

Power of Story: Book Recommendations

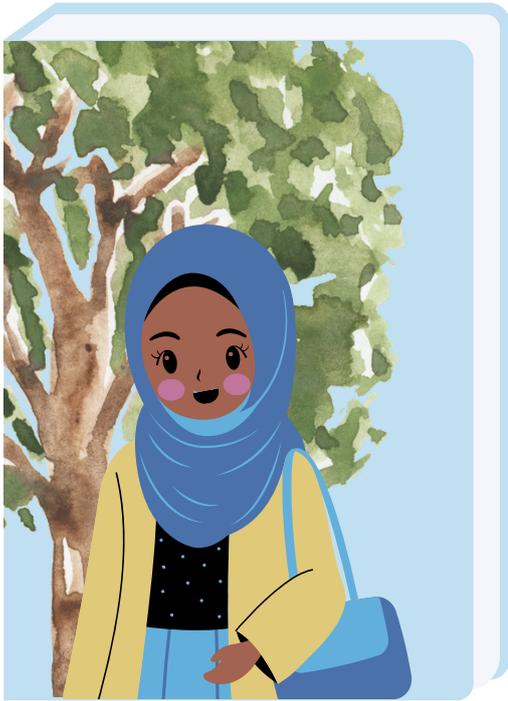
Stories sit at the very heart of Religious Education. Across religions and worldviews, stories are used to explore meaning, identity, belief and belonging. They help pupils encounter ideas that might otherwise feel distant or abstract, grounding theology, philosophy and ethics in human experience. Through story, children and young people meet characters who wrestle with big questions, make moral choices, express faith, doubt or hope, and live out their beliefs in everyday contexts. In RE, stories do not simply illustrate ideas; they invite pupils into deeper understanding by connecting head and heart. Using story in RE/RME/RVE also supports pupils to see religions and worldviews as lived and dynamic rather than static sets of facts. Well-chosen texts can develop empathy, challenge stereotypes and open up respectful dialogue, allowing pupils to encounter diversity within and between traditions. During our Power of Story focus week, and as part of World Book Day, this collection (which can only ever be partial) celebrates the rich role that stories play in RE classrooms; from picture books to novels, from sacred narratives to contemporary voices. Each recommendation reflects the power of story to engage learners, deepen thinking and support meaningful encounters with religion and worldviews.

We asked teachers on our Leadership Scholarship programme, Doctoral Scholarship programme, Masters Scholarship Programme and our Education and Programmes manager for recommendations of 'powerful' story books that they have used in the classroom*.

Other excellent book lists are available. We particularly recommend The National Association of Teachers RE (NATRE) ['Wider reading in RE'](#) document.

**The list could have been so much longer but we had to stop somewhere I have far more on my shelf!*
Fiona

Our most recommended book



The Proudest Blue Ibtihaj Muhammad

Recommended by: Maryam Bham, Aimee Tinkler, Catriona Card, Fiona Greening

"I use it in primary RE to explore identity, belonging and religious expression, especially within units on Islam and lived faith." Maryam Bham

"I used it to explore identity, belonging and lived experiences because it is an accessible way for pupils to understand how worldview and practice shape a person's sense of self." Aimee Tinkler

"The other clever thing about it is that I can use it because my children see themselves in the little sister and KS2 can use it and link to the older sister." Catriona Card

"I used this in my primary school for a whole school project. The author's notes were very helpful in giving details of Ibtihaj's personal viewpoint too. The book was a stimulus for discussing what it means to belong to a faith community in Britain today. The classes discussed at different levels and produced art and written work for a whole school display on the feelings and attitudes in the story and also on their own feelings of belonging." Fiona Greening

Content: A lovely picture book about a girl whose sister wears hijab for the first time at school. Ibtihaj Muhammad is a fencer and first Muslim American woman in hijab to compete for the United States in the Olympic Games. This is a fictional book about two sisters taking pride in hijab and focuses on celebrating parts of ourselves that make us appear different.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Identity, lived faith, Islam, identity and belonging

EYFS/3-5-year-olds

The Baby Birds
Gill Vaisey

Recommended by: Sally Brooman



"We use it in EYFS and the children love retelling the story with the puppets. Pupils get so much out of it. We introduce it as the favourite book of our Muslim persona doll and they tell her their favourite stories too."

Content: This book retells a story of the Prophet Muhammad with his friends coming across some baby birds and reuniting them with their mother. The Prophet reminds his friends to care for all living things.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Belonging, care, lived religion: understanding the world: people, culture and communities

Big Ideas for Little Philosophers
Duane Armitage & Maureen McQuerry

Recommended by: Fiona Moss



"A way of bringing big thinkers and big thinkers into your classroom with 4-7 year olds."

Content: A series of simple and engaging board books exploring key philosophical concepts such as Love, Truth, Equality and Happiness drawing on the ideas of philosophers such as Plato, Socrates, Simone De Beauvoir and Aristotle.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Philosophy, love, truth, equality and happiness

Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge
Mem Fox

Recommended by: Catriona Card



"I use it to introduce the ideas of objects being used to help us remember times, places and peoples linking to 'special things'."

Content: A little boy lives next door to an old people's home and learns about memories.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Remembering, love, community and belonging

KS1/5-7-year-olds

Josey Johnson's Hair and the Holy Spirit
Esau McCualley

Recommended by: Amy Clarke



"I have used this with 5-7's and with 7-11's too. It is about celebrating differences and Christian beliefs about Gods creative designs as part of Gods plan for humanity."

Content: Josey learns about why people are different whilst preparing for Pentecost. She learns about the differences around her.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Diversity, pentecost, belonging, Christianity: useful with 'Understanding Christianity' Kingdom of God unit

The Hanukkah Mice
Steven Kroll

Recommended by: Fiona Moss



"I love using this with children to explore each night of Hannukah and some of the practices of this festival."

Content: As Rachel receives her Hanukkah gifts the mice look on and show us how food candles and remembering are important.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Hanukkah, Judaism, belonging, festival

KS1-KS2/5-11-year-olds

Ganesha's Sweet Tooth
Sanjay Patel & Emily Haynes

Recommended by: Fiona Moss



"This Pixar animator brings all his skills in the story of Ganesha, great to explore the story and iconography. I also love his 'Little book of Hindu Deities.'"

Content: A picture book adaptation of how Ganesha came to write the epic and important poem from Hindu literature, the Mahabharata.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Hindu Dharma, deities, story

Gospel's Story
Gary M. Best

Recommended by: Rebekah Guy



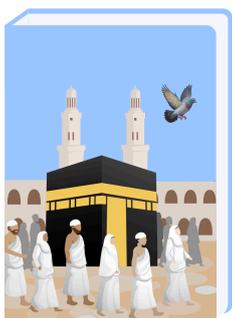
"I use this to explore John Wesley as an inspirational person as well as looking at different churches and Christian practices in the local area."

Content: Written from the point of view of Gospel, John Wesley's horse, this story explores some of John Wesley's journeys around the UK.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Christianity, breadth of Christianity, inspirational figures

Two Pigeons on a Pilgrimage: A Hajj Story
Rabia Bashir

Recommended by: Fiona Moss



"Whilst I'm not sure about the pigeons, the children love them. I love the accurate detail of the Hajj for children but also the glossary, diagram and maps for teachers and children."

Content: A picture book adaptation of Hajj as a bird's eye view.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Islam, pilgrimage, Hajj, festival

The Proudest Blue Ibtihaj Muhammad

Recommended by: Maryam Bham, Aimee Tinkler, Catriona Card, Fiona Greening, Fiona Moss



"I used it to explore identity, belonging and lived experiences because it is an accessible way for pupils to understand how worldview and practice shape a person's sense of self."

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Key themes/Curriculum links: Identity, lived faith, Islam, identity and belonging

The Tale of Three Trees

A traditional folktale retold by Angela Elwell Hunt

Recommended by: Sarah Dennis



"I Love this book. I use this across all years of the primary school to link Jesus' life together. It puts the 'Big Story' into context."

Content: The Tale of Three Trees is a traditional folktale about three trees that dream of greatness but are disappointed when they are cut down for humble uses. However, their dreams are more than fulfilled as each plays a vital role in the life of Jesus; becoming his manger, his fishing boat, and eventually his cross.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Christianity, Incarnation, Salvation

The Believing and Belonging Series

Gill Vaisey

Recommended by: Paul Marvin



"Great examples of lived experience although important not to use these as your only examples."

Content: This series of books explore the real lives of eight children each from a different religion or worldview. reflects the lived experience of individuals and communities and aims to inform, inspire, engage and excite children, teachers, and everyone interested in understanding and respecting diversity of religion and worldviews.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Lived worldviews, belonging, belief

KS2/7-11-year-olds

Our Very Greek Easter

Kassi Psifogeorgou

Recommended by: Sally Brooman



"We use this in our year 3 and 4 Easter unit."

Content: Tom and his family are flying to Greece for Easter, ready to visit their family. Tom writes letters to his friend and tells him about the customs and food of Greek Orthodox Easter from Lazarus Saturday to the joyous Easter Sunday feast.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Christian worldviews, Easter, Diversity of Christian worldviews

The Adventures of Odysseus
Hugh Lupton, Daniel Morden, Christina Bali

Recommended by: John Semmens



*"We look at the actions of the hero to see how he behaves and think about whether his actions would have been judged differently by ancient audiences. I also use it to link back to the Trolley Problem with the scene where the hero must choose between Scylla the dragon, which will kill 6 of his men, and Charybdis the whirlpool, which will kill them all. So there's the idea that actions might be understood differently by different people *and* the idea of universal perennial problems."*

Content: Odysseus fights to find his way back home after the long and brutal Trojan War, he has to endure harrowing ordeals and adventures.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Philosophy, ethics

The Breadwinner
A traditional folktale retold by Angela Elwell Hunt
Recommended by: Alex Brown, Elaine Arundell



"We read Breadwinner in reading with 8-9 year olds and I can link this to social justice and caring for community - how people of faith(s) work together and support others in need. We can discuss 'our daily bread' and the different needs people have, and the spiritual and moral responsibility of looking after others."
"The Race and Education Film Club, covered the film [Saima Saleh wrote this up](#). I wrote a short piece about 'Bacha Posh' (a particular gender expression that occurs within Afghanistan, owing to women/ girls not being financial independent) - linking it to my own experiences."

Content: A girl's life under the Taliban rule. Parvana has to pretend to be a boy to save her family under the brutality of the Taliban.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Social justice, poverty, responsibility, justice and compassion.
GCSE / A level / Higher links: AQA themed paper 'Relationship and Families'

The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe
C.S. Lewis

Recommended by: John Semmens



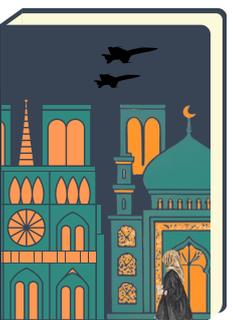
"This allegory of Christianity blends with mythology and it really brings the children into the book. There is so much that you can do in RE with Aslan dying as an instant sacrifice for a 'sinner' and then Aslan comes back to life-there are so many layers to it. It gives children a chance to access deep theological ideas using language that is accessible to children."

Content: Four siblings discover a magical land called Narnia through an enchanted wardrobe and must join forces with the noble lion Aslan to defeat the evil White Witch.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Sacrifice, redemption, and the battle between good and evil

Safiyyah's War
Hiba Noor Khan

Recommended by: Chris Mooney



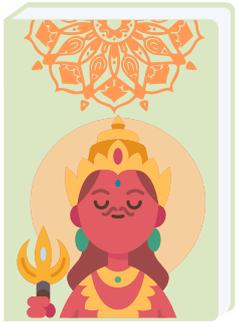
"This is a book I traditionally recommend to Year 5 and 6 students who want to broaden and deepen their understanding of worldviews across history. It's poignant, reflective and insightful."

Content: Safiyyah's War is a brilliant story centred on the story of a family in Paris during World War 2. The family live in a mosque and in their own different ways are providing support to the community around them.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Faith, courage, moral choices, worldviews across history

The Vedas and Upanishads for Children
Roopa Pai

Recommended by: Fiona Moss and Jake Womack



"I love these well told stories from Hindu sacred text, which are great to read as stories and use in RE lessons. Great for teacher subject knowledge. There is also a Gita for Children by the same author."

Content: This book explores ancient Indian wisdom making it both accessible and engaging. The book explores the oldest scriptures and their deep ideas about the universe and the self.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Hindu Dharma, sacred text

Planet Omar: A Series of Books
Zanib Mian

Recommended by: Fiona Moss



"Ideal for your classroom bookshelf. I love the graphic novel style illustrations that illustrate the book and teach us more about Islam."

Content: Omar and his family, who are Muslim, live their lives and through that we learn about beliefs, practice, dress and the joy and sometimes difficulties of being a Muslim in a British Primary School.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Islam, prayer, festival

KS2/7-11-year-olds and KS3/11-14-year-olds

Amazing Muslims who changed the World
Burhana Islam

Recommended by: Lyndsey Leech



"We use this to challenge misconceptions about Islam and encourage further study."

Content: A collection of 30 short biographies which highlight influential Muslim figures who are both contemporary and historical.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Islam, inspirational people

Muhammad
Demi

Recommended by: Miriam Hicklin



"Muhammad by Demi is a beautifully illustrated and thorough account of the Prophet's life. I've used it across the secondary curriculum to introduce the Sirah, and at A Level we've used the artwork to discuss debates around anthropomorphism in Islam and the Persian spiritual art traditions. It uses Martin Lings' Muhammad as its primary source which my A Level students also use!"

Content: The award-winning artist Demi here introduces the remarkable life of the Prophet Muhammad for young readers.

Themes/Curriculum links: Islam
GCSE / A level / Higher links: The Sirah

Once Upon an Eid
S.K.Ali and Aisha Saeed

Recommended by: Louisa Jane Smith



"I love the authentic voices and lived worldviews- great to use at Ramadan and Eid."

Content: Voices of 15 Muslim women and their experience of hope and joy. Fifteen short stories from food to prayers to new clothes for Eid and the power of family and community.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Celebration, community, Islam, festival, Eid

Refuge
Anne Booth and Sam Usher

Recommended by: Beth Blizzard



"As part of a scheme of learning in Year 7 focused on developing empathy through the study of historical and contemporary migration, this book places the concept of refuge in a context that feels familiar and accessible to students."

Content: This picture book is a moving retelling of the Nativity story from the unique perspective of the donkey, who witnesses Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus as they flee to Egypt in search of safety.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Nativity, Christianity, migration

KS3/11-14-year-olds

Ghost Centurion
Ronnie Evans

Recommended by: Lyndsey Leech



"We use novels with older years to get them to consider different perspectives. A great one for looking at the crucifixion and seeing if students can pick out the other biblical events woven in."

Content: The novel follows Marcus, a Roman centurion cursed with immortality and pursued by a demon, who must hide the dark secret that he was the one who killed Christ.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Christianity, existence of God, Revelation, atonement, redemption

GCSE / A level / Higher links: Problem of evil

Investigate! Religions : The Jewish, Christian and Muslim Faiths
Sophie De Mullenheim

Recommended by: Maddy Oakes



'We use this within our year 7 Prophethood unit which links nicely to an Oak academy unit. It displays factual information in an engaging and accessible way for young learners to see the connections between the Abrahamic faiths.'

Content: A non-fiction book that explains the beliefs and practices of Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

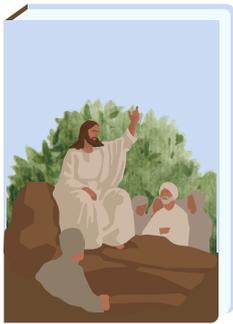
Key themes/Curriculum links: Islam and Christianity: prophethood

GCSE/A level/Higher links: GCSE Islam and Christianity: revelation and prophethood

The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History

Michael H. Hart

Recommended by: Kuljinder Shokar



"In year 9 we have a unit of work about influencers titled 'the REal influencers'. We use Michael Hart's book and then focus on each founders or significant people from different religions."

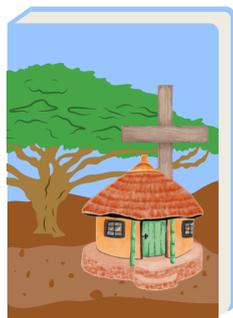
Content: A list, not without controversy, of information about the world's most influential religious and political leaders as well as inventors, writer and philosophers.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Belonging, care, lived religion: understanding the world: people, culture and communities

Things Fall Apart

Chinua Achebe

Recommended by: Damian Sherriff



"In a Year 9 unit on African religion, we use the chapter with the story of the Christian missionaries visiting the village in Umofia. It helps to answer the question of what happened to indigenous African religion rather well. The portrayal of the missionaries is also striking and interesting for students."

Content: Okonkwo is the greatest warrior alive, when he accidentally kills a clansman, things begin to fall apart. He returns from exile to find missionaries and colonial governors have arrived in the village.

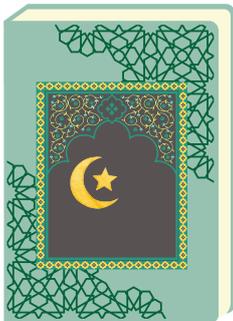
Key themes/Curriculum links: Religion, colonialism, worldview conflict, Indigenous religion and change

GCSE/A level/Higher links: GCSE Religion and Society: religion, power and culture

The House of Islam

Ed Hussain

Recommended by: Lewis Jones



"I use extracts from this in a Year 7 unit on social sciences on how Islam is practiced in the UK, helping to counter misconceptions."

Content: A controversial book to some. An insider's exploration of the spiritual depth, history, and modern diversity of the Muslim world, designed to bridge the gap between Islamic traditions and the West.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Islam, diversity of Islam

KS4/14-16-year-olds

Sophie's World

Jostein Gaarder

Recommended by: Greg Parekh



"I often use the rabbit-in-the-top-hat analogy from the opening chapters when we're talking about creation: the universe as this enormous magic trick, and humans as the curious creatures climbing up the rabbit's fur trying to figure out how on earth we got here. I find it gets students thinking about awe, wonder, and the big questions about explanations of the world."

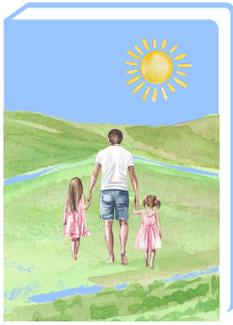
Content: Sophie, who is fourteen comes across a mentor who introduces her to philosophy. Alongside this there are mysteries in Sophie's life and she uses her new understanding of philosophy to try and solves the mysteries.

Key themes/ Curriculum links: Philosophy, meaning, worldviews and philosophy
GCSE/A level/Higher links: GCSE Philosophy: Ultimate questions

The Philosophers' Daughters

Peter Vardy

Recommended by: Mary Lou Bryne



"It includes curious questions that his daughters have asked and then specialists from many different fields offer their response to them. The questions include topics such as the Big Bang, the use of animals for food, and plenty of other thought-provoking questions that are discussed and raised in the RE classroom. It fits with many aspects of our curriculum."

Content: The philosopher Peter Vardy has collected together a series of questions asked by his daughters and answers them. He also includes answers from other theologians and philosophers.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Love, morality, faith, ethics, philosophy, science and religion

GCSE/A level/Higher links: The existence of God, The Problem of Evil, ethical theory, applied ethics, religious experience and language

A Level/16-18 year olds

The Unbearable Lightness of Being

Milan Kundera

Recommended by: Fran Bailey



"This is great in discussing ethics with post 16 students."

Content: The novel focuses on Tomas, a surgeon and serial adulterer who embraces 'lightness' A real page turner.

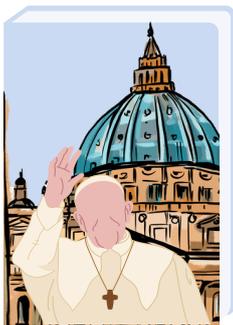
Key themes/Curriculum links: Ethics, freedom, identity, A Level Ethics and Philosophy

GCSE/A level/Higher links: A Level Ethics: Existentialism and moral freedom

Conclave

Robert Harris

Recommended by: Fran Bailey



"A great post 16 novel which is a great way to discuss power and authority in the church. A real page turner."

Content: In this novel, the Pope is dead and the Cardinals are gathering to elect his successor. Also a beautiful film

Key themes/Curriculum links: Power, authority, leadership, A Level Christianity

GCSE/A level/Higher links: A Level Christianity: Church authority and governance

Silence

Shūsaku Endō

Recommended by: John Dunlop



"I have used this in a cross-curricular project between Religious Education and Advanced Higher English. It is set in 17th Century Japan and follows the story of a young priest who travels in search of his mentor during a time of religious persecution. It explores themes of faith, doubt and suffering."

Content: The writer is a Japanese Catholic and tells the story of seventeenth century missionaries coming to support the oppressed Japanese Christian community.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Faith, doubt, persecution, Advanced Higher / A Level Christianity

GCSE/A level/Higher links: Problem of evil; persecution and faith

Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India
William Dalrymple

Recommended by: Fay Lowe



"Nine lives is a valuable classroom text because it combines a contextual overview of religious practices with personal real-world stories that show how these practices are lived out in everyday life."

Content: The book tells the story of nine people and their nine different lives each one taking a different religious path.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Lived religion, plurality, ethics, and belief in a contemporary global context

GCSE/A level/Higher links: Asceticism vs worldly ethics, ahimsa, religious pluralism and diversity, identity, religious experience

Religion for Atheists: A non-believers guide to the uses of religion
Alain De Botton

Recommended by: Samuel Yates



"I always recommend this book to post 16 students. A nice introduction to exploring non-religion outside of atheism'. I also use excerpts with GCSE groups."

Content: This book suggests that non-religious people should 'steal' good ideas from religion; from ideas on how people might live to how to arrange our societies.

Key themes/Curriculum links: Ethics without God, Humanism, ritual, community and belonging, moral formation, sacred space

GCSE/A level/Higher links: Secular worldviews, what is religion?, sources of moral authority

The books in this list are recommended by individuals who use them or have them used them in their classroom. Inclusion on this list does not mean that Culham St Gabriel's Trust endorses any of these books.