



Seeing stars in all faiths

A rural school is using a free online resource to teach children about respecting and understanding other religions and cultures, and uncovering links with maths.

Maya, a pupil at Thurlow CE Voluntary Controlled Primary School, a village school four miles from Haverhill in Suffolk, told me: 'When you grow up you will meet lots of people who are different to you. People in my class are different to me... it's not hard to like them.'

There are just 92 pupils on Thurlow's roll, aged four to 11. It is sometimes a challenge for small rural schools to give children an insight into a wide range of cultures and beliefs but Ofsted praised the school for its commitment to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Similarities and differences

This year, upper key stage 2 – a mixed year 5/6 class has used a new free resource called Interfaith Explorers. This provides materials for half a term looking at three Abrahamic faiths so that pupils see the similarities between

the different faiths and cultures of Jews, Muslims and Christians. Teachers can access digital versions of historical documents and artefacts alongside lesson plans and activities.

The resources provide some thought-provoking materials. Annette Illingworth, teacher of upper key stage 2, has tried out many of the stimulus activities. These include the 'Lemon activity' where children each choose a lemon and study it as closely as

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possible so they can find it again in a pile. They come to recognise subtle differences between objects which on the surface look identical.

R-e-s-p-e-c-t

'Brush up on respect' uses toothpaste, a lolly stick and a cut out shape of the letter R. The children have to cover the

Creative competition

- Interfaith Explorers invites schools to share what pupils have discovered and learned during their journey with this resource by sending in photographs, video, art work, a record of the final presentation and so on. Visit <http://interfaithexplorers.com/competition/submit-your-entry>. Closing date 31.07.2014
- The winners will get an artist in residence for a month to help extend ideas and work around the Interfaith theme. The Maimonides Foundation hope that the artist will help schools produce creative media that can be used to help foster understanding and respect between pupils of different faith and cultures

letter completely with the toothpaste and are told that the 'R' stands for 'Respect'. Then the teacher, using her very best acting skills, tells them that she has made a terrible mistake and that the letter R in fact stands for Rude. She asks them to uncover the letter and they have to scrape off the toothpaste and try to get it back into the tube. Of course this is an impossible task and reinforces the idea that it is very hard to take back thoughtless words or unkind actions.

This had a big impact on Nicole: 'We will be moving to a new school, meeting new people and we need to be able to understand how what we say might offend ...make someone feel uncomfortable ...and what might not.'

The challenge

Interfaith Explorers was created by Professor Nasser David Khalili who is Chairman of The Maimonides Foundation. It is backed by Unesco with education resources developed by Edison Learning Limited.

Professor Khalili is a Jew who grew up in Iran and studied in the USA and UK so he has experience of the three faiths covered. He believes that many of the problems of the world occur because people do not understand each other's culture so he has issued a challenge to children in year 6 who are on the brink of going up to secondary school. They have to find out as much as possible about 'the people who share our country' and to create a presentation to share with other pupils, parents and governors. He has also launched a competition (details left).

Mathematical thinking and religion

Interfaith Explorers is a useful cross-curricular resource as it includes information about art, dress and music as well as sacred texts stories and key figures, places of worship, pilgrimage, prayers and the Ten Commandments.

Annette has found the materials have been fruitful sources of ideas for maths activities for key stage 2. Numbers come up again and again in religious texts. Seven is a key number in Judaism: *Shabbat* is the seventh day of the week, a bride circles the groom

seven times under the wedding canopy, seven major holidays punctuate the Jewish year and, after a death, relatives sit *shiva* for seven days. Think also of the number three with the Trinity and the Resurrection in Christianity. Class 4 at Thurlow has been exploiting this by tripling quantities or looking at increasing the size of a shape by 3mm and seeing how it affects the area.

Calendars are one of the easiest ways of bringing together mathematics, religious ideas and the seasons. The class has been investigating the date systems used in history, looking at how the moon is used in working out calendars or religious festivals.

Data handling

Religion has also been the basis for an activity on data handling. Annette's class looked at the sovereign state of Brunei on a website called Journey Mart to find out the percentage of the population that followed each religion. One of the objectives was to find ways of representing the data using charts and graphs. This involved reminding pupils that 100 per cent is a 'whole pie' and helping them to use calculators and an online protractor to work out the fractions: 67 per cent of the inhabitants are Muslim so the written form is $67/100 \times 360$.

Shape and pattern

Shape and pattern are also important to the three Abrahamic faiths. This provided a chance to talk about geometry. Annette started with a circle worksheet from Edison. Pupils talked about what they had seen and revisited key mathematical vocabulary such as multiple, repeat, radius, circumference. They built up tessellations and explored the properties of lines, circles and triangles.

The six pointed Star of David is the recognised symbol of Jewish identity, while the pentagram was representative of Christ's wounds and is often seen as a shape with magic properties. Stars and circles are especially important in Islam, most often as tile patterns. Annette has found that Interfaith Explorers provides a context for the maths and helps children to see the links between the religions as the same shapes appear

References

- <http://interfaithexplorers.com/>
- Journey Mart (<http://www.journeymart.com/de/brunei/religion.aspx>)

Resources for maths and religion

- Islam: <http://school.Maths.Uwa.Edu.Au/~adrian/islam.Html> background
www.Islamawareness.Net/maths/science_and_math.Html
www.Islamawareness.Net/maths/math.Html
- Judaism: www.Jewfaq.Org/calendar2.Htm
<http://imahd.Ca/2009/11/16/why-jews-excel-at-math/>
- Christianity: www.christianperspective.net/math/god-and-math/

in the decoration of buildings in different cultures.

Baking calculations

Towards the summer, the class researched biscuits for the Jewish festival of Purim. These were destined for an end of term event for governors so they had to work out quantities for large scale catering. They checked the cost of the basic ingredients of eggs, sugar, cooking oil, lemon, vanilla essence, baking powder and jam at Tesco, Sainsbury's and Asda. They had to decide whether it would cost less if they shopped around and bought ingredients from several different stores.

Annette found Interfaith Explorers a very fruitful source of ideas for her class and appreciated the fact that they were as relevant to her children as to those in inner city schools.

'What I like is that you don't have to search around for lots of different resources,' she said. 'You can link it to the whole curriculum but it's not a straightjacket. Some concepts are quite difficult but these activities help to make ideas more concrete and memorable.'

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