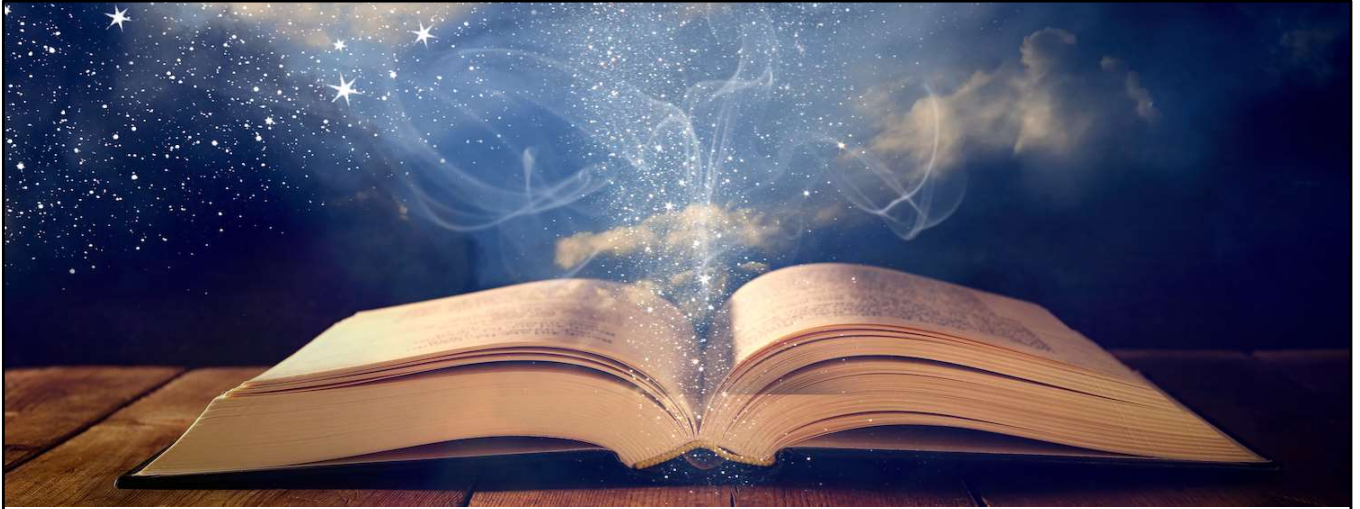
2. MEETING NUH
Read the story of Nuh. Explain how this is the same as Noah in the Bible. Explain how Allah and God are the same. Nuh was a prophet of God. The rain in the Quran was a sign of God’s mercy.

Share

Matthew Lane – Year 6 teacher at Hethersett Primary just a few miles down the road - REQM Gold – RE Lead for 4 years, teaching for 10.

Written for TES, teachPrimary, RE Today and RE:ONLINE about RE and Religion & Worldviews.

Why do I think Worldviews is important to RE? Before teaching I was an Officer in the Royal Navy and saw the impact of how religion and worldview can be harnessed through the twisting of sacred texts making the world a less secure place for all of us.



Teaching with sacred texts

This talk links in with what we heard from Lat Blaylock in his keynote: using sacred texts helps us to find the substantive knowledge and make links. It lets us see the principle ideas and ideals of a religion and how these are similar or contrasting to other religions or worldviews. We will cover more on the three key tenants of the OFSTED research review and how this links to substantive knowledge later.

As we work through these slides and their lesson ideas, be thinking about how we can use the approaches to introduce sacred texts and find links between them and the knowledge they house.

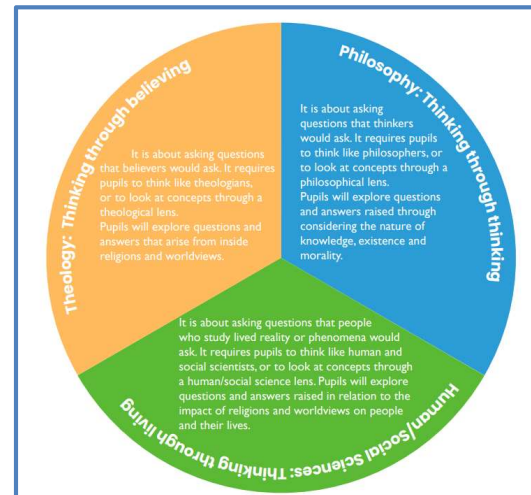
- Why use sacred texts in lessons?
- Approaches to using sacred texts in lessons.
- Lesson examples
- Hermeneutics
- Texts to use

What will be covering in the next 30mins? Why we should used sacred texts in class to support a R&W approach and the pedagogy of the Norfolk LAS.

Approaches to using sacred texts and how to get the best out of them in lessons. A few lesson examples to give you ideas of how to approach texts. A little on hermeneutics (don't worry it's not as difficult to teach as it is to spell) and then a few examples of texts and resources you could use in your lessons or at your school.

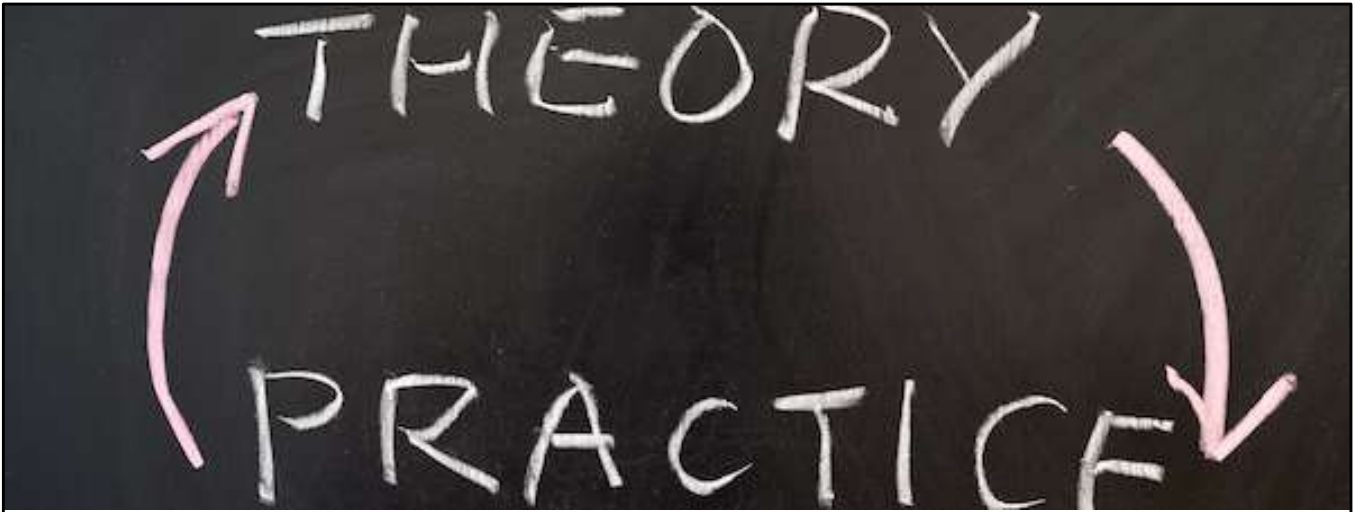
Why do we need to use sacred texts in lessons?

- “Substantive knowledge” – the original word (maybe).
- “Ways of knowing” – **theology**. Also **philosophy** and **HSS**.



So why do we need to use sacred texts in our lessons? What is the point? They work as a key part of the “substantive knowledge” we can teach about a religion. These sacred texts we use in lessons are the canon record of followers or even the directly dictated word of God depending upon the text. Using sacred texts also facilitates the multi-disciplinary pedagogy, the “ways of knowing” of the Norfolk LAS – and its underlying Religion & Worldviews approach. I use the term “ways of knowing” as this is the name given to the learning in the OFSTED research review of May 2021. The other terms from the review are “substantive knowledge”, or the knowledge we are teaching, the meat of the lessons. and “personal knowledge”. Personal knowledge is the experience and culture our pupils bring with them to their learning which we as teachers shape and add to through our teaching. It is sometimes linked to or referred to as the “personal worldview”.

Theology is the main lens in which we can use sacred texts. These are texts about Believing. They share the beliefs of a religion along with rules for life, key ideas, customs and cultures. Therefore they can also be used as a starting point for philosophy and HSS lessons. There are different ways to structure learning from sacred texts and we will discuss this later on.



How can we use sacred texts? |

So how do we use sacred texts in our lessons? How do we help children to read, understand and interpret these ancient and sacred words?

Sacred text scholarship

- Reading as the Writer - Historical context, when was this written? Where was it written?
- Reading as a Reader - using Reading Comprehension skills, meaning of words.
- Reading as a Believer – what messages or ideals might a person of this faith take from the text?

As primary teachers, approaching the reading and study of a sacred text can be daunting. However, what we are doing at its core is reading. And we all teach guided reading and English.

Therefore, we can transfer those skills. The skills we will discuss can be taught in any order, although I have found them best when taught in the order explained here. In this approach we would read the text three times, with a different viewpoint each time.

As a writer, we sit behind the text looking at its structure and history. Then, as the reader we are within the text thinking about its content. Finally, as a Believer (or from their perspective) we think about the worldview of another and how a member of that religion would interpret the text.

Reading as the Writer (behind the text)

Think about these questions before reading:

- What is the author's purpose for this piece of writing?
- Who is the intended audience for this piece of writing?
- When and where was this piece written?

When reading as a writer we approach the text from the perspective of the writer. This is not make believe: it is thinking through the questions a writer could ask. It is taking time to ponder about the History of the piece such as when and where it was written and how this in turn impacts upon the writing.

The New Testament is a good example of this, with some Gospels written for a Jewish audience whilst others written for different groups. Some gospels may be direct dictations, whilst others were written many years after the death of the namesake from second or third hand accounts.

Each bullet point:

- What is the author's purpose for this piece of writing? Is it to record a history? Is it to teach a moral or social custom?
- Who is the intended audience for this piece of writing? Was it for a specific groups, such as the Gentiles in the New Testament, or was it as an historical record for all to read? Did the author think this writing would be passed down the millennia?
- When and where was this piece written? As modern readers in western Europe does our positionality mean we miss vital context to this text? Like the Good Samaritan.

Think about these questions as you are reading:

- How does the writer reveal the main idea?
- How does the writer pull us in and make us want to read more?
- What techniques does the writer use for sequencing?
- How does the writer reveal their emotions?
- How does the author use word choice to make the writing more memorable or effective?

Reading as a writer is quintessential guided reading. We think about the ideas that a text is trying to communicate to the reader. What writing features have been used. This is especially important when reading poetic texts. This is also a time to reflect on vocabulary: why do we have Lord and LORD in a text?

Each bullet point

- How does the writer reveal the main idea? Is it slowly or bluntly? Do they use metaphor or simple language?
- How does the writer pull us in and make us want to read more? Do they create suspense? Do they pose questions to us?
- What techniques does the writer use for sequencing? Is the text long and winding or a short, sharp message? Or is this a very old text that is missing these features that we would expect in a modern text?
- How does the writer reveal their emotions? Was there an emotion they approached this text with? Is there an emotion they want us as the reader to have or take away from the text?
- How does the author use word choice to make the writing more memorable or effective? Is there a key phrase that the writer wants us to remember? Is there a closing line that summarises the whole story?

Reading as a Reader (within the text)

- What genre is this piece?
- What emotions do I feel as a reader?
- Who are the main characters in this story?
- Why did the main character make that choice?
- What is the moral of this story and why?

Here are further questions we could use, this time reading the text as a reader. Again, questions that you will recognise from your Guided Reading lessons. You may wish to change the term “main character” in your lessons – this has only been used as a place holder on this slide for ease of reading.

- What genre is this piece? Does the text have the features we expect for this genre? Is it a poem as we expect a poem? Is this a History or a moral story?
- What emotions do I feel as a reader? How does this alter my interpretation of the text?
- Who are the main characters in this story? Is there one or many? Are they figures we have met before within this sacred text or within other sacred texts?
- Why did the main character make that choice? Were they forced into these choices or do them freely? Are they ones we would expect or not: like when Jesus turns over the temple tables and scatters the money – this is out of character from what we expect.
- What is the moral of this story and why? What moral have we taken? What moral might someone else take? Was there a moral the writer wanted us to take?

All of these questions can be linked to the development and teaching of “Personal Knowledge”. These questions give students time to connect with the text, learn and ponder how this learning has changed or confirmed their personal ideas. We can discuss more on Personal Knowledge at the end of this talk if you wish.

Reading as a Believer (beyond the text)

- What message(s) would a believer take from this story?
- What does this story tell us about believers at this time?
- How might this story inform the life of a believer today?
- What messages could a non-believer take from this.

In this last stage of reading, we step through and out of the text to consider it from the perspective of another reader. This is where we can transition in lens from theology to the social sciences.

Some of these questions are repeats, changing the focus from the writer/us to another reader. These are questions that ask us to postulate and empathise. This is an area, as a teacher, where our own professional knowledge may reach its limits: CPD may be needed to make the utmost of this stage.

- What message(s) would a believer take from this story? This can link to lessons that many believers may take or dogma that believers are expected (but don't always) take from this extract.
- What does this story tell us about believers at this time? Linking back to an historical lens: are we as modern readers missing something in the context?
- How might this story inform the life of a believer today? How would someone of that religion or worldview use this story today? Can we find examples of them using it in their lives?
- What messages could a non-believer take from this?

After this final reading we could ask our pupils if the text or passage has made them consider their own Personal Knowledge. Has the text confirmed or conflicted with the ideas and ideals they brought to this lesson?



Sacred texts in lessons

So having talked theory, how does this work in lessons? How can we apply our skills of reader as a writer, reader and believer to our learning?

How do <Christians> celebrate births?

1. Look at the <Bible> for stories of births and children.
2. Discuss why, as humans, we celebrate births. (Philosophical).
3. Investigate <denominations> traditions of celebrating births. (HSS)

This is a model for approaching a sequence of lessons. You can swap out the religion and sacred texts in the brackets as you desire. It could also be repeated in a loop as a sequence of comparative theology, for instance reading part of the Bible and then a comparative part the Quran.

With this sequence you could start with children discussing their own experience and ideas before beginning the reading. Then they read through extracts from one or more sacred texts (1), before distilling out the core ideas (2). After this, we get into the messiness of looking at how a message can be interpreted by different denominations (3). As an example, we see a broad range of how Christians celebrate births and link this to the joining of their church. Anglican and Catholics christen/baptise at a young age where as Baptists do not baptise until a child as made their own declaration of faith and taken the conscious choice.

You could also use extracts from “What is Humanism” by Michael Rosen for a non-religious worldview in this lesson.

Comparing Noah and Nuh

- Read the story of Noah, summarise key parts
- Read the story of Nuh, summarise key parts.
- Identify the similarities
- Explore the differences: events, content, tone, author, audience...



In this example we are directly comparing two sacred texts to read similar versions of the same set of events. In this case, Noah from the Bible and Nuh from the Quran. Here we read the two stories separately, summarising and learning the stories. Then we can compare the content of the two stories, looking for the similarities and differences. In this example, the differences provide interesting content for lessons.

1. Read the story of Noah, summarise key parts
2. Read the story of Nuh, summarise key parts.
3. Identify the similarities
4. Explore the differences: events, content, tone, author, audience...

I covered this approach in a lesson plan for this month's teachPrimary. A link for this is on my website and attached to your handout. You may wonder why you would ask children to summarise a text. Summarising is a brilliant Generative Learning approach which will help pupils to internalise and distil the key concepts from a text. There are more ideas on using Generative Learning on my website: <https://www.theteachinglane.co.uk/square-bracket>

How do we ask for forgiveness

- Look at a selection of OT and NT quotes.
- Compare these to examples from Hadiths.
- Find similarities and differences.
- Look at who, when and where these were written. Are they first or second hand quotes?

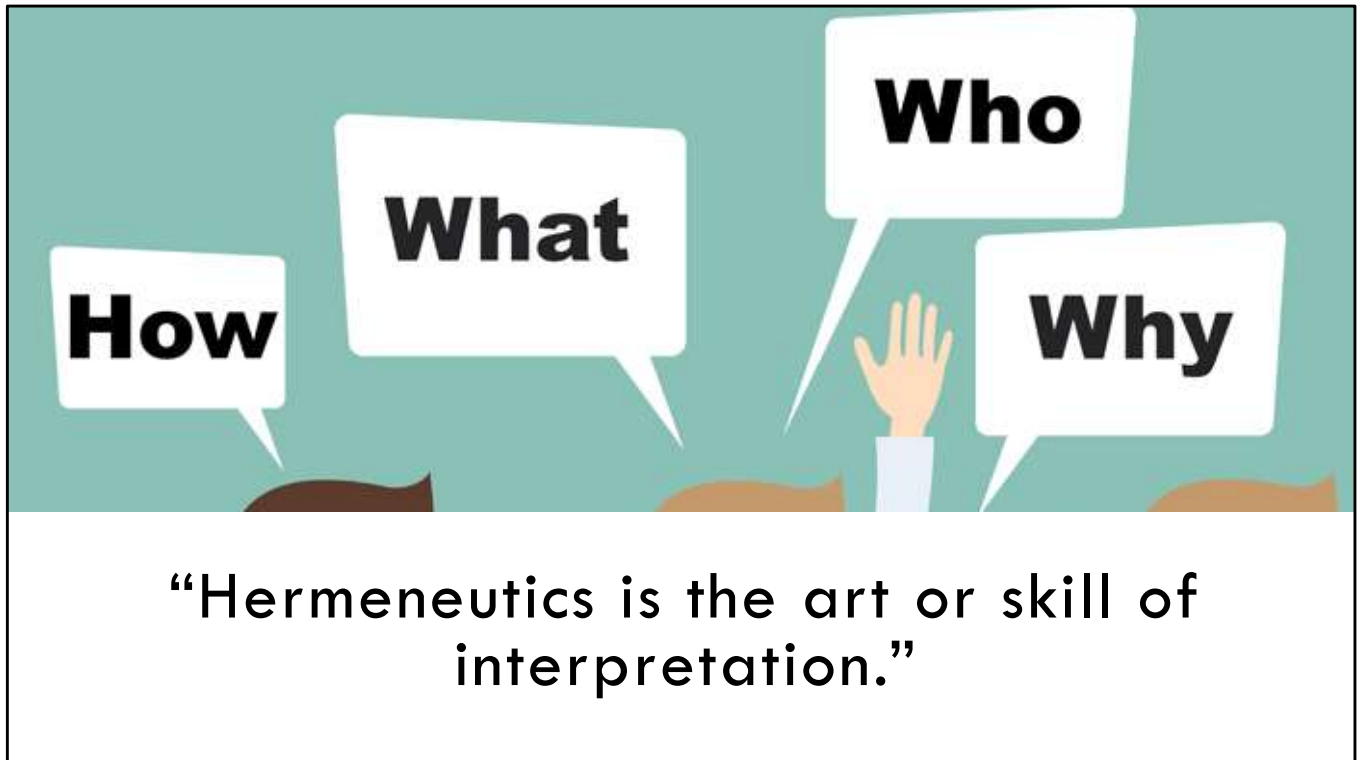
Forgiveness is a core theme to explore in many religions. In this example, we look at a selection of extracts from the OT and NT. These could then be compared to Hadiths to add in comparative religion.

This is also a good example of where we can explore the Personal Knowledge aspect of worldviews. Children could compare their own moments of forgiveness, then read these extracts and then reflect upon how the reading has now altered their own thoughts on forgiveness.



Hermeneutics

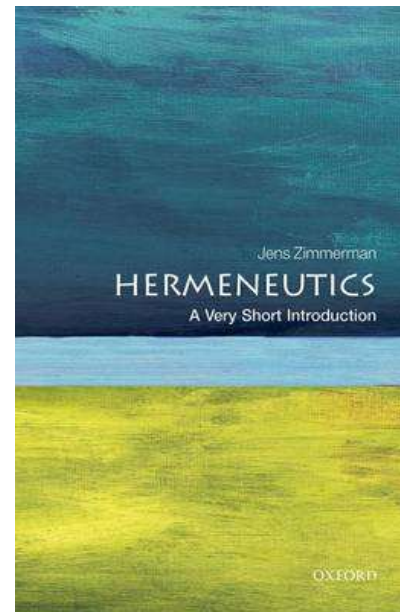
Now to a tool in our Worldviews toolbox that is far harder and scarier to spell than use.



Hermeneutics is an academic discipline of interpretation. It has its roots in Biblical Theology but has now developed into a wider academic school of thought within Humanities.

How to Hermeneutics?

- A scholarly methodology for interpreting scripture.
- Originally biblical.
- Used in many branches of humanities.
- Very suited to a worldviews approach



reonline.org.uk/leadership/practical-introduction-to-hermeneutics

A scholarly methodology for interpreting scripture, to find its many meanings.

Originally biblical.

Used in many branches of humanities.

Very suited to a worldviews approach as it asks us to consider our own worldview (as no one stands nowhere) and the possible views of others.

Zimmerman has an excellent short introduction book on the subject. There is also excellent free CPD available from REONLINE which can be accessed via their blog.

- “*Positionality of the reader*”: our locale, socio-economic context, race, belief ... the reader’s *worldview*.
- The historical and social context of the text.
- The author, the intended recipient, the reasons for writing.
- Theology + History

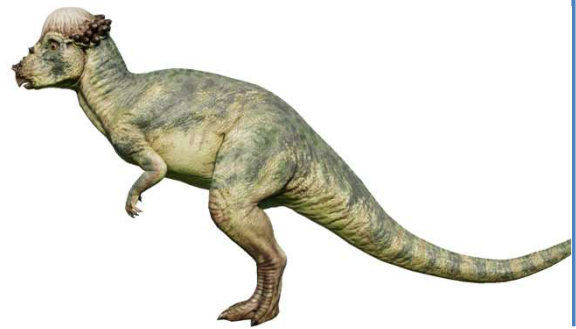
The aim is to arrive at an understanding of what texts may be saying

When using Hermeneutics we think about our positionality as a reader. Where are we in the world? How does our socio-economic background impact upon our understanding of the text? Our own worldviews have an impact on our reading of a text. For instance, how many of us missed the racism in the Good Samaritan the first time we were read it?

Many people do see cross overs in hermeneutics between theology and history. What we are trying to do in this method is draw out the original reasoning and meanings of a text.

Can I do this with children?

- Should I call it hermeneutics?
- Onomatopoeia ... split digraph ... pachycephalosaurs
- Didn't we just cover this..?



But should we do this with our classes or is hermeneutics just a planning tool for staff? In short yes. As we already discussed in the earlier reading questions, children can engage with these rich questions. Should you use the name in lesson? Well, children can name dinosaurs when they are three. Although, you may wish for them to use the term “Reading” in their own writing as it is a pig of a word to spell!

You may be thinking “Didn't we just cover this in the previous slides on Reading as a Writer, Reader, Believer?”. Well, yes we did.

Great CPD on this via RE:ONLINE by Jenifer Jenkins. Links are on the next slide.

Hermeneutic links - Jennifer Jenkins

- Ways of Knowing: Hermeneutics - part 1 -
<https://www.reonline.org.uk/2022/02/01/ways-of-knowing-hermeneutics-part-1/>
- Ways of Knowing: Hermeneutics - part 2 -
<https://www.reonline.org.uk/2022/03/01/ways-of-knowing-hermeneutics-part-2/>



Which texts to use?

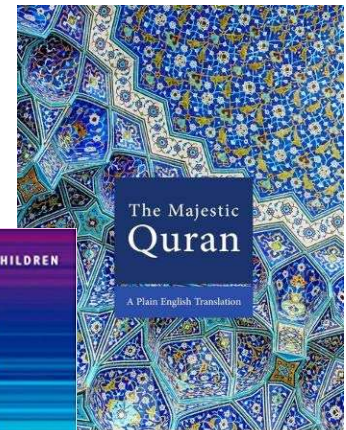
Now we know why and how to use texts – which ones should we use?

Now any sacred text can be used. However, the text needs to be suitable to find the “substantive knowledge” in.

For some religions, like Islam, this is relatively straight forward. Whilst others, like the Dharmic traditions, can be more complex. In Norfolk, our Agreed Syllabus asks more of teachers and their classes but the resources are not always readily available. For instance, a KS1 friendly version of the Torah is difficult to find that is not a storyteller version.

Sacred texts

- Needs to be a “complete” translation.
- “Storyteller” books good for introductions but not scholarship.



Translated by Dr. Musharraf Hussain, Al-Azhar, OBE, DL, D.Univ

First of all we need complete translations. That way we can compare content between translations as learning progresses.

Storyteller books are great for lesson openings to give children a quick summary, but by their nature, they are mixings of different texts or gospels to create a quick story. Like there being three kings in the nativity story – it is something we see and read often yet there is no Biblical canon for this information. Just the three gifts they brought. Lots of collective worship resources are like this.

A great free resource for Bibles is BibleGateway. I especially like the feature to print off comparative passages with different translations in parallel.

Bibles

- NIRV – one used in Church of England churches
- ERV – Easy Reader Version, used by EAL but also good for using alongside NIRV to aid comprehension.
- Rainbow Good News
- NLT – New Living Translation, written in the 2010s, much easier to read.

So which Bibles to use? There are many different translations to choose from.

NIRV is often used. It is an older translation and quite close to much older translations. However, it can be difficult for children to interpret and read due to its old fashion language and sentence structures.

Easy Reader Version is a good partner to NIRV but suffers from over-simplification in places for older readers. It can be great with younger readers from Years 2-4.

Rainbow Good News Bibles date from the 1980s. They have a modern tone but some of the language and structure is dated to us 21st century readers. You may well have some of these in your school.

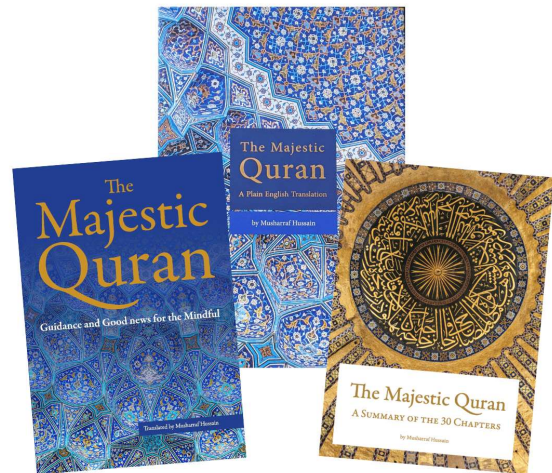
NLT is the one we have started using in my school. It has modern sentence structures which makes the reading flow, but it has not diluted or downgraded the vocabulary in the way seen in the ERV.

Qurans

Majestic Quran

Summaries for teachers

Storage and handling?



For Qurans, many have recommended the Majestic Quran. This is a modern English translation. We have them in my school and the children enjoy using them. We bought hardback editions so they would last longer and children would be respectful of them.

The summarise of each Surah produced by the same company are great for staff CPD and lesson planning.

If you do purchase class sets of Qurans, be mindful of how they should be stored as the highest books in a room and the personal hygiene customs for these texts. By tradition, any copy of the Quran is considered Holy, so it can be seen as very disrespectful to print off or make photocopies of an extract and then throw these in the recycling bin like we would printouts from Biblegatway. Generally, it is considered OK to read the Quran from a screen so this is a possible work around if you do not have full physical copies of the Quran. If you may wish to check with your children or local school community as to their view on this practice as opinion is divided in some parts of the Muslim community.



GODLY PLAY



!!! FINAL SLIDE OF PRESENTATION !!!

Another option to consider for KS1 and EYFS is Godly Play. Whilst originally designed for Sunday Schools and worship, the stories have volumes of scholarship that support the refinements made.

Training is needed to make the most of this resource but is well worth the investment. A great resources for KS1 that is a whole presentation in itself.

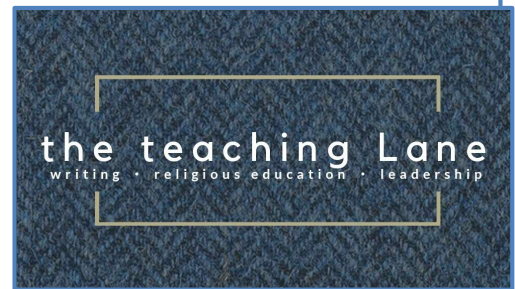
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Thank you for listening. This is me! ANY QUESTIONS?