

Introduction:

This context for learning assists learners to explore the Christmas story to allow for progression across Curriculum for Excellence levels. This sequence of learning experiences aims to develop the following learning intentions:

1. To recall the main points of the story (remembering)
2. To explain the key words from the story (understanding)
3. To examine the symbolism in the Christmas story (analysing)
4. To make more developed links between the Christmas story and key Christians beliefs (analysing)
5. To examine the impact of the Christmas message(s) for learners' own beliefs, values and actions (analysing)
6. To consider the challenges which the Christmas story poses for contemporary society (analysing)
7. To critically assess the decisions and actions of the main characters of the story (evaluating)
8. To reflect on the main themes of the story and consider the similarities and differences between these and those of other stories (evaluating)

Prior Learning

Learners are likely to have engaged previously with the Christmas story at earlier CfE levels. It is therefore recommended that practitioners check the prior learning of pupils by engaging them in considering aspects of the story they have previously examined and explored. For example, learners can be given a list of key words from the Christmas story and asked to assess the extent to which they can explain each of the key words using the 'traffic lights' strategy: green: 'I know the meaning of the word', amber: 'I am not very sure about the meaning of the word' and red: 'I do not know this word'. Practitioners can then explore further with learners the meaning of all key words.

Other tasks that could give an indication of the prior learning could be: a Christmas quiz/crossword, 'true-false' or 'KWL' activity. This grid (What do I know?; What do I want to know?; What have I learned?) can be used to find out what learners already know about the Christmas story, what they want to know and then, as a form of assessment, to find out what they have learned.

Learners could also be asked to create a mind-map with everything they know about Christmas, then, each learner can swap his/her mind map with their partner and adds their new information to it in a different colour. This could also be carried out as a jigsaw activity with different groups assessing each subsequent group's mind-map.

Skills

Analysing
Reflecting
Evaluating
Critical thinking
Discussing
Explaining
Collaborating
Exploring
Questioning
Describing

Learning journey - Religious and Moral Education

Focus: RME

The Christmas Story

CfE Level: Second / Third Levels

Learning Experience

Introduction:

Across Scottish schools, Christmas is a topic regularly revisited at different stages of learning. This series of learning journeys is designed to offer varied approaches to Christmas which support progression and depth of analysis in relation to this topic area. Specifically, it supports learners in considering the key religious aspects of Christmas and so supports the development of their own emerging beliefs and values. Many aspects of Christmas are explored in our education system through art, music, drama and other approaches drawing upon a range of curricular areas. While these learning journeys draw upon such curricular areas and their approaches, the key focus is exploring the beliefs, values and practices and traditions associated with Christmas in relation to Religious and Moral Education in Curriculum for Excellence.

Possible learning opportunities/tasks:

1. UNDERSTANDING THE KEY FEATURES OF THE NATIVITY STORY

- The class can be split into groups of around four or five learners. Each group can read different passages from the Bible (for example: Luke 1, 26-38, Matthew 1, 18-25, Luke 2, 1-7 etc.) related to Christmas. Learners can then write a series of questions for their chosen passage which will be given to another group after they have read the same text.
- As a sequencing task, practitioners can distribute envelopes with pictures from the story, A3 papers and glue sticks. Learners can stick the pictures on the A3 paper in the correct order and write a sentence about each picture. An additional approach might be to present the story out of sequence and ask learners to re-order appropriately. This will also allow learners to engage in discussion about aspects of the story which are presented differently in different narrative accounts in the Bible.
- Learners can be given a world map from Jesus' time and asked to identify on the map places related to the story: Roman Empire, Rome, Nazareth, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Egypt, etc. They could explain what happened at each of the locations and how this links to the story overall. Learners could also add any knowledge they have about how these places feature in contemporary Christianity and in contemporary celebrations of Christmas.

2 EXPLAINING KEY TERMS IN THE STORY AND EXAMINING ITS SYMBOLISM

Using a textual version of the story, practitioners/learners can annotate the story by highlighting some key words such as 'angel, frankincense, gold, shepherd, wise men etc. and expressing their views on the variety of meanings of these key words.. At the beginning of the learning experience, practitioners can introduce the text of the story they are about to read and give a paragraph by paragraph summary of the story, or invite learners to add their comments to the story in the same paragraph by paragraph manner. Learners will be invited to suggest their own interpretations of the story at this point. Alternatively, learners can read the text paragraph by paragraph and practitioners can ask key questions to engage students with the text: 'Find an expression that means....' 'Highlight the word that you think suggests that...'. When words have been identified, practitioners should display them and discuss them with learners in order to agree shared understandings of meaning (tell a story, share an illustration, etc.). The symbolism in the Christmas story can also be discussed and analysed. Using only the identified key vocabulary practitioners can ask learners to put together a 'joint' re-write. The final task could be an individual re-write.

3 REFLECTING ON THE MAIN THEMES FROM THE STORY

The class can be split into groups of around four to five learners. Each group can be given a fragment from the Christmas story and asked to consider the following question: If you were to write a headline for this story that captured the most important/memorable aspect, what would that headline be? Learners' responses can be written down and recorded so that a class list of headlines is created and then discussed.

Learners can then be asked to reflect more deeply on the meaning(s)/themes of the story through engaging in a class/group discussion. The following examples of questions can be used as prompts for critical thinking:

- What would have happened if Mary refused to accept 'God's plan' for her?
- If Mary refused to accept 'God's plan' for her, what might the implications be for Christian belief?
- What would you do if you were Mary, Joseph, Herod etc. and why?
- What if Joseph had refused to marry Mary or have anything more to do with her? What might the ending of the Christmas story have been in that case?
- Why do you think Joseph supported Mary?
- What do you think prompted the wise men to follow the star and search for the new born child?
- If you were one of the wise men would you leave your own homeland to follow a star? If you did, what would persuade you to do so?
- If you were living in that time, what gifts would you have brought to the new born child? What gifts might you take if the events were happening today?
- What do you think we can learn today from this story?
- Why do you think Herod was troubled when he heard about Jesus' birth?
- Did any part of the Christmas story surprise you/annoy you/scare you.....? Why?

4 CRITICALLY ASSESSING AND REFLECTING UPON THE DECISIONS, POSSIBLE FEELINGS AND ACTIONS OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS IN THE STORY

The class can be split into groups of around four to five learners. Each group can be asked to engage critically with the main characters of the story by, for example, making up questions for an interview with each of them or by identifying the qualities that each of the main characters display.

Learners are challenged to imagine they are one of the main characters of the story, for example, Mary, Joseph, Herod etc. and asked to introduce themselves to the class. They can use the following questions to help build each character and retell his/her decisions and actions in a speech:

- Who am I?
- What was my role in the story?
- What did I do?
- Why did I do it?

Learners could then 'hot seat' in character by taking questions from other learners about not only the part they played in the story, but also their feelings and reflections on the part they played.

5 MAKING MORE DEVELOPED LINKS BETWEEN THE CHRISTMAS STORY AND KEY CHRISTIAN BELIEFS

A series of key questions could be posed by practitioners and then other similar questions could be posed by learners through collaborative enquiry.

E.g. 'Christians believe that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human'. There could be discussion around what this might mean – for example:

- Can a being which is divine also be human?
- In what ways was Jesus a 'normal' human?
- What is the relationship between Jesus and God?

'Christ came to earth to save humans from sin'

- What is meant by sin?
- In what way is Jesus able to 'save from sin'?
- If Jesus was fully human could he be without sin – as Christians believe?

In addition these key questions could be set up in an exhibition format in class – with members of the class guiding 'visitors' through these questions and engaging in discussion with them about the questions.

6 EXAMINING THE POSSIBLE IMPACT OF THE CHRISTMAS MESSAGE FOR LEARNERS' BELIEFS, VALUES AND ACTIONS

Practitioners can split the class into groups and give each group an envelope with selected words from the Christmas story in it. Each group could use this set of words to compose a Christmas poem which illustrates the beliefs and/or values which the story prompts learners to consider. Learners will be encouraged to reflect upon the impact of this story for their own beliefs, values and actions using a 'think, pair, share' approach. To illustrate learners' thinking about the impact of the story on their own beliefs and actions, each learner could devise a 'pledge' in the form of a formal certificate or a placard which they can place on their desk. This pledge/placard could state something like: The Christmas story teaches [fill in] so I could [fill in].

7 CONSIDERING THE CHALLENGES WHICH THE CHRISTMAS STORY MAY POSE FOR CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Learners could each be asked to research a story which is currently in the news. Each story should be outlined in relation to its key points. In groups, learners can then consider how the Christmas story might be used to respond to the key features of the contemporary news item. What parallels might there be between the Christmas story and the different contemporary news items?

Possible Assessment / Evidence:

- Learners' discussions and learners' check lists
- The completed 'KWL' grid
- Learners' mind-maps, peer-assessment
- How well can learners identify and reflect on the main themes from the story? Assessment evidence: learners' headlines and learners' discussions and responses to practitioner's open questions
- How comprehensively can learners recall the key features of the story? Assessment evidence: learners' answers to the questions; A3 paper with the pictures in the correct order and learner discussion around places related to the Christmas story
- How effectively can learners explain the key words and the symbolism in the Christmas story? Assessment evidence: learners' re-telling of the story and learners' discussions
- To what extent can learners make links between the Christmas story and key Christian beliefs? Assessment evidence: group discussions and exhibition guides preparation and practice
- To what extent can learners analyse the impact of the Christmas' messages for their beliefs, values and actions – pledges/placards text and discussion around these
- Depth and breadth of learners' discussions about the story and its characters. Assessment evidence: learners' discussions and speeches; the interviews and 'hot seat' activities.
- How well can learners apply and express their understanding of the Christmas story to contemporary events? Assessment evidence: learners' discussions and reflections reports