

Using Religious and Cultural Artefacts in Religious and Moral Education (RME)

These materials explore the use of religious and cultural artefacts in the classroom to support high quality learning and teaching in Religious and Moral Education (RME). They can be used by practitioners in any RME context and are designed to facilitate learning about and from RME, as well as stimulate discussion among practitioners about the role and purpose of artefacts within learning and teaching in RME.

What are religious and cultural artefacts?

A religious/cultural artefact is an object that can have religious, cultural or personal significance. All religious traditions have objects that are used in worship, festivals, rites of passage, or as daily reminders to followers of their beliefs, their traditions, and their identity. They can be a means of signifying specialness; a visible link to the community and its history; a symbol of key principles and beliefs, or a sign of commitment and belonging. Many artefacts are not linked to specific religions, but to other belief groups and cultural traditions.

Why use religious and cultural artefacts?

In the [assessing progress and achievement in RME](#) paper, the significant aspects of learning in RME refer, among other things to:

- understanding the religious and cultural diversity of Scotland and across the world through learning about Christianity and World Religions and other stances for living
- investigating religious beliefs, values, issues, traditions and practices through a range of primary and secondary sources
- appreciating the importance of respect for the beliefs, values and traditions of others and being able to demonstrate this

In [The 3-18 RME Curriculum Area Impact Review Report](#) it was noted that a strength of RME nationally is that:

- In the majority of schools, children and young people's learning is active and engaging. Many teachers use a range of teaching and learning approaches effectively to motivate learners.

A religious/cultural artefact is an object that can have religious, cultural or personal significance

Engaging, active, and collaborative learning enables learners to achieve these significant aspects of learning in RME. Learning in RME takes many forms and uses many sources, however, direct contact with religious and cultural artefacts can enhance and energise learning in RME.

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Using artefacts in the classroom can help bring religion and beliefs to life, through engaging directly with objects of importance within religious traditions and cultures, and stimulating learners to consider and reflect upon their role and use within the tradition. Artefacts can be used to support learners in approaching religion and belief in an enquiring and analytical way – leading to thought-provoking questions and ideas and opportunities for further research and enquiry. Furthermore, artefacts provide a sensory, active and memorable aspect to learning, are stimulating and appeal to visual and kinaesthetic learners much more than a graphic or

textual description. This makes them of particular use in learning with children and young people with additional support needs. An example of the effective use of religious and cultural artefacts in special education can be found [here](#).

Artefacts can also be stimuli for discussion, creative writing, drama and philosophical enquiry.



For example;

Discussion

- What is this artefact?
- Which religious belief does it represent?
- What does it represent?
- What message is conveyed by its dress and body position?
- What is it holding and why?
- What symbols are associated with this artefact?
- How might it be used by religious people?
- Is it art or something more?

Creative Writing

- You are walking through a well-kept garden and you come across this object. Who put it there? Why? Is there a story behind it? Who owns the object? What beliefs do they have?

Philosophical Enquiry

- Do religious artefacts contain 'power'? What might that 'power' be and how can it be accessed?
- Should only religious people use religious artefacts?
- How should we treat things which some people think are holy/special?
- A religious friend of yours as suggested that it is not enough to learn about religion, but that you should 'try it' by using this object as a focus for meditation. What do you think of that suggestion?

Artefacts can stimulate inter disciplinary learning (IDL) as they provide a springboard, for example, to discussions and activities about history, culture and geography. Religious and cultural artefacts allow an entry point for various experiences and outcomes at all levels in each of the three RME lines of enquiry (Beliefs; Values and Issues; Practices and Traditions).

For example:

History

- How old is this religious object?
- Who in the past might have placed this object where it is and why? What beliefs would they be likely to have had?
- What would a modern version of this look like?

Geography

- In which parts of the world would you be most likely to find this style of cross?
- Where in your area might there be crosses such as this and why?



Culture

- What does the circle around this cross signify?
- What does the design indicate about the maker of this cross and the culture where this cross can be found?

How can artefacts be used?

In effective RME children should be learning *about* and *from* religion and belief. Learners should be encouraged to enquire, investigate and evaluate the artefact. Questions can be asked about the artefacts' origins, uses and importance. One effective strategy is to introduce artefacts in the context of a discussion and/or presentation of the children's and young people's special objects and memorabilia. This can evoke rich comparisons with the religious artefact and also generate empathy and respect. This can also help to 'de-mystify' religious and cultural artefacts, by linking them to the idea that many people have special objects and items which are of meaning to them. However, any 'de-mystifying' should not detract from its significance to a follower of the relevant religion or belief group.

Artefacts can also be used to support [progression in RME](#), with a range of different approaches, questions and lines of enquiry being used in relation to the learners' point in the Broad General Education.

For example:

Early

- This is an Easter candle. When might you use candles?
- What things do you do at Easter?

First

- The Easter candle is sometimes called a Paschal candle - Find out what this means.
- Candles can be used at time of joy or sadness? Why might someone use a candle at joyful or sad times?

Second

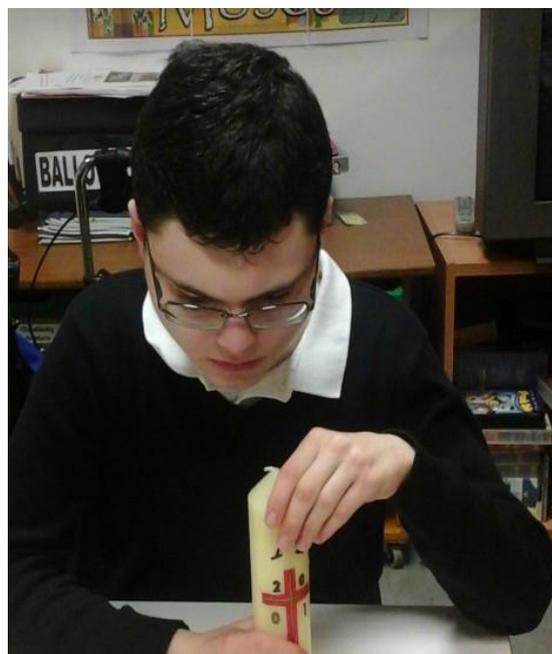
- How is the paschal candle used in Christian worship?
- The paschal candle is sometimes thought to 'symbolise eternal light'. What do you think this means?

Third

- In what ways is the paschal candle used differently in Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christianity?
- What do the letters Alpha and Omega on the candle relate to? What questions does this raise for you about Christian beliefs?

Fourth

- The candle symbolises light which links it to Christian beliefs about Jesus. In what ways is light a suitable symbol of belief about Jesus?
- Many modern events involved the use of candles although they are not 'religious events' What kinds of events use candles and how close are they to the method of use in religions?



Some artefacts also are used to signify entry into sacred space or time. Items such as Buddhist prayer chimes, Hindu puja bells, the Sikh chauri and Muslim prayer mat all serve the purpose of entry to worship or meditation. Learners can be asked to consider how their own time and space is demarcated and divided and how they commence any 'special activities' in which they engage. Artefacts can also be used as an entry to rich discussions about questions of value and worth, whether material or sentimental.

Artefacts should be used with integrity: This means that practitioners should have a clear understanding of their place within their tradition, and therefore any special requirements in handling artefacts in the classroom. There are many ways to find out what artefacts exist in each religion and how they should be handled. Organisations such as [Interfaith Scotland](#) can provide CLPL opportunities for practitioners in learning about artefacts, and may also be able to put practitioners in touch with specific religious groups. In relation to Roman Catholic Christianity, the [Scottish Catholic Education Service](#) may also be able to support practitioners in learning about religious artefacts within Catholicism. Further support for CLPL in RME can be found in Education Scotland's [Route Map through CLPL in RME/RERC](#).



Additionally, this is an excellent opportunity to make contact and engage with people in the school and local community and beyond. Inviting people in to the classroom to discuss with learners how they use religious and cultural artefacts would be an effective way to engage in dialogue about the place of the artefact in the belief system. This would allow learners to question and explore the use of the artefact within the belief group. Artefacts should be placed within their religious and cultural context.

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What are some of the sensitive issues relating to using religious and cultural artefacts?

Some things to consider:

- Not all people within a religion practise in the same manner and with the same artefacts
- Avoid creating stereotypes about religions and religious groups – for example 'all Christians would...'
- Use appropriate language to talk about artefacts, and ensure that learners do the same, such sensitivity is part of the learning process.
- Build upon prior learning with respect to religious artefacts. Throughout *Curriculum for Excellence* RME, learners should be coming into contact with religious beliefs, practices and traditions and artefacts from 3-18. Even if the context used has been different in prior learning, many of the central concepts associated with artefacts remains the same – such as the specialness of the object and its use through symbolism. Link new learning about artefacts to prior learning.
- Religious and cultural artefacts should be handled and stored with respect and sensitivity according to the practices of followers of the belief system from which the artefact originates.
- If learners are discussing or presenting their artefacts this should be done in an atmosphere of respect. Learning to approach beliefs, practices and traditions sensitively and respectfully is an important aspect of learning in RME.

Some examples of artefacts which might be used and how they might be used

This list is far from exhaustive, but gives some indication of the kinds of artefacts which might be used and how each could be linked to learning.

Buddhism

Prayer Flag – impermanence, compassion
Singing Bowl – meditation, mindfulness

Christianity

Icons – images of Jesus, denominations, reverence
Rosary Beads – penance, prayer

Hinduism

Puja Tray – worship, the shrine
Murtis one God and many, divine qualities and symbols

Islam

Qur'an – unique revelation, unbroken tradition
Prayer mat and compass – spiritual orientation and belonging, brotherhood

Judaism

Passover (Seder) Plate – connection with history, slavery and freedom
Hebrew Scroll and Yad (pointer) – specialness, covenant

Sikhism

5 K's – belonging, purity
Chauri – respect for the Guru Granth Sahib, purification



It may also be helpful to consider what constitutes an artefact within a 'non-religious' context.

Other Traditions

In some religions/traditions/belief perspectives, a range of objects may be considered as artefacts. These can be used in addition to those from the six world religions above. It may also be helpful to consider what constitutes an artefact within a 'non-religious' context. For example, many secular monuments convey beliefs and are used in practices so could be used to explore beliefs, values and practices.

Professional Learning Resources

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/testimony/index.asp>

www.bbc.ac.uk/religions - provides a wide variety of information about world religions

<http://re-handbook.org.uk/section/approaches/using-artefacts-in-religious-education> - further discussion about the use of artefacts in RME

www.thredirectory.org.uk - provides list of suppliers of artefacts

<http://www.strath.ac.uk/redb/reartefacts/> - list of religious artefacts

Professional Dialogue Prompts

- What does using religious artefacts add to learning in RME?
- What counts as a religious artefact?
- How can learners' own artefacts be best used in RME?
- How can we access religious artefacts?

- How can we engage with the local community in accessing and understanding religious artefacts?
- How can artefacts be used to support literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing?
- What interdisciplinary links are possible when using artefacts?
- How can we be sure that our use of artefacts accurately represents the belief community from which they originate?
- How can we source reliable and valid information for practitioners about artefacts?
- What alternatives are there when actual physical artefacts are not available?
- How can we ensure that we use artefacts to support the development of higher order thinking skills?
- What skills can be developed with learners through the use of artefacts?
- How can we use artefacts in ways which support meaningful progression for learners?