

Year 5&6 Key Stage 2



RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Resource File

Year 6 units of work - What happens when we die? - Reincarnation





Lesson 3 Reincarnation

The big picture

This lesson gives the first answer to the big question: ‘What happens when we die?’ It introduces, in a simple and broad way, the idea of reincarnation. This is probably the oldest answer to this question to be found in the world’s major faiths and is the response of Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism and most other ‘Eastern’ religions.

Reincarnation is often perceived as a very ‘attractive’ answer to those for whom it is not traditional. However, in these religions, it is seen more as a curse than a blessing. The human life is seen as a prison from which the soul or spirit is trying to be free. The human in possession of that soul has a responsibility to live in such a way as to move that soul nearer freedom, so it can take its rightful place in creation.

The lesson uses the image of a ladder to explain the concept, although there are many other possible ways of doing so. You should feel at ease to adapt the material to make it as accessible as possible to your class.

Learning objective

- To think about and reflect on the concept and nature of the human spirit or soul being reincarnated at the end of a person’s life.

Success Criteria

Learning about:

- Pupils will have a broad understanding of the term ‘reincarnation’.

Learning from:

- Pupils will have reflected on how a belief in reincarnation would affect the way a believer would think about the end of their life.

Religious Education Council Requirements

A3, B1, B3, C1, C3

Resources

- Writing and drawing materials

Vocabulary

Karma, physical, reincarnation, soul, spirit

Key questions ?

What is reincarnation?

Why might believers in reincarnation see it as a curse rather than a blessing?

Introduction

Give the class a chance to silently recall and reflect on what was talked about in the last lesson. Give them a chance, first of all in small groups and then as a class, to share any thoughts, feelings or questions they have had in the week since. Can they remember what the religious terms ‘spirit’ and ‘soul’ mean?

Share the learning objective: ‘In this lesson we are going to think about the belief that each life can lead to another.’

Activities

Stimulus

Ask the class to take out the work they did last week and look at the description they wrote of their personality. Explain that some of the oldest religions in the world, such as Hinduism or Buddhism, believe that when you die, your soul is reborn in another life. It may go to another person or an animal. The idea is that life and death are a cycle where one leads to the other. The conscious mind will not know about previous lives, but the soul will be passed along on its journey.

Tell the class that you will explain more about the journey in a moment, but for now you would like them to share in groups of two or three what they think about reincarnation, and what they would like to come back as and why.

Draw a ladder on the board and explain that you are going to use this to explain the idea of karma. You may wish to ask the class if anyone has their own explanation of karma, particularly if Eastern religions are represented.

Explain that, put simply, karma is like a measure of how healthy and happy someone's spirit or soul is. Religions that involve reincarnation teach that when the soul is first born, it is weak and stupid, fit only for the smallest animal. If this small animal does the right things these improve the karma and ensure reincarnation in a more worthy animal. This cycle continues until that soul becomes worthy of a human.

Explain how the process then starts again. As humans act in good and bad ways, so the soul has good or bad karma. The better the karma is when a soul needs a new body, the higher up the ladder, or the more worthy the human it is given to will be, and vice versa.

Response

Ask people to go back into their groups and discuss and come up with answers to the following questions, which you have put on the board:

Key questions ?

Which humans do you think are at the top of the ladder?

Which ones do you think are at the bottom?

How would this belief make you look at animals/other people?

Where do you think you are on the ladder?

What makes you think that?

If the roof fell in right now, what would your karma be like?

After time has been given to consider these issues, tell people that you would like them to draw a ladder that shows their responses to these questions with words, pictures and arrows. Make sure they know they can annotate it with other thoughts and also with further questions.

You may wish to ask people to show their thoughts using the following sentence starters:

- Reincarnation means...
- If I could come back as anything or anyone, I would be... because...
- I think I have good/bad karma because...
- Looking at reincarnation today has made me think...

Plenary

Allow people to get into pairs and friendship groups to share their ideas and experiences with each other.

Make it clear that religions with this answer to the question: 'What happens when we die?' believe that there is a 'top' of the ladder. Although they have different ways of expressing it, they all express a belief that there is a point where the karma of the soul is so good that it no longer needs to be made better and can go to live with God. Thus, reincarnation is not seen as a blessing, but as something ultimately undesirable. Is that how they have considered it today?

Draw the lesson to a conclusion by encouraging everyone to discuss the lesson when they go home and share their thoughts and their questions with their families.

Differentiation and extension

(By outcome) everyone, except those with very specific needs, should be able to participate in this lesson. Anyone who needs it should have extended opportunities to discuss the issues raised.