

Religion and Worldviews

KS3 Case Studies

16th Street Baptist Church,
Birmingham, Alabama
(Christian Worldviews)



A RELIGION AND WORLDVIEWS APPROACH

A religion and worldviews approach recognises that everyone has (or occupies) a worldview - no-one is neutral.

This approach is rooted in two key principles:

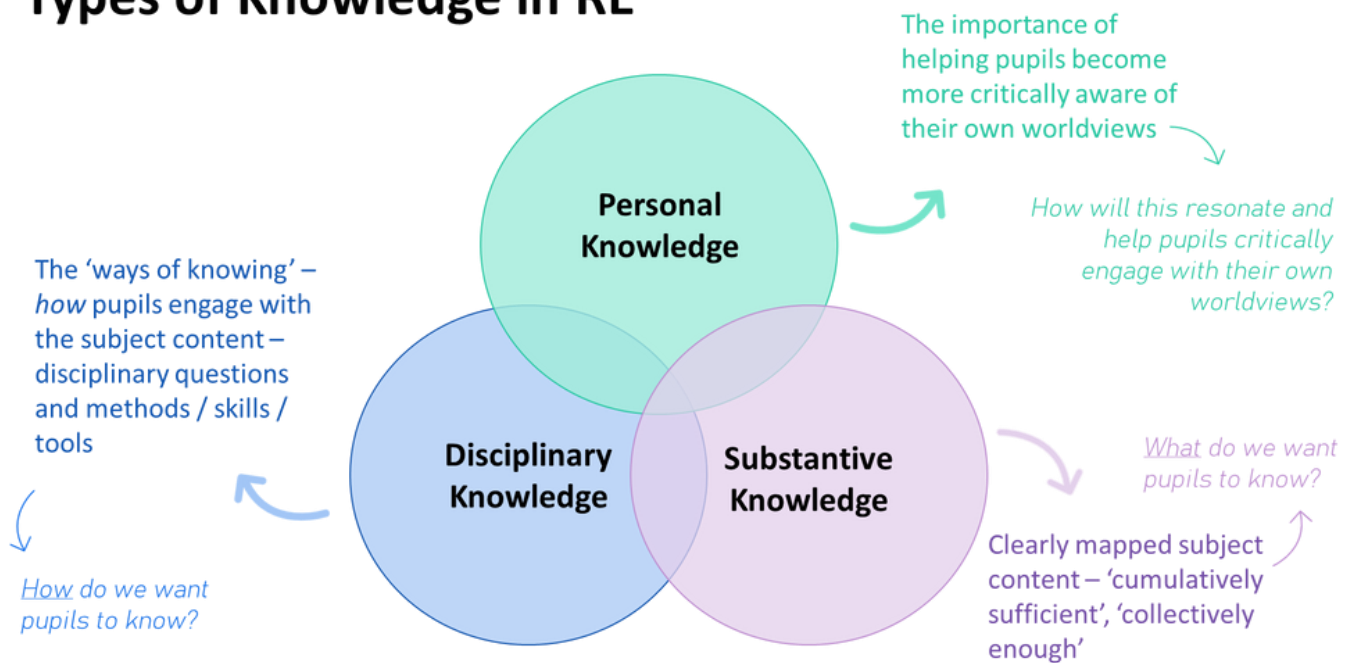
1. Worldviews start with people

Rooting the learning in real or fictionalised case studies helps make worldviews tangible to students; this helps them know, understand and remember more

2. Students' ability to make sense of what they learn is an integral part of the curriculum

It is essential to use various 'ways of knowing' to support students to engage critically with subject content; this includes helping them critically engage with their own worldviews

Types of Knowledge in RE



A RELIGION AND WORLDVIEWS APPROACH



A RELIGION AND WORLDVIEWS APPROACH


Both reimagined substantive content and refocused pedagogy must be in place for a religion and worldviews approach.

SUBSTANTIVE CONTENT

- ✓ Begins with people, focusing on the rich diversity of lived, authentic experience of religion and non-religion. 
- ✓ Develops an understanding of the matters of central importance for the religious and non-religious worldviews studied.
- ✓ Explores what is meant by concepts such as belief, religion, spirituality and worldview.
-  ✓ Investigates organised, institutional and individual worldviews.
- ✓ Examines how worldviews may offer meaning and purpose to people.
- ✓ Studies the influence and power of worldviews.
- ✓ Considers how worldviews may provide values, morality and guidance. 
- ✓ Takes seriously diversity, continuity, change and context of worldviews.

Note: Worldviews can be religious or non-religious

PEDAGOGY

- ✓ Begins with pupils understanding as interpreters of religion and worldviews.
- ✓ Enables pupils to understand their personal knowledge through reflexivity.
- ✓ Utilises different ways of knowing such as theological, sociological, historical and philosophical disciplinary lenses.
- ✓ Inducts pupils into the processes and scholarly methods used to study religion, religious and non-religious worldviews.
-  ✓ Emphasises the value of dialogue and intellectual humility in the classroom.
- ✗ A curriculum may reimagine the substantive content, but not be a religion and worldviews approach if it does not take into account the appropriate pedagogy.
- ✗ A teacher of RE may utilise the appropriate pedagogy (largely a hermeneutical approach) but use a world religions paradigm to construct the substantive content, this would also not be a religion and worldviews approach.
- ✓ To be a religion and worldviews approach the teacher of RE must both reimagine the substantive content and their pedagogy.

<https://www.reonline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/a-religion-and-worldviews-approach-7.pdf>

THE WAYS OF KNOWING IN RE

There are a range of different scholarly ways in which we can know about religious and non-religious worldviews. We call these the 'ways of knowing' and they draw from some important academic disciplines, including Theology, the Human and Social Sciences and Philosophy. These disciplines are all interested in asking about religion and belief, including people's ways of believing, living and thinking. The boundaries between them are fluid and they address many of the same questions and use many of the same methods, tools or skills. However, for the purposes of introducing students to these 'ways of knowing' in the context of the RE curriculum, we have provided a suggested way of categorising them. As students move through the curriculum, they should be introduced to the interconnected nature of these 'ways of knowing', so that they understand that the boundaries between them are more fluid than this structure suggests.

Theology The study of things that people believe	Human / Social Sciences A range of academic disciplines that explore the ways in which people live their lives	Philosophy Interested in what we know and how we know it
Exploring where beliefs come from, how they have changed over time, how different beliefs/concepts connect to each other within an overarching worldview and how different people understand and engage with their beliefs differently. A key method used by theologians is hermeneutics (textual interpretation).	Asking questions about how people live and why they live in the ways that they do. Interested in how context affects ways of living. Key methods used by human and social scientists include surveys, interviews, ethnographic study and analysis of data .	Asking questions about how people think or reason about the world around them, and how we can know what is true or real. Key methods used by philosophers include thought experiments, debate, critical thinking and processes of reasoning .



For guidance on what it might look like for students to get better at the ways of knowing, see the disciplinary knowledge progression overview on p.11.

DEVELOPING PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE

It is important to think about how the subject content and the case studies used to exemplify and explore that content might resonate with students' own lived experiences. Making explicit these points of resonance will support them to become more critically aware of their own worldview. Over time, students should become increasingly confident and independent in using the various ways of knowing to engage critically with their personal knowledge.



16th Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama

(Christian Worldviews)

This case study explores Christian perspectives on what it means to be human and how this relates to questions of diversity and justice.



<https://itoldya420.getarchive.net/amp/media/sixteenth-street-baptist-church-birmingham-alabama-1>

INTRODUCTION

This case study enables students to explore different Christian perspectives on what it means to be human by interpreting a range of sources of authority. Through analysing the case study, students engage with the ways in which context can influence a religious worldview. They also use the case study as a lens through which to address moral questions about right, wrong, justice and injustice.

It provides foundations for **AQA GCSE Christian Beliefs and Practices, Theme E (Religion, Crime and Punishment) and Theme F (Religion, Human Rights and Social Justice)**.



CURRICULUM DESIGN

This case study would connect with other opportunities to engage with religious and non-religious beliefs about what it means to be human and with opportunities to explore questions of **values and morality**. It would also align with other opportunities to engage with learning about **power, authority** and the ways in which **context** might influence this.

See the worldview concept progression overview on p.10 for guidance on what it might look like for students to get better at understanding these concepts.

HOW TO USE THIS CASE STUDY

<p><u>What</u> do we want students to know?</p> <p><i>Substantive Knowledge</i></p>	<p><u>How</u> do we want students to know?</p> <p><i>Disciplinary Knowledge</i></p>	<p><u>How</u> might this resonate with students?</p> <p><i>Personal Knowledge</i></p>
<p>Christian sources of authority contain teachings about what it means to be human and about justice and injustice</p> <p>People who belong to Christian worldviews can experience and perpetuate injustice</p> <p>The ways in which people reason about 'right' and 'wrong' can be influenced by context</p>	<p>We can better understand worldviews by reading, interpreting and asking questions about key sources of authority</p> <p>We can better understand worldviews by analysing historical case studies to find out how context affects ways of living</p> <p>We can better understand worldviews by noticing and asking questions about how people reason about right and wrong</p>	<p>Lived experiences of fair and unfair</p> <p>Lived experiences of discrimination</p> <p>Lived experience of addressing questions of right and wrong</p>

16th Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama (Christian Worldviews)

From the late nineteenth century, the United States of America was a nation with laws mandating racial segregation. This situation evolved following the abolition of slavery in 1865, an amendment to the Constitution that by no means ensured equality - or even equity - between white and black people in the US. African Americans regularly experienced discrimination, including acts of violence. The 1960s saw the growing power of the Civil Rights Movement, which campaigned for an end to discrimination and violence against African Americans, and for the equal rights of all Americans. Key figures in this movement included Revd Dr Martin Luther King Jnr, Ralph Abernathy and Ella Baker.

In September 1963, four white Protestant Christian extremists belonging to the Ku Klux Klan planted a bomb at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. When the bomb detonated at 10.24am on Sunday September 15th, four girls, 14-year-olds Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, and 11-year-old Cynthia Wesley, were killed and twenty others were injured, including Addie's sister. There was significant damage to the church building, including its stained-glass windows. This black-majority church was a key civil rights meeting place and had been the target of a number of bomb threats.

The bombing outraged many in America. Revd Dr Martin Luther King Jnr contacted Alabama Governor and prominent segregationist, George Wallace, saying, "The blood of our little children is on your hands." It also made international news. In Llansteffan, Wales, a stained-glass artist called John Petts heard the news on the radio. He later said that it left him sick at heart: "I was horrified by the death of the children; as an artist-craftsman, hearing that the stained-glass windows of the church had been destroyed... I thought to myself... what can we do about this?... Could not some of us... join together in a positive gesture of Christian sympathy in the face of destructive evil, and, as a token, put back at least one of those windows." He contacted the editor of the Western Mail and the next day the newspaper launched an appeal to raise enough money to replace one stained glass window. Donations were capped at half a crown (12.5p) per person so that the gift came from the Welsh people to the community in Birmingham, Alabama. A telegram was sent to Revd John Cross, the minister of the 16th Street Baptist Church, offering to replace a window. He responded accepting the offer, stating that "Wales was the only country to offer such direct and material assistance". John Petts thought carefully about the design, seeking something that would speak into Christian beliefs about what it means to be human and that would reflect the lived reality for this church community. The final design shows Christ as a black man being crucified. One arm is stretched out pushing against discrimination and injustice; the other is reaching out, seeking reconciliation and peace. Below the image are the words, 'you do it to me', a reflection of [Matthew 25:40](#).



SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Interpret and ask questions about key Christian sources of authority to better understand Christian perspectives on what it means to be human (see [here](#) p.11 for a bank of possible questions). Apply this to the case study, analysing the ways in which various Christians within the case study live out or do not live out these key beliefs and teachings. Consider how they may have explained or justified their actions in relation to their beliefs. Explore the implications of this for the power and authority of these beliefs and teachings.

Example Questions

Where would I find this text?

Who is this text important to?

What does this text say? What does this tell me about Christian beliefs about human beings and social justice?

Does everyone read these texts in the same way? Does everyone draw the same meaning from these texts?

How do we know?

How might a person's context influence how they draw meaning from this text?

Does it matter if different people interpret sources of authority differently? Why / why not?

Examples of Christian sources of authority:

[Genesis 1:26-27](#)

[Job 12:13-22](#)

[Amos 5:24](#)

[Mark 12:30-31](#)

[Matthew 25:31-40](#)

[Ephesians 6:5](#)

[Galatians 3:28](#)

Revd Dr Martin Luther King, Jr, [Letter from a Birmingham Jail](#) (April 1963)

Lauren W. Reliford, [The Liberating Theology that Transformed my Understanding of God](#) (Sojourners, 2023)



Analyse a range of information about the historical context relevant to the case study in both the US and the UK. Ask questions about how this context shaped the experiences of white and global majority heritage Christians. Compare this with the lived experiences of Christians today, using a range of data.

Example Questions

Where is this information from?

What does this information tell us about the global diversity of Christian worldviews?

How does this information help us understand the ways in which **context** affects ways of living out Christian worldviews?

How does this information help us understand the role of **power** in Christian worldviews?

How reliable is this information? How do we know?

Examples of Contextual Information and Data

ABC News, [The Civil Rights Era in Photos](#)

Google Arts and Culture, [Photos from the Civil Rights Movement](#)

BBC Bitesize, [The Origins of the US Civil Rights Movement](#)

National Park Service, [The 16th Street Baptist Church Bombing \(1963\)](#)

Pew Research Center, [How US Religious Composition has Changed in Recent Decades](#)

Carl Marzali, [Study Links Religious Groups and Racial Bias](#) (USC Today, 2010)

Our Migration Story, [20th and 21st Century Migrations](#)

Syracuse University (London), [British Black History Timeline](#)

Revd Israel Oluwole Olofinjana, [Black Majority Churches](#) (Open University)

The National Portrait Gallery, [British Civil Rights: Intersectional Struggles \(1950s - 1970s\)](#)



SUGGESTED ACTIVITES

Using the case study as a foundation, analyse and evaluate different arguments about how power and authority might influence someone's perspective on right and wrong. Consider different Christian perspectives on what it means to be human; explore how Christians justify their positions and consider the strengths and weaknesses of their processes of reasoning.

Support students to identify processes of reasoning and construct their own reasoned responses.

Example Questions

Should we judge people's actions based on their historical context or are some things always wrong?

Does great power come with great responsibility?

What do some Christians believe the teachings of Jesus suggest about the rights and wrongs of disrupting power?

Examples of Philosophical Thinking

Once Upon a Picture, [The Thinking Collection](#)

The Philosophy Man, [P4C Resources](#)

[Philosophy 4 Children \(P4C\) / Thoughtful](#)

Will Ord, [The Good Reasoning Tree](#)

Joe Kinnaird, [Teach them to Write like a Philosopher](#)



Support students to notice their own personal responses to the case study: encourage them to analyse these responses and consider how they might be related to personal lived experience or to previous learning and encounter. Support them to reflect on how personal worldviews might have influenced these responses. Students may not be consciously aware of their personal worldview: use this opportunity to help them become more consciously aware.

Be aware that for some students, this case study may resonate negatively with personal lived experiences of prejudice, discrimination and misuse of power - ensure that psychologically safe spaces are created to enable students to explore how their personal worldview influences their response to the case study and subject content.

Examples of Resources

Martha Shaw and Katie Freeman, [What Do We Really Mean by 'Personal Knowledge'?](#)

Faith and Belief Forum, [Skills for Dialogue](#)

[What is Psychological Safety and Why is it Important?](#)

[Psychological Safety Toolkit](#) (Diverse Educators)



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND EXAMPLES

[Visit of the first black Welsh minister to Birmingham, Alabama, for the 60th anniversary of the bombing](#)

[The Wales Window in the 16th Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama](#)

[The National Park Service, The 16th Street Baptist Church, Birmingham Alabama](#)

[Gordon Conwell, The World as 100 Christians](#)

[Gordon Conwell, Global Christianity](#)

[African Christianity in Ethiopia](#)

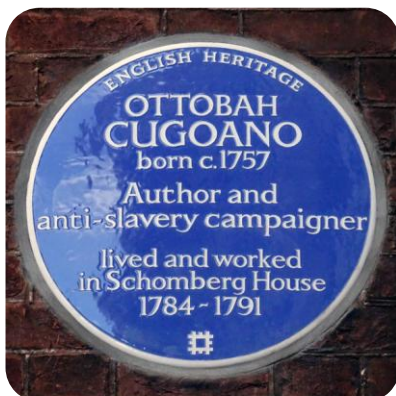
[African Christianity Thrived, Long Before White Men Arrived](#)

[Census 2021 and Black British Christians](#)

[Black Majority Churches \(BMCs\) and the Transformation of British Christianity](#)

KEY VOCABULARY

Discrimination
Equality
Equity
Imago Dei
Injustice
Justice
Racism
Reconciliation
Segregation



[Quobna Ottobah Cugoano](#) was trafficked at the age of 13 to work on a plantation in Grenada. He gained his freedom in England in 1772 and wrote about his experiences. He was baptised at St James's Church, Piccadilly in 1773.



Born into slavery in 1797, Isabella Baumfree, who later changed her name to [Sojourner Truth](#), became a powerful advocate for human rights. She became a Christian preacher, rooting her advocacy work in her Christian beliefs.



In 2021, the Archbishops' anti-racism taskforce published [From Lament to Action](#), its report into institutional racism within the Church of England. It made a range of different recommendations to address this.

RELIGION AND WORLDVIEWS CONCEPTS PROGRESSION

For more information on assessment and RE see [here](#) and [here](#).

	Progression Step 1	Progression Step 2	Progression Step 3	Progression Step 4
Context	Notice that some ways of living are similar and some are different; notice that not everyone is the same	Identify different ways of expressing beliefs and ways of living from a diverse range of contexts	Explore ways in which personal context influences ways of believing, living and thinking; explain the impact this has on people's worldviews	Analyse the difference context makes to a person's worldview; articulate why it is important to understand more about context in order to understand people's worldviews
Identity and Belonging	Notice that some things in their homes and daily lives are similar and different to other people's homes and daily lives; notice that our homes and daily lives can contribute to our sense of belonging	Recognise that some people belong to 'organised worldviews' and describe how these contribute to a sense of identity and belonging	Explore ways in which religious and non-religious worldviews contribute to a person's sense of identity and belonging; explain how this helps us understand the lived reality of worldviews	Analyse ways in which being part of a religious or non-religious worldview can present benefits and challenges to a person's sense of identity and belonging
Meaning and Purpose	Notice that special stories can help us learn more about worldviews; read and explore special stories to find out more about people's worldviews	Recognise that a worldview provides possible answers to some big questions about God, the universe and human beings; these can be known as 'beliefs'	Explore different ways in which people respond to questions of meaning and purpose, including from organised and individual worldviews; express their own ideas about these questions and say where these ideas come from	Analyse ways in which context might influence a person or community's response to questions of meaning and purpose, including their own responses; connect this with questions about ways in which worldviews change and stay the same over time
Power and Authority	Notice that there are people who look after us and try to keep us safe, but that our voices matter too	Recognise that organised worldviews have the power to influence communities and societies; explore different sources of authority for people	Explore different ways in which people interpret their sources of authority; identify which voices in worldviews have more or less power and influence and explain why this matters	Analyse some reasons why different people interpret their sources of authority differently; ask questions about how worldviews influence and are influenced by wider society and connect this with the concept of power
Values and Morality	Notice that the words we say and the actions we carry out can affect the people around us; understand that there are some rules / guidelines we follow to help us live well together	Recognise that worldviews can shape a person's understanding of 'right', 'wrong', 'good' and 'bad'; engage with some stories and lived examples from worldviews that explore these terms	Explore different ways in which people reason about 'right', 'wrong', 'good' and 'bad' within and between worldviews; explain similarities and differences in people's responses to these terms	Analyse ways in which a person's worldview might influence their values and morality; explain ways in which context might contribute to this

DISCIPLINARY KNOWLEDGE PROGRESSION

For more information on assessment and RE see [here](#) and [here](#).

	Progression Step 1	Progression Step 2	Progression Step 3	Progression Step 4
Theology	<p>Stories, texts and sources of authority are carriers of meaning about beliefs and values; understanding this can help us better understand someone’s worldview</p> <p>There are questions we can ask that help us understand that some stories, texts and sources of authority are important to a group or individual</p>	<p>Stories, texts and sources of authority can contain ‘hidden meanings’ (the meaning within); understanding this can help us better understand someone’s worldview</p> <p>There are questions we can ask that help us understand the meaning and significance of particular stories, texts and sources of authority</p>	<p>Stories, texts and sources of authority are shaped by context (what sits behind); understanding this can help us better understand someone’s worldview</p> <p>There are questions we can ask that help us understand the context of important stories, texts and sources of authority and the ways in which this might affect its meaning</p>	<p>Stories, texts and sources of authority are interpreted by readers who are influenced by their own context (what sits in front); understanding this can help us better understand someone’s worldview</p> <p>There are questions we can ask that help us understand how a reader’s or interpreter’s worldview influences the meaning they draw from a story, text or source of authority</p>
Human / Social Sciences	<p>There is information that can tell us how people live, which helps us better understand their worldview, including objects, places, photographs, videos, surveys, case studies, etc.</p> <p>There are questions we can ask when looking at objects, places, photographs, videos, surveys, case studies, etc., that help us understand how people live</p>	<p>The way in which people live is affected by context, including time, place, culture, gender, etc.; knowing about this can help us better understand their worldview</p> <p>There are questions we can ask that help us understand how context, including time, place, culture, gender, etc., affects the way in which people live</p>	<p>When we are trying to understand a worldview, it is important to consider the origin of sources of information about how people live</p> <p>There are questions we can ask that help us identify the origin of sources of information about how people live</p>	<p>When we are trying to understand a worldview, it is important to consider how our own worldviews might shape the way we interpret information about how people live</p> <p>There are questions we can ask that help us understand how our own worldviews might shape the way we interpret information about how people live</p>
Philosophy	<p>Humans think or reason about themselves, others and the world around them, including their understanding of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ or ‘right’ and ‘wrong’; understanding how they do this can help us better understand their worldview</p> <p>There are questions we can ask that help us understand more about how humans think or reason about themselves, others and the world around them, including their understanding of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ or ‘right’ and ‘wrong’</p>	<p>Different people might think or reason about themselves, others and the world in different ways, including their understanding of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ or ‘right’ and ‘wrong’; understanding more about this can help us better understand different worldviews</p> <p>There are questions we can ask that help us understand the different ways in which people might think or reason about themselves, others and the world in different ways, including their understanding of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ or ‘right’ and ‘wrong’</p>	<p>When we are trying to understand a worldview, it is important to consider whether our own and others’ processes of reasoning about human beings, the world and morality/ethics are reliable</p> <p>There are questions we can ask that help us understand whether our own and others’ processes of reasoning about human beings, the world and morality/ethics are reliable</p>	<p>It is important to consider how different people (including ourselves) articulate their understanding of ‘validity’; this can help us better understand their worldview</p> <p>There are questions we can ask that help us understand the importance of considering how different people (including ourselves) articulate their understanding of ‘validity’</p>

