



Diversity in the National Curriculum - Religious Education

Happy Chris-nukk-eid!



No, this is not a new holiday that sees a combination of Christmas, Hanukkah, and Eid-ul-Adha (presents, chocolate coins, and pilgrimage) but a way to celebrate our differences. During this important time of the year, people of all faiths, and indeed those of no

religious belief, spend time with their families celebrating their traditions. However, when we all come together in schools or in the workplace, we can find it difficult to commemorate the holidays in a shared way. At the **Three Faiths Forum** (www.threefaithsforum.org.uk/) our answer is Chris-nukk-eid! Unfortunately you will not be



getting extra holiday time, but during Chris-nukk-eid we are rejoicing in our three holidays together—a lead up to celebrating them apart.



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The Three Faiths Forum is a charity that brings together people of different beliefs in understanding. Through our programming those with religious or non-

religious beliefs have a space to share their thoughts about faith and society, discovering the differences and similarities between faiths, and between faiths and wider society. The most important underpinning for this exchange is education. Therefore, through its educational 'Triologue' programmes, 3ff facilitates encounters with people of different faiths and engages with aspects of faith



(scriptural texts, festivals, etc.) in London schools five days a week.

The overarching reason behind 'inter faith' is to give everyone opportunities to talk about faith (their own and other people's) in their everyday lives—not to save these important discussions for religious leaders, or limit them to RE lessons. We believe that living within a multi-faith society means everyone must learn and talk about the effect faith has in and on their lives—whether they have religious or non-religious beliefs. Ignorance between communities, whether defined by religion, race, locality or outlook, is our focus, because ignorance is indiscriminate, impacting all communities. Ignorance leads to F.E.A.R—False Evidence Appearing Real—which destroys the fabric of society, pulling at its threads one strand at a time.



While running our programmes, we hear from young people and adults who fear that religion will encroach on the shared space that is the public domain. Their

reaction to this fear generates animosity towards religion in general, rather than leading them to exploring the relationship between 'faith' and secular society. 'Faith' has as much to learn from the secular world as the secular world has from faith. Contrary to popular belief, these two are not on the opposite ends of the spectrum of society, even though they are often pitted against each other. Many people of faith, as citizens of society, simply want a voice in societal discourse or a place for faith in the 'public square'. By working on sharing the 'public square' not only with other religions but with secular society, we are allowing a free-flow of information and discussion, and a celebration of who we





are—and this discussion can occur on a reciprocal and, hopefully, authentic basis.

Authenticity is key. We can only speak from our own experience. Unless requested to speak as the representative of a group, we cannot represent anybody but

ourselves. The aim is to confront stereotypes—pointing out the many intricacies that contribute to our individuality makes it more difficult for others to label us. That is why our presenters always use ‘I’ statements, speaking for themselves and not others, showing the individuality of their belief.

In dialogue, one learns by inquiry and response, by asking questions and giving answers. You can learn much about yourself by allowing others to probe your thoughts and feelings. Many participants in our programmes tell us they have a deeper understanding about their own faith, beliefs, or religious texts by explaining their views to others. But to get that deeper understanding, we must be honest without causing harm or disrespect—at 3ff we call this ‘The Art of Asking.’ It’s OK to be ignorant; all of us are ignorant about something. But when in dialogue situations, we must learn to ask questions in an informed manner.

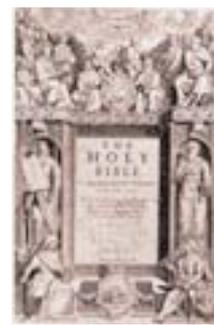


Dialogue gives people a voice. That ‘voice’ comes with a responsibility to others. A voice, if used in the wrong way, can destroy friendships and relationships, but can also heal. We must first put ourselves in the other person’s

shoes and walk around in them for a while. We must remember that the cornerstone of religion and also human rights is what some call the ‘Golden Rule’ and others call the ‘Ethic of Reciprocity’. In essence, it is an ethical code that states that one has a right to just treatment, and a responsibility to ensure justice for others. In ‘faith’ terms—‘Do not do unto others as you would not have them do unto you’.

However, as we are all different, what may be good for one person, may be bad for another. The way we learn what is right or wrong for the other

is through dialogue. From that, we can learn that we should treat others as *they* would want to be treated (Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vol. 2)—also called ‘The Platinum Rule’. The Platinum Rule asks that you try to understand the other person’s opinions and ideas, but without looking through the lens of your own point of view. This is an extremely difficult thought process to take on, so go for the Gold. Once there you can think about Platinum!



In conclusion, dialogue (or Triologue) allows people to speak their minds on a variety of issues related to faith, belief, philosophy, spirituality and their place in society. To achieve this we must listen to all groups (including religious groups, young people, people of no religious belief) without judgment,

in order to better understand our neighbours and for us to move forward together. Celebrating differences or explaining about difference and similarities, encountering others and some shared understanding is what we are after.

A good way to start your voyage into celebrating differences and doing inter faith dialogue is by running a Christnukk-eid celebration in



your school or place of work. This can be done quite easily; you’ve probably celebrated something similar before. Food brings people together, so either everyone cooks together or each faith group brings their food in so that all can share in the delight. Special efforts should be made to



make sure that all food follows dietary rules for all—or simply labelled accordingly with a vegetarian option. Each group takes turns explaining their holiday

and the food they brought. Then each group can organise an activity like a quiz, measuring knowledge of other faiths, followed by a prize or gift exchange from each culture. The possibilities are



endless, the important thing is to celebrate together, understand the things that we share, appreciate the differences, and learn a little more about one another.

So, on this occasion, let us say ‘Happy Christ-nukk-eid to everyone!’

Stephen Shashoua

Director of the Three Faiths Forum

Our staff run free programmes in London schools and can help with learning about and learning from faith and interfaith. For more information on our programmes, please visit our youth site, www.3ff.org.uk

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Additional Resources

The **Real Histories Directory** has a number of resources that might be of help to teachers wishing to introduce more diversity to their teaching of Religious Education and to further encourage their students to research more widely.

The **BBC Schools—Religious Festivals** website (www.bbc.co.uk/schools/religion/) gives information on the festivals celebrated by a number of different faiths. ISKCON Educational Services (www.iskcon.org.uk/ies/) provide information and resources on Hinduism, Vedanta and Vaishnavism. The **Jewish Education Bureau** (www.jewisheducationbureau.co.uk/) promotes the study of Judaism and has resources for classroom or individual study and the **Jewish Council for Racial Equality** (www.jcore.org.uk/) has education resources and programmes for primary and early years, secondary, youth groups and adults.

Articles of Faith (www.articlesoffaith.co.uk/) provide a range of hands-on artefacts and classroom resources for Religious Education. **The Clear Vision Trust** (www.clear-vision.org/) also has material to help with the teaching of Buddhism in the classroom. The **Islamic Foundation Online Bookshop** (www.siteberry.com/Users/IslamicFoundationStore/Products.html) provides resources with the aim of developing a better understanding of Islam among all people of the word, Muslim and non-Muslim.

The **National RE Festival Database** (www.natre.org.uk/db/) is a moderated online record of children's ideas (aged 7-18) about faith, truth and justice, peace and a perfect world based on a pupil questionnaire. At the **People of Faith** site (<http://pof.reonline.org.uk/>), you can begin to explore the rich diversity of the world's main faiths and religions from the viewpoint of individuals from each faith and religion. **Diversity and Dialogue** (www.diversityanddialogue.org.uk/) aims to build trust, address stereotypes, promote community cohesion and facilitate dialogue about controversial and timely issues between young people from diverse backgrounds throughout the UK. D&D works with young people—and their teachers and youth workers—to identify and engage with contentious and challenging subject matter of particular importance to them, in this way empowering young people to play an active role in initiating, designing and implementing programmes that contribute to building inclusive, informed and dynamic communities. **Faith to Faith** (www.dasharts.org.uk/photography.htm) is a pioneering photography project involving Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh teenagers from five London faith schools. The **St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art** (www.glasgowmuseums.com/venue/index.cfm?venueid=13) in Glasgow aims to promote understanding and respect between people of different faiths and of none. Displays occupy three floors and are divided into four exhibition areas: The Gallery of Religious Art; the Gallery of Religious Life; The Scottish Gallery; a temporary exhibition space. The Gallery of Religious Life explores the world's six main religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism. Beside the museum, you can also contemplate in Britain's first permanent Zen garden.

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The Real Histories Directory

The **Real Histories Directory** (www.realhistories.org.uk) has been created as a resource tool for teachers, parents, pupils and the wider community to support them in their teaching and learning about cultural diversity in the UK. The website helps you to locate **resources** in your and other LEAs, such as storytellers, dual language books, culturally diverse toys and relevant **events** taking place in the UK. There are also items of **news** that may be of particular interest to schools and teachers.

You can also submit resources that you would like to include in the directory free of charge by visiting the site, clicking on the 'Real Histories Directory' link, then 'Submit an entry' and following the on-screen instructions.

As well as the varied resources available, each month a new **Topic of the Month** is added with suggestions for using the Directory in the classroom and at home.

We are interested in hearing your views on our Topics and the Real Histories website. You can email comments and suggestions to: realhistories@runnymedetrust.org.