

TEACHING THE CONCEPT OF GOD

Outline of a scheme of work for approaching the concept of God in the classroom

(cf. Chapter 7 p.118)

Aim: to help pupils forward in their thinking concerning the concept of God, and the question of whether or not God exists. No level of belief or un-belief in God is assumed; the purpose is clarification and enabling pupils to enter into the debate, at their own level, from a basis of developing knowledge and awareness of the complexity of thinking about God.

[1] Is your idea of God - whether you believe in God or not - anything like any of these?:

1. a celestial policeman;
2. an absentee landlord;
3. a magician;
4. a being greater than anything we can possibly think of;
5. an old man on a cloud;
6. light which gives life;
7. the conclusion of a mathematical theorem;
8. the chairman of a rather boring harp-playing assembly;
9. a presence who is loving and just;
10. a crutch for people who can't cope;
11. an all-powerful dictator;
12. a character in a fairy-story;
13. a power that is either evil or indifferent to suffering;
14. a heavenly Santa Claus;
15. a king who is just and holy;
16. electricity which is invisible and powerful, useful but dangerous;
17. a slot-machine whom you can approach with a coin and get out what you want;
18. the ground without which nothing in this world could exist.

[2] How we think of 'God' affects what we think about other things too, for example especially whether or not 'God' exists. Can you match any of the following statements to the images of 'God' in the list above?:

1. 'I've never seen God, nor has anyone else.'
2. 'You can't prove God exists.'
3. 'God's O.K. for little children – Christmas carols and all that.'
4. 'Talk about God makes me sick – "Thou shalt not . . ." etc.'
5. 'God's never answered *my* prayers.'
6. 'Miracles don't happen, so God doesn't exist.'
7. 'God made the world and loves everyone everywhere.'
8. 'I sure would hate to be in heaven!'
9. 'Going to church doesn't make people any better – just look at Mrs X down the road. If you want a kindness doing, don't ask her.'
10. 'Even if God exists, it doesn't matter anyway.'
11. 'It is the will of God, and we must trust Him.'
12. 'Religion is basic to life.'

Do you think that members of the different religions you have studied would be likely to agree with any of these? If so which? Do you think there would be important differences between the religions on this? Why/why not?

[3] Collect some comments about religion.

These could be from your family and friends, or from newspapers, television, books in the library or from the internet. Write them out and beside each one describe what picture of God is behind the comment. Where do you think people get their pictures of God from? Do you think some of them are ones which genuinely religious people would not adopt?

[4] What do you think yourself – whether you believe in God or not?

What is the picture of God you have? Perhaps you have several, in which case what are they? And do they contradict each other?

[5] How do the various pictures of God you have been looking at, and also those which you have yourself, compare with the list, which most of the great world religions would agree on, given in 4(i) above?

If there is a difference, why do you think there is?

Why do you think they think of God in these ways?

Do you think their reasons are good ones?

What reasons do you yourself have for your answers?