

7 ways around Easter: A pedagogical fantasy

How do you teach? The good teacher of RE uses a wide range of pedagogical tools and learning methods to explore the RE field of enquiry, making connections between the ancient and contemporary, the personal and the critical, the enquiry and the beliefs, the religions and life. Here I offer a not - too – serious guided tour of the subject's many tools of pedagogy. The article illustrates seven approaches to teaching the festival of Easter, all with their own merits and highlights. Don't take the article too seriously!



The phenomenon of Easter

The new RE teacher Miss X noticed in her syllabus that she was to teach the ten and eleven year olds about the Festival and stories of Easter this term, the beliefs associated with the celebration, and the impact of these beliefs in the Christian community. She had just been trained by some phenomenologists, and planned two lessons on the phenomenon of Easter.

Using artefacts – a variety of crosses, some icons, some 'He is Risen' badges, and hot crossed buns, and a video of the Easter celebrations in an Orthodox and an Evangelical setting, she taught the festival, introducing pupils to its terminology and its diversity. They responded well, gathering facts and building understanding.



Learning from Easter

After two lessons, Miss X read Michael Grimmitt's seminal 1987 book on 'RE and human development'. She realised she had neglected pupils' learning from religion. She planned fresh activities: pupils were asked provocative questions. What if you were in charge of the Easter celebrations for the two churches nearest school? What music would you choose for Good Friday and Easter day, and

why? What does the idea of 'life out of death' or 'resurrection' or 'life after death' mean to you? Can you explain an occasion when hope seemed hopeless, but you held on anyway? Was that similar to or different from the Christian experience at Easter? More good work emerged, relating the festival to pupils' own experience.

Cracking Easter Concepts

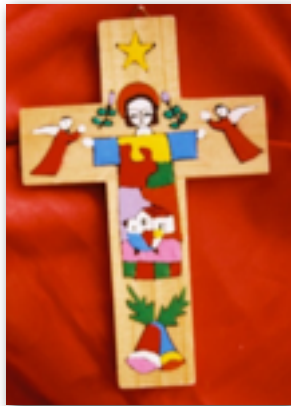
After these lessons, she went on a course with Professor Trevor Cooling, and learned about 'concept cracking'. Inspired afresh to analyse truth claims, she planned two lessons of Biblical study in which the claims of the resurrection were presented to the class. They responded to the challenge – some who thought it would be impossible discussed their view with others who thought it was best understood as a miracle. There was an exploration of the idea of miracle, and the evidence that might be used to support a claimed miracle. Children heard from a Christian visitor who talked about 'why I believe Jesus returned alive again', and asked questions about evidence, proof and truth. Christian children in the class stayed at the end, thankful for the exploration of the truth claims of their own faiths and beliefs.



Deconstructing Easter

During half term, she checked her notes from college, and remembered all about the ways in which RE can facilitate the deconstruction of religion and its narratives for post modern young people.

The next two lessons were used to dissect how the Easter festival is sometimes used to keep people in their place – a heavenly reward for a life of drudgery. The exploration of this point of view took note of the ways in which Christians maintain Easter beliefs, and the ways these beliefs are taken to pieces in contemporary Britain as well. One child asked ‘So, Miss, is religion just a way of keeping people in their place?’ She knew she was getting somewhere when a group of boys announced they didn’t believe in Easter, and wouldn’t be bothering to wait till Easter Sunday before eating all their chocolate.



notes on Handel’s ‘Hallelujah’ chorus, making sense of its origins, use today and emotive and spiritual impact within and beyond the Christian community. Lots of the children showed her their level 6 skills of interpreting. She was thrilled.

Experiencing Easter

As term wore on, Miss X was visited by the local adviser, who liked spiritual and experiential approaches to RE. She realised what was missing in the term’s lessons and used a guided fantasy based upon the appearance of Jesus to two disciples travelling to Emmaus. Pupils created works of art inspired by the fantasy on a choice of themes: ‘Back from the Dead’ or ‘My Hope for the Future’ They were wonderfully creative.

A gift to the pupil

A primary teacher lent Miss X a copy of *A Gift to the Child (Hull, Grove et al)* and she realised that reviewing all the lessons would be good. Pupils broke bread together, interrogated the artefacts for themselves, made and reflected on some palm crosses and sat still while they crystallised the learning in their own hearts and minds. Many of them agreed that even though they were neither Christian nor religious, there was a gift for them in their studies.

Interpreting Easter



There was another course – NQTs get out more than most – on interpretive approaches to RE, and Miss X was edified. She planned a couple more lessons, the first seeking a deeper and more textured look at the diversity of Easter as Christian children describe it (she used accounts from 13 year old Catholics, Methodists and Quakers, from Bristol, Birmingham and Nigeria). Then she asked pupils to write interpreter’s

Come the last day of term, the class asked ‘Please Miss, can we not do Easter next term?’

