



The Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education in Northamptonshire

Support Materials



Handling Faith Sensitivities



Guidance on Faith Sensitivities

Using Religious Objects with Sensitivity in the Classroom Some Basic Considerations

“The attitude of the teacher will communicate to children and influence their attitudes. What you are and what you do is more powerful than what you say – so always treat religious artefacts with the sensitivity and respect you want pupils to have towards religion and beliefs.”

A major issue for RE is to enable the development of a sympathetic awareness of religion and beliefs and their impact on life. This is facilitated where pupils learn that for many faiths, religious artefacts have sacredness in their own right and must be treated with great respect owing to the view that they possess their own innate spirituality. Pupils and teachers who have no faith or those who have a background in some traditions of the Christian faith, particularly the Nonconformist traditions where there are few artefacts, may not necessarily be aware of this.

It is possible to develop this understanding in a number of ways; for example, show an object which is aesthetically pleasing, such as a golden mask of the Buddha, and ask the pupils if they like it and that if they had it, what they would use it for? The pupils usually describe it as an attractive, decorative object that if it were theirs, they would hang it on the wall as it is pleasing to look at and to them, it is an ornamental or a decorative object. You might then ask the pupils if they think that this artefact could be more important than that to some people. To develop the discussion, use an image of the maker of the object, a Balinese Buddhist sculptor whose father and grandfather spent their entire working lives creating this same image. To them, the object was much more significant than that. It is an object that is sacred in its own right and is a fundamental element in worship and meditation. The pupils can then explore objects and places that are precious to them and it is possible to draw out ideas such as respect, consideration, sacredness etc. from this. It would also be possible to use, say, an Aboriginal bark painting which told the story of their creation mythology or some Native American ‘magic stones’ used by the group’s Shaman or Medicine Man.

To demonstrate further to pupils that different artefacts can have different meanings to different audiences, another strategy is to ask the group to bring into school an object that is important and has a significant meaning to them. You usually find that they bring in objects that have little material value but significance to them: a photograph, a well-loved toy or some memento of a departed grandparent, for example. It is easy to draw out the nature of the value of the object, which does not necessarily have anything to do with monetary value.

There are some artefacts which have particular sensitivities for usage, which have religious and cultural mores and prescriptions relating to their use. The following list is not definitive but uses examples which teachers need to be aware of and attempts to make the point that all objects, whatever their traditions and mores, need sensitive handling to avoid offence.

Christianity

Icons

Many Orthodox traditions of Christianity use icons as part of the process of worship. These are pictorial representations of saints, patriarchs, etc. These are often held in great veneration by Orthodox assemblies and adherents kiss the icon or the wall to which it is attached. They are often considered as objects which have their own spirituality and as such should not be passed around the class or treated lightly.

The Host

The symbols used in Holy Communion, whether bread and wine or wafer and wine, are held in great reverence by many Christians as more than symbols of the Last Supper: for Roman Catholic Christians these symbols become actual physical manifestations of Jesus' body and blood. Great sensitivity must be given to the use of these objects if they are to be shown in the classroom. Communion wafers or Priest Breads should be kept wrapped and not passed individually from hand to hand. It is not acceptable to have wafers in the classroom which have been sanctified or blessed.

Hinduism

Hindu Scriptures such as The Vedas or The Bhagavad-Gita. The Bhagavad-Gita is acceptable to have in school but should be treated with respect, wrapped when not in use, preferably in a red cloth, placed on a book stand when being read and never under any circumstances placed on the floor.

Images of the deities - gods and goddesses (murtis), whether models or pictures, should not be placed on the floor and all Hindu religious objects should be kept away from shoes or from objects which are made from leather.

If a shrine is built or a **Puja Set** displayed, it should be placed on a surface which has been cleaned and covered by a cloth. The colour red is considered auspicious. A useful approach is to create a shrine in the corner of the room in the same way as it would be displayed in a Hindu home. To make it more authentic, use coloured fairy lights and garlands around the shrine.

Religious customs of respect and expectations and practices relating to visits to Mandirs (Hindu temples) should be negotiated in advance of any visit with the Mandir. Of course, an educational visit comes to the Mandir to learn, rather than to participate or to worship.

Islam

The Qur'an

Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the word of Allah, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) through the angel Gabriel, over a period of twenty three years from about 610CE. The Qur'an focuses on humanity's relationship with God. It is seen as a guide to life for mankind, the revelations touching upon all aspects of human existence from doctrine to social organisation and legislation. Though 'translations' (best understood as 'interpretations') are available in many languages, only the Arabic version is regarded as the true Qur'an.

It is thus a book treated with a great deal of respect, but more importantly it is an object that should be read and used on a regular basis by all. Opinions vary as to whether you can hold the Qur'an without washing first. If teachers are concerned regarding the handling of the Qur'an then they should obtain copies of translations / interpretations in English from the Islamic Foundation or the Islamic Society of Britain that may be freely passed around without offence to anyone. Some insist on wrapping the Qur'an in cloth or placing it on a high location, but this is more Asian cultural practice rather than universal Islamic teaching.

A Kursi (Qur'an stand) is sometimes used to hold the Qur'an when reading, it is not essential and it is not a sacred object.

Prayer Mat

Muslims will often perform their prayers whilst standing on a prayer mat, although this is not essential. Prayer mats can be found in various colours, materials and sizes. They are not sacred objects and therefore may be passed around the class for pupils to look at. It's important to pray facing Makkah from a clean place: the prayer mat is a 'clean place' in which the worshipper can have confidence.

Judaism

Tefillin

These are small black leather boxes worn on the head and arm during prayer by Orthodox Jews. They contain scripture from the Torah. These scriptures are sacred objects to the Jews so the Tefillin should not be opened or examined by hand. Some Orthodox Jews may be unhappy at these objects being touched by females and many would prefer that these artefacts are not used in the classroom. Showing photographs is a suitable alternative.

The Torah

The most sacred Jewish holy book is the Torah. Torah means teaching, and it contains the Five Books of Moses (Pentateuch). These are the books of the Law for Jewish people, given to Moses. The Torah is written on a scroll and kept covered and placed in a special cabinet or cupboard called the Ark, in the Synagogue. The written surface should not be touched by hand and the place is kept during reading by a yad or pointer –often made of silver, in the shape of a pointing hand. It is acceptable to have a yad but not a real Sefer Torah as you would find in the synagogue, although it is sometimes possible to obtain a miniature paper copy of the kind given as a present at a Bar Mitzvah. This, of course, should also be treated with respect: it is holy to Jewish people, so should be respected by all.

Mezuzah Case

These are small brass or silver cases which contain an inscription from the Torah. They are placed on the door lintel of each door in the Orthodox Jewish household with the exception of the toilet. It is quite permissible to have one for use in the classroom but it must be empty and not contain scriptures.

The traditions relating to a visit to a synagogue, such as head covering, segregation by gender, are varied and should be negotiated in advance of any visit as the Orthodox and Reformed traditions differ significantly.

Sikhism

The Sikh holy book is the **Guru Granth Sahib**. It is treated with tremendous respect and considered as if it were human, hence the use of the title 'Guru'. The Tenth Guru of the Sikhs made this final collection of scripture and taught the community that the scriptures were now to be their Guru. It is kept in a bed in a special room or at certain times on a throne. It is kept covered by a cloth called a rumala, often decorated with Sikh symbols. A chauri is wafted periodically over the scriptures when they are being used. You should not have access to a copy of this in school although you may have extracts from songs, prayers or scripture or a prayer book, usually the Sacred Nitnem, which should be kept wrapped when not in use, and on a book stand when being displayed. Any building in which the Guru Granth Sahib is present becomes a Gurdwara, so the scriptures cannot be held in a library, for example.

Kirpan

One of the 5 Ks (or symbols) of Sikhism is the Kirpan or sword. It symbolises the Sikhs' willingness to fight against oppression, for justice. If you show pupils a Kirpan, do not take it from its sheath. A Sikh would only do this to fight for faith, against oppression or injustice. There are some interesting examples of Sikh human rights cases based on carrying the Kirpan. It is not, in Sikh practice, an offensive weapon.

Kachera

The Kachera are the undershorts that are worn by all Khalsa initiated Sikhs, men and women. There are obvious sensitivities in having this artefact handled in the classroom. Some Sikhs would prefer schools not to have Kachera but some Sikhs argue that as one of the Five Ks, this should be available. If you have Kachera, it is probably best to keep them in a clear plastic bag for viewing and they should not be passed round among pupils. Explaining their significance should emphasise the symbolism of modest and respectful behaviour between the genders.

Artefacts from Sikhism should not be shown, examined or explored in a room where smoking has been taking place or where alcohol has been used.

Materials should not be handled by a teacher who has tobacco on their person.

Custom and practice relating to visits to a Gurdwara should be discussed with the Gurdwara in advance of any visit. Sikh generosity makes it usual for visitors to be fed at the Langar kitchen. Leave plenty of time for this.

Buddhism: Positives to follow, negatives to avoid

Do:

Do use plenty of examples of lay Buddhists in your teaching, to avoid suggesting that all Buddhists are celibate monks or nuns with shaved heads. Many active and devoted Buddhists adopt no obvious sign of their faith in their dress or hairstyle.

Do explain the Four Noble Truths carefully. Be cautious about the use of the word 'suffering' as it is used in accounts of the 'Four Noble Truths'. Suffering (dukkha) refers to the unsatisfactory nature of life. Buddhism doesn't claim that everything is painful.

Do select Jataka stories carefully. These are accounts of the previous lives of the Buddha. Some are excellent to use with children but some are quite difficult to grasp and can appear to be merely grim tales of sacrifice. It is not good to give the impression that Buddhist story is gloomy.

Do talk to the class about meditation, and compare it to educational relaxation (which pupils may be familiar with, or may try out.) But don't ask pupils to 'try meditation'. Stilling activities in order to encourage the class to be more reflective are useful educational practice, but they never involve participating in Buddhist practice. RE learns from Buddhist meditation but does not require the practice.

Do remember that not all Buddhist monks and nuns wear saffron coloured robes e.g. Zen wear black/brown; Nichiren wear white and yellow; Cha'an wear black; and Tibetan wear wine/gold. Lay Buddhists and many members of the western Buddhist Order are not seen in robes.

Do present the Noble Eight Fold Path as eight related ways of pursuing enlightenment. It's not a 'path' that is starting at step one and then taking the next step and so on. It is really one path with eight aspects. The path is actually followed when observing all eight aspects together.

Do be aware of the many differences between different varieties of Buddhism in Britain and the wider world. As pupils learn more, they will be able to see this diversity as a strength in Buddhist traditions and a source of learning.

Don't:

Don't refer to Siddhatha Gautama as being the Buddha until after his enlightenment. Strictly speaking, the status 'the Buddha' can only be given to Siddhatha after his 'awakening' under the Bodhi tree.

Don't use the term 'Begging Bowl'. Instead, it is better to use the term 'Alms Bowl'. Begging Bowl suggests that members of the Sangha (Community of Monks) are parasitic on the laity, when in fact both are spiritually supportive of each other. Members of the Sangha are not allowed to ask for food, so the term 'begging' is incorrect.

Don't suggest that all Buddhists are Atheists. For many Buddhists, the existence of God is not an issue as it is not relevant to the goal of enlightenment. The Buddha taught that the key question is reducing suffering, not answering metaphysical speculations.

Don't equate Buddhist meditation with Hindu meditation or other forms of meditation. Buddhist meditation is usually associated with achieving 'Mindfulness' or being fully aware. This leads to calm, concentration and insight. Other forms of meditation are often associated with drawing upon transcendent forces outside of the self or transcendent states of consciousness.

Don't use the term 'merit' unless also explaining it is not a 'points system' to gain as much merit as you can for yourself. Merit is only kept when given away totally and freely.

Don't use the term 'reincarnation' as it suggests a soul or something which can be reincarnated. Most Buddhists prefer the term 'Rebirth'.

Don't confuse showing respect for the Buddha with worship of the Buddha. Prostrations in front of statues and shrines are a form of showing respect and gratitude. Worship is not offered to humans.

Don't equate the 5 Precepts (for all Buddhists) and the 10 Precepts (for Sangha) with commandments. They are not commandments but commitments, taken on voluntarily in pursuit of enlightenment: 'I endeavour to train myself to abstain from...'

Christianity: Positives to follow, negatives to avoid

Do:

Do picture Christianity as a global faith: most Christians live beyond Europe and America. There are, for example, more Christians in India than in England. Christianity has declined in the UK for 50 years but globally in this time it has grown hugely.

Do use examples of Christian practice that are drawn from pupils' lives and are up to date. It's good to show that the practice of festivals, weekly worship or family devotion includes children of the ages you are teaching: Christianity is not an 'old people's religion'.

Do teach pupils about the Christian belief that Jesus was both fully God and fully human. Jesus was not 'half man and half God'. Nor was Jesus God disguised as a man. He was / is God in the form of humanity.

Do teach pupils, even from early ages, that Christianity is diverse. Examples of Catholic, Orthodox, Church of England, Pentecostal, Baptist, Salvationist and Quaker practice are all very different. Like all religions, these groups also contain their conservatives, liberals and radicals.

Do tell Biblical stories as narratives in their own terms: text is often better than textbook. These narratives have thousands of years and millions of re-tellings to commend them, so let them speak. RE goes badly when Bible stories are linked to topics by word association: Noah's Ark is not a story about water, transport or the two times table. Joseph's life in Egypt is not about fabric design. 'Any dream will not do'!

Do visit a church when there are people there. Visiting an empty building can reinforce the impression that some children have that churches are a monument to a faith that is no longer relevant, or like a museum. Churches are centres of Christian community life so engage with the community in every way you can.

Do help the pupils to understand that the Eucharist is also a remembrance service as expressed in Jesus' words: "Do this in remembrance of me".

Do make space for pupils' own responses to Christian ideas: learning from religion is never coercive, but it can be challenging. The challenge of belief about heaven or about love for all humanity or about unconditional forgiveness is worth considering.

Don't:

Don't assume Christian belief is normal or typical of British people by using phrases like 'our God' or 'we believe'. This will not be appropriate for all pupils. As with all religions, distancing devices should be used e.g. "Many Christians believe ..." "Part of the Christian tradition is that ..."

Don't represent Jesus in Christian belief as being merely a good man or a wise teacher or as being a prophet. For Christians, Jesus is God incarnate (in human form, on Earth). This belief is represented by titles for Jesus like 'the Son of God', 'the Christ', and 'the Messiah'. Jesus is the source of salvation.

Don't liken Christian belief in the Crucifixion to belief in a human sacrifice which placates a bloodthirsty God. The Crucifixion has to be understood in the light of the Christian claim that Jesus is both fully God and fully human. Hence God is on the Cross.

Don't use the archaic term 'the Holy Ghost' as it suggests a trivial and spooky concept of the third person in the Trinity. Do use the term 'the Holy Spirit'.

Don't neglect the Resurrection as part of the Easter Story. The Resurrection and the Crucifixion are inextricably linked and one should not be taught without the other. A useful emphasis may be on the way the resurrection informs Christian belief about life after death.

Don't suggest that in Christianity, Mary or the Saints are worshipped. Prayers are made to Mary or the Saints as mediators.

Don't, when exploring the Eucharist, give the impression of almost cannibalistic ideas about eating 'the body of Jesus' or drinking 'the blood of Jesus'. Holy Communion is a participation or encounter with God expressed in the words 'the Body of Christ' and 'the Blood of Christ'. The belief in the 'Real Presence' refers to 'whole Christ', fully God and fully human.

Don't reduce the parables of Jesus to simple moral tales in which the meaning is always 'be nice'. Don't only tell stories in which Jesus appears bland. He was such a controversial teacher that he was executed. Good RE will explore why he was so controversial.

Hinduism Positives to follow, negatives to avoid

Do:

Do attempt to introduce pupils to the Hindu idea of one God, Brahman, the World Soul, the Ultimate Reality.

Do refer to the 'deities/gods and goddesses of Hindu tradition' in explaining the idea of one Universal Spirit, seen in many different forms of gods and goddesses.

Do be selective when using photographs of ascetics and holy men (Sadhus) and attempt to prepare the pupils before disclosing such material. Photographs of emaciated men caked in mud may merely create the impression that Hinduism is for weirdos or masochists.

Do emphasise the vibrant community life of British Hinduism in your teaching: well over half a million British Hindu people live out their faith in our own country. Local Mandirs and British Hindu identities are a good focus for study.

Do present the controversial issues of caste carefully. Be cautious about the use of the word 'Harijan' ('Children of God') used by Gandhi to describe 'outcasts'. It is often resented as being patronising. 'Untouchability' is a wide social problem in India – not just in Hindu communities. The term 'Dalit people' is widely used by the hundreds of millions of 'untouchables' themselves.

Do use the spelling Rama rather than Ram when talking about the incarnation of the god Vishnu (the QCDA Glossary of terms says "for obvious reasons," presumably because of possible association with a male sheep).

Don't:

Don't teach children that 'all Hindus' are the same in any significant way. The religious traditions of Sanatan Dharma (the eternal way, Hinduism) are perhaps even more diverse than those of the Christians or Buddhists. Say 'Some Hindu people...' or 'Many Hindus...'

Don't suggest or give any support to the view that all Hindus are polytheists believing in many gods.

Don't trivialise the concept of Samsara (reincarnation) by suggesting that in one's next life one may be reincarnated as a species other than human, e.g. a spider, ant or fly. Although theoretically possible to leap from human to another species, Hinduism emphasises that the process is a slow one taking place over hundreds of incarnations.

Don't describe the images and paintings of deities (gods and goddesses) as idols as this suggests idolatry, as if Hindus literally worship the statue or painting or a spirit inside the statue. Hindus use images to aid and focus worship. The images are properly called 'murtis'.

Don't refer to the trimurti in Hinduism of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva as being 'the Hindu Trinity'. The role of these three gods in Hinduism bears no resemblance to the place of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit in Christianity.

Don't reduce Hinduism in the classroom to a succession of festivals: there is much rich material beyond Diwali lamps and cards. It is good to use examples of Hindu story, ethics, family life, worship, symbolism and philosophy for learning in RE.

Islam: Positives to follow, negatives to avoid

Do:

Do present the worldwide faces of Islam through RE. It is the second largest and fastest growing religion in the world.

Do use examples of British Islam to illustrate teaching and learning: local mosques are a good starting point. There are well over 1.5 million British Muslims.

Do teach pupils about Jihad at an appropriate age. The greater Jihad in Islam refers to the idea of struggle for the good in life. The lesser Jihad refers to using force as a means of self-defence.

Do stress the Muslim belief that Islam is the perennial faith, which has a long chain of Prophets going back to Adam.

Do think carefully about using an Arabic Qur'an in the classroom. If you decide to do this, then use a Qur'an stand to hold the book when demonstrating it to pupils. Do store a Qur'an away carefully, ideally wrapped and placed on a high shelf away from danger. Handle the Qur'an in ways that are alert to the respect Muslims give to the text.

Do be aware of Islamic rules with regard to art and representation: Allah cannot be pictured – any image would fall far short of the reality. Many Muslims also do not picture the Prophet, and some do not picture any human being. 'Islamic rules' art, using patterns, designs, buildings and landscapes, is usually acceptable but representing animate forms like animals or humans can be controversial. Both Muslim and non-Muslim pupils can learn a lot from studying these rules.

Do teach pupils to enquire into the wide and deep contributions that Muslim society has made in fields of knowledge such as Science, Mathematics, Language, Architecture and more.

Don't:

Don't let stereotypes that associate Islam only with fanaticism, fundamentalism or terrorism and conflict go unchallenged: Islam means 'peace'. It is unfair to see the world's 1½ billion Muslims through a lens of suicide bombing.

Don't describe Muhammad (PBUH) as 'the founder of Islam'. Muhammad is the last and final Prophet of Islam. Muslims believe that their faith preceded Muhammad and goes right back to the earliest beginnings of human kind.

Don't refer to Allah as being 'the Muslim God'. Allah means 'the God' and Muslims believe the one true God (Allah) was worshipped by Abraham, Moses, Jesus and other prophets.

Don't use the words 'Muhammedan' or 'Muhammedanism' as they suggest worship or devotion to the Prophet Muhammad rather than submission to God. The proper terms to refer to the faith are 'Islam' while believers are called 'Muslims'.

Don't put a Qur'an, or extracts from the Qur'an in Arabic, on a dirty surface or on the floor.

Don't put another book or books onto a Qur'an or onto Arabic extracts from a Qur'an.

Don't leave a Qur'an open on a Qur'an stand when not in use, as if it was an exhibit.

Don't pick up a Qur'an, or an extract from a Qur'an in Arabic, with dirty hands.

Don't use illustrations that claim to show Muhammad or his Companions either in outline or with faces blanked out as appears in some forms of Persian art. Companions include Khadijah, Aishah, Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali.

Don't cast pupils or anyone in drama or role-play scenes as Muhammad or as one of his Companions.

Do think carefully about using Islamic sound such as the prayer call or Islamic music with pupils. This can enrich the learning, but while there are recordings of the Call to Prayer and Qur'anic recitation which are intensely beautiful, they can sound strange to untrained Western ears. Different Muslim community groups take different approaches to music. Some use only the human voice, and no instruments.

Do avoid any unnecessary references to 'pigs' or 'pork' when working with Muslim children. Pigs are thought of as an unclean animal which should be in all forms avoided.

Do be careful about showing photographs of Shi'ah, commemorating the martyrdom of Hussein on the 10th of Muharram at Karbela. Some participants cut themselves and so can appear very gruesome.

Do prepare pupils for how they should sit when visiting a mosque. Ask them to avoid pointing their feet towards the Mihrab, in other words in the direction of Makkah. Pupils should dress modestly, being guests in a place of worship. Girls may be asked to cover their heads and wear longer skirts or trousers. Check with your hosts to make sure appropriate advice is given.

Don't liken Wudu to Christian Baptism. Wudu is a preparation for prayer. Baptism is a sacramental ritual which marks a person's entry into the Christian faith.

Don't describe Muhammad as 'fleeing' from Makkah to Madinah as it suggests cowardice. Muhammad and his followers 'emigrated'. It was an organised plan to leave Makkah, not a forced running away. Muslims do not attribute negative emotions or thoughts to the Prophet.

Don't dwell on differences in the past which have resulted in bloodshed, e.g. the Crusades. The extent to which some of these differences are religiously motivated is questionable.

Don't suggest that the killing of a sheep or goat during Id-ul-Adha is a sacrifice demanded by a bloodthirsty God. The ritual is a reminder of the story of Abraham and Ishma'il. The killing of an animal results in a sharing or giving, a sacrifice of generosity in the feeding of others.

Don't refer to Muslim prayer beads or Subhah as being a 'Muslim rosary'.

Despite the points made above, don't be scared or anxious about encountering the Muslim community as it is: encounter is very powerful for learning.

Judaism: Positives to follow, negatives to avoid

Do:

Do describe the first 39 books of the Bible as being 'the Jewish Bible' or 'the Tenakh'.

Do be cautious about using the term 'Jews'. The word developed a pejorative tone, particularly under the Nazis. Many members of the faith prefer the term 'the Jewish people'.

Do ensure all pupils cover their heads when visiting a synagogue. Take advice from your hosts to make sure that dress and behaviour are appropriate.

Do attempt to describe the joyous nature of Judaism. Although Judaism is based on fulfilling the 613 mitzvah (laws), this is not to be seen as a burden which one mechanically undertakes. They are undertaken with sincere intention (kavanah) and often with joy.

Do avoid the use of the dating system BC (Before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini), as it assumes that Jesus was the Christ. BCE (Before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era) are widely and wisely used by Jewish writers and RE professionals.

Do make sure that when pupils learn about anti-semitism and attacks on Jewish people, including The Holocaust itself, this learning is set in a wider frame of reference: Jewish people are not just victims of racism. Jewish resistance to the shoah is an appropriate focus for study. The Jewish life of Europe over many centuries is a rich learning resource. The Jewish theological responses to The Holocaust are an important area of learning for older pupils.

Do seek to balance the accounts you give of the State of Israel's current position in the wider middle east. For example, not all Jewish people are Zionists. Unbiased study of peace and conflict issues in Israel / Palestine today is notoriously difficult: aim to allow a diversity of Jewish and other voices to be heard.

Don't:

Don't refer to the first 39 books of the Bible as being 'the Old Testament'. It suggests that the books are old fashioned or out of date. The Jewish Bible is not merely the Christian 'Old Testament'

Don't equate the telling of Bible stories with teaching about Judaism. If children don't learn about modern Judaism, then their RE is inadequate.

Don't make use of 'Yahweh' or 'Jehovah' with reference to God. The Hebrew letters standing for God YHWH were never spoken out loud. Instead phrases like 'Lord', 'the Holy One', 'King of the Universe' and 'The Almighty' are always used.

Don't depict contemporary Judaism as being of the legalistic, narrow minded Pharisaic form against which the Christian New Testament rebels. The early Christian depiction of Judaism was not sympathetic or always very accurate. Judaism teaches the mercy of the Almighty.

Don't confuse the Menorah, the seven branched candelabrum and symbol of Judaism, with the Hannukiah, the nine branched candelabrum used at the festival of Hannukah.

Don't use the term the 'Wailing Wall' to describe the Western Wall in Jerusalem. It suggests that Jewish prayer is negative and moaning. The proper term is the 'Western Wall'.

Don't suggest that Moses on Sinai received only the Ten Commandments. In Jewish belief, Moses was given God's Law, the Torah, containing the 613 commandments (mitzvah).

Don't leave any anti-Jewish prejudice unchallenged: negative stereotypes all too easily lead to racist and discriminatory attitudes.

Sikhism: Positives to follow, negatives to avoid

Do:

Do represent the Sikh faith in British settings where you can. There are nearly half a million Sikh people in the UK. For good learning, tell their stories, and open up their communities.

Do teach about Sikhism today, not only covering stories of the ten Gurus.

Do be alert to the diversity of Sikhism and the changing practice of the contemporary faith. For example, it is controversial to live as a Sikh without wearing a turban but some Sikhs do this.

Do use modern examples of the Sikh practice of Sewa (service to all humanity). The life of Bhagat Puran Singh and the work of the Pingalwara at Amritsar is a good starting point.

Do be careful when showing pupils the kachera. Without preparing pupils, they seem to some like merely voluminous underpants and can give rise to a poor response.

Do explain to pupils about receiving karah prashad while visiting a gurdwara. It isn't to everyone's taste and it is impolite to be seen to be throwing it away after accepting it. Ask your hosts for guidance in advance of a trip.

Do warn pupils about how they should sit when visiting a gurdwara. Feet pointing towards the Guru Granth Sahib should be avoided and boys and girls would usually be separated. Boys and girls should cover their heads and girls should wear calf length skirts or better still trousers.

Don't:

Don't use three dimensional images of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh. They resemble too closely images of deities (gods and goddesses) used by Hindus. Sikhs have expressed the fear that people will equate the place of the Guru in Sikhism with the place of the deities in Hinduism.

Don't refer to the Amrit Ceremony as being the 'Sikh Baptism'. The two rituals are not good parallels.

Don't use the term 'Granth' by itself. It should be accompanied by honorific titles such as 'Guru Granth Sahib' or 'Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji'.

Don't picture Sikh teaching as a conflation of other religions: Guru Nanak's vision was based on his own experience of the divine, though he drew on both Islamic and Hindu understandings in his teaching.

Don't call the kirpan a 'dagger' as it suggests a sneaky, ignoble weapon. However small, it is a 'sword'. This suggests a more upright, noble weapon, which is more in keeping with the Sikh notion of the 'saintly knight'.

Don't refer to the chauri as a 'fly whisk'. It is a symbol of the authority of the Guru Granth Sahib.

Don't call a kara a bracelet as it suggests that it is merely decorative. 'Bangle' isn't much better. It is a 'steel band'.

Religious Feasts and Fasts

Schools are reminded that:

- The observance of festivals and fasts provides good opportunities for learning about and from religions;
- The Shap calendar, published annually, provides accurate information one year in advance on most festivals and fasts observed by faith communities in England;
- Since officially only Christian holy days are recognised, school attendance may be affected when other faiths are observing festivals and fasts. Schools need to plan for this development;
- When it seems that there may be potential problems in marking more than one festival or fast, they should try to seek school level accommodations across faith communities.

Guidance Note on Visiting Places of Worship

Arranging a school visit to a place of worship

Although visits may involve quite a lot of work to organise, they can really bring a religion to life for children. Well planned visits to places of worship are well worth the effort and can be highlights in learning in RE.

For guidance on visits to Places of Worship please see the relevant additional section in the Support Materials.