

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

SECONDARY



A baker's dozen of ideas for the secondary classroom

Below are 13 ideas for things to do in your secondary classroom or school in the March 2011 celebration. It might be that you only have time to do things that fit into your existing scheme of work and there are some ideas here that will add something to those; it might be that you've time to develop something extra and there are some ideas for events in the classroom, events across the RE department and ideas across the whole school. It might be that you can grasp this time to lead an RE themed topic for a week or half-term or term as part of the New Secondary Curriculum development in your school. As well as the ideas on this page, you might also consider the ideas for special educational needs and gifted and talented as whilst there is overlap, there are also ideas there you could develop.

1. Shout about it

The RE month is an ideal time to generate excellent display about RE in your school. This is something that you can challenge pupils to be involved with and look for a display space in the school atrium or hall where you can celebrate the good RE that takes place in your school. There are a number of themes on which you could develop display:

- Work in a particular topic or year group
- Work using a particular medium (writing / poetry / photography)
- A 'Why you should study RS at GCSE' display
- A 'Religion in the news' board in your classroom

Remember that display does not just have to be ink on paper. Why not do a 'vox pop' recording of

pupils in the school talking about why they like RE and make this into a short video for the entrance hall display, or an e-presentation of work as a series of slides, a display of artefacts or of pupils' model work – let your imagination fly and make a splash in a public place in your school.



2. Do something different in the school or classroom

- The RE celebration might be an opportunity to do something rather different in your RE classroom or in your school to bring RE to prominence among staff, students and the wider community. Later on are other ideas but below are just six that might do something rather special in the RE classroom for the month of March 2011.
- **Have a debate on some key issues.** The opportunity to develop debating skills can be very important for GCSE and AS/A2 as well as for younger pupils. The concept of justified, reasoned and evidenced argument is also core in the skills of the responsible citizen. So organise a classroom debate, 'hot seat', 'conscience alley' or other technique in your classroom. There are many you might choose but the best thing is to allow the students to decide on one, from a range of choices. Allow 'questions from the audience' as part of this to involve as many pupils as possible.



- **Try a community of enquiry.** This technique developed from the SAPERE [Society for Advancing Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education – www.sapere.org.uk] and P4C [Philosophy for Children – www.p4c.com] communities. There is more information online about the process but you can start with an open enquiry question or a stimulus question such as ‘Who has responsibility for caring for the earth?’, or an image of a landfill or a video clip. A good enquiry stimulus is one that leads to other questions, it is in the dialogue, listening and learning that progress takes place.
- **Do a local exploration of the effects of religion in your locality.** There are some ideas in the section (below) about visits, but another would be simply to take students for a walk around your locality, look at the buildings, the street names, the shops, what evidence is there of religion and religion’s influence in your neighbourhood – look beyond the places of worship. See www.retrails.org.uk for more ideas.
- **Have a question time panel.** Invite people from differing faith positions and then get an audience of students to ask them questions of a pertinent nature. Questions could be submitted beforehand or be a ‘surprise’ to the panel. You get to play David Dimbleby!
- **Paint a wall.** Is there a wall outside your classroom, or somewhere in the school that could do with cheering up? Why not involve the art department, or even better get a local artist with a religious bent, and paint that wall to represent the range of believers and ideas in your school? (clarify health and safety implications before going too far down the planning route for this, particularly if pupils are involved in the painting)



3. Have a competition

Young people love competitions and this is the ideal time to arrange one. Consider a range of options so that pupils with different strengths have the opportunity to participate. It would be worth considering how these might tie into your normal classroom activity as well as seeing the competition as an extra; you might have a homework task that can also be the root of a competition.



Make sure that there is a fuss about the winners and that this is recognised above and beyond the RE classroom; you might if possible present awards in a year or house assembly, or a full school one. Make sure that the parents of the winners are involved and invited into the school to meet you and the head teacher. Look for some small prizes from the school (even from your departmental budget) or from some local sponsors. Book tokens, iTunes tokens, cinema tickets and CDs are always welcome.

A few ideas to get you started:

- Design a logo for the RE department
- Hold an essay competition on a theme related to existing work (and good preparation for exams!)
- Make a stained glass window for RE
- Arrange an RE debating competition as part of a lesson
- Make a video about RE in the school or a topic in the SoW (see below)
- Make a model / artefact
- Enter the National Association of Teachers of RE’s ‘Art in Heaven’ competition (www.natre.org.uk)
- Make a page (or pages) for the school website
- Hold a ‘Who Wants to be a Millionaire?’ competition
- Devise an RE question of the day with box for answers and merits for prizes
- Design a poster set to show how RE is important in different occupations
- Compose a song about your own ideas / belief / faith

4. Make a film /music video

Young people are more and more exposed to the world of film and with the cost of equipment dropping hugely there are real opportunities here for pupils to become budding Spielbergs. Choose a topic that is pertinent to your syllabus or let the imagination run riot and make it a competition. For some more thoughts and ideas and some great tools see **True Tube** at: www.trutube.co.uk. For an example from a GCSE student see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BYiXNWFeUZE&feature=player_embedded. For more details about equipment, CPD ideas see www.mmiweb.org.uk/filmmaking/

5. Getting pupils involved

Show and Tell is something which is rare in the secondary school. So why not allocate five minutes of each lesson during the *Celebrating RE* month to a 'Show and tell' session for each year group. Some ways to consider:

- Pupils can be asked to bring in an object / artefact from home which says something about the things that they believe in or that are important to them
- They could tell a story that is important in their life or the life of their family or faith tradition
- They could give a slide show of their place of worship
- They could be asked to give a short presentation on an issue of the day that they feel strongly about



6. Develop a cross curricular theme

This RE celebration month is an ideal time to be driving for an RE themed day, week or month. What is possible depends on your situation or your school but with the developments in the New Secondary Curriculum your school you could look at imaginative ways to combine subjects focussing on cross-curricular themes or the Personal Learning and Thinking Skills. There are any number of ways you can link with other subjects either individually or severally. There is a whole bunch of ideas that can be found on the NATRE website (<http://www.natre.org.uk>); some more outlines outlines for cross-curricular themes are as follows.



- **The Environment, Stewardship and Climate Change.** This is not a topic which is going to go away and all the religions have something important to say about our relationship to the planet. The science department should have something to add about the nature of the science involved in climate change and the nature of the scientific process. Do the pupils believe that 'science will find an answer' or that we have to take the nature of stewardship more seriously? If I am to 'love my neighbour as myself' does this mean that I have to re-consider my own standards of living?
- **What makes me me?** Identity is a very personal thing and has a whole series of parts. One of these is what I believe and the religious influences in my life. Has anyone else the right to tell me what I believe is wrong? How do I deal with the challenges to my identity from the myriad of influences in modern living?
- **How do I know it's true?** Questions about truth, who is telling it and how or whether people can be sure are critical, as are understanding about the nature of truth and the different kinds of truth (scientific, mathematical, philosophical, ethical, religious, etc...). This is a great topic for a cross-curricular theme.

7. Run a sixth-form day or conference

The chances are that even if you are running a great RE A level course, there may still be pupils in your school who are not getting their statutory entitlement to RE in the sixth form. So look at running a day that your sixth-formers can get involved in; if you have an AS/A2 group then they can become the facilitators / group leaders. There are many themes which you can link this to e.g. ones which link to topics in general studies courses. If possible get external speakers and presenters to come in, including local members of faith communities (your local faith forum or SACRE may be able to help here).

Talk to the sixth-formers about topics they are interested in and look to plan a series of events for an engaging day. Some of these might include:

- What should I believe when there are so many different beliefs?
- What does stewardship mean in a capitalist society?
- Who has the right to choose in matters of life and death?
- Do rocks have rights?
- Does the right to free speech mean I can criticise others as much as I like?

8. Assemblies to celebrate RE's contribution to the life of the school

Consider using assembly time in the *Celebrating RE* month perhaps to give a flavour of the variety of faith and beliefs of those in the school (and why not have an atheist and/or humanist assembly. Link this with a programme of getting visitors in to talk about their faiths and ideas.



9. Tasty RE

Food is very important in ritual and ceremony. So you might just like to get pupils to bring in food from their own background to share with the group, or work with the food technology department or the school kitchen to develop an RE menu (or a series of menus for the month), or just have some tasty snacks out in your classroom. *(taking account of food safety requirements)* Get your pupils in Y7 or Y8 to develop a cross-religions / beliefs menu for a Celebrating RE party.

10. Getting out of there ...

Trips are always a winner with young people and when better than the RE celebration month. This could be a time to make some good links with the local faith communities. It could also be a time to arrange a joint trip with the History, Art, Music, Geography or other departments,

Your local faith forum or SACRE might be able to help with local addresses and contacts. Planning will need to include the purpose of the visit, the outcomes from the visit, and how pupils are going to collect data whilst outside the classroom (this could link to a film making project; digital voice, still and moving images recorders are very valuable on visits).

A good focus for visits is, 'Who worships or meets here and how does the building reflect the core beliefs or concepts of the religion?' One option would be to work with a place of worship to develop a leaflet for visitors designed by your pupils in conjunction with the host community.

If you really wanted to push the boat out look at planning a trip to the Holy Land, India or Egypt over the Easter break ... if you started planning now ;-)

To help plan the visit look at at <http://pow.reonline.org.uk/>



11. Run a film month

Why not run a film month with some film showings of “RE related” movies? As long as you do not charge, this should be all right to do in the hall, or the RE classroom – you might link this with the food idea and serve related snacks. Do be aware of the certification of films but some might be:

- Moses (1998) – certificate U
- Gattaca (1997) – certificate 15
- Dead Man Walking (1995) – certificate 15
- Bhaji on the Beach (1993) – certificate 15
- Creation (2009) – certificate PG
- The Golden Compass (2007) – certificate PG-13



12. Inviting people into the school

Visitors add something special to any lesson or event. A number of the ideas suggested above would benefit from visitors, for example the assemblies, the sixth form day and others. However there are many other opportunities to get visitors into the school. This could relate to a particular topic in the curriculum - what about a Hajji if you are working on Islam? Any member of a local faith community to talk about the role of faith in their lives can be great, and a panel of visitors for a question time session could be wonderful even if it takes a while to arrange.

Do be aware of the need to vet visitors, of the safe guarding policy of your school and of the experience of any visitor in working with children.



13. Do some research

This RE celebration month is a chance for you to find out more about what the pupils like (and don't like) about the topics and methodologies you use in RE. You might just want to have a questionnaire in classes or do some interviews with pupils but there is an opportunity here for getting pupils involved in doing the work. Get them to design a questionnaire or some questions and then collect the data and analyse it. This might, for example, help you decide on the topics for 2012 or for your GCSE or AS/A2 choices. It will also make the pupils feel involved in the choices that you are making.