



## Introducing Religion & Worldviews

# Adopting a Religion & Worldviews approach in Religious Education

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## Teacher Handout Primary Schools



Welcome to the 'Introducing Religion and Worldviews' training pack for primary school teachers. This handout has been designed to accompany you, alongside the PowerPoint slides, as you attend the training and reflect on how you can (further) adopt a Religion & Worldviews Approach in the RE classroom.

The aims of the training are:

- To have a better understanding of the Religions and Worldview (R&W) approach in RE,
- To assess where your curriculum already touches on and follows a R&W approach and where there might gaps,
- To understand the benefits of adopting a R&W approach and how this can strengthen the teaching of religion and non-religion in schools,
- To start thinking about classroom practice that is anchored in a R&W approach.

Before you undertake this training, we suggest that you start reflecting on your own experiences of RE - e.g.:

- How was RE like for you as a child?
- What did you learn?
- What did you wish you had learnt?
- What was your teacher training like when it comes to RE?
- How do you feel about teaching RE today?

Reflecting on your own experiences will enable you to start looking at RE as a subject that is on a journey - one that seeks to mirror the changes in our plural society.

During the training, you will be introduced to key documents, such as the [CoRE report](#) (a report led by a Commission on Religious Education in 2018, which coined the phrase 'Religion and Worldviews'), and ['Worldview: A Multidisciplinary Report'](#). We do not expect teachers to engage with these documents (unless you were interested in them) - these are only mentioned by way of context, as we explore the journey on which RE finds itself.

Instead, you might find the following material more relevant to day-to-day RE teaching:

- [The Handbook for Curriculum Writers](#)
- [The \(draft\) National Content Standard for Religious Education in England](#) pp. 6-11 (NB: only refer to this document if based in England)

You will find that a R&W approach to RE can be interpreted in different ways – though all sharing the same core values, which will be explored throughout this training. Examples of what a R&W approach might look like in an RE scheme of work include the free resources below:

- [Teacher-led Framework: a resource for RE teachers and leaders](#) (led by Gillian Georgiou)
- [Coventry and Warwick SACRE / Diocese-led Framework: An exemplification of a Religion and Worldviews Approach in RE](#) (led by Jennifer Jenkins)

Due to time constraints, the training will focus mostly on what a R&W approach is (and isn't) in the classroom, and as such might not always offer enough time to look at classroom activities. Below we provide examples with which you can engage at your own pace, in your own time. Further resources are available online, (though these may not be freely available to all):

- [Exploring Religion and Worldviews](#) (NATRE)
- [Exploring non-religious worldviews](#) (REToday)

After your training (whether it was a day-long INSET day, or a series of twilight sessions), we invite you to consider what you have learnt, and to reflect on how that learning might affect the way you approach RE and teach the subject. Refer to the examples below and see how these may (or may not!) differ from how you have taught RE in recent weeks. Feel free to share your thoughts with colleagues and/or your RE coordinator.

We are aware that some of the terminology used in this training may be new to some of us – we have therefore included a glossary, which we hope will be useful to colleagues.

Please leave feedback/comments about the resources by clicking [here](#) or scanning the QR code below:



## ACTIVITY 1 –

### What does a R&W approach look like in the KS1 classroom?

In this brief, you are given two teaching plans following a church visit with KS1 pupils. Examine the differences between the World Religions Paradigm (WRP) and a Religion and Worldviews (R&W) approach.

#### **RE adopting a WRP approach**

LO: To identify the features of a church.

Following a visit to the local church (traditional CofE church building in a village setting).

Look at photos from the church visit on the screen as a recap and ask children what they can see.

- What did we see in the church?
- What were the special places or objects in the church?
- Can you remember the names of any of them?

In groups, ask pupils to make a shoe box church and label the features using the word list provided (alter, seats, lectern, Bible, pulpit, tower, bells, prayer cushion, font).

#### **RE adopting a R&W approach**

LO: Describe places of worship whilst considering why they are important to different people.

Following a visit to the local church (traditional CofE church building in a village setting).

Use link on smartboard to 'visit' two different churches. Get pupils to compare the church to the one they visited.

- What do you notice?
- What is the same?
- What is different?
- Which would you most like to visit and why?

In groups, ask pupils to make a shoe box church, including any objects or areas they think are important in the church.

- Which is the most important part of the church or object?
- Why do you think that?

- What might someone visiting your church feel?
- Who might visit your church?

Some children could add speech or thought bubbles to what people inside the church might be saying or thinking.

Draw a big question mark on the whiteboard and remind the pupils that this is their big thinking time. Tell them that today you would like them to think about the following question:

‘Is a church still important and sacred to someone who is not a Christian?’

Give the children time to think carefully about their responses.

## ACTIVITY 2 – What does a R&W approach look like in the KS2 classroom?

In this brief, you are given two examples to use with KS2 pupils. Examine the differences between the World Religions Paradigm (WRP) approach used for a unit on Hinduism, and the Religion and Worldviews (R&W) approach used in a lesson plan. Think about how the rest of the unit could be developed.

### **RE adopting a WRP approach**

Previously this unit was called 'What is Hinduism?'. The unit focused on Hindu deities, puja, Diwali and ahimsa.

Activities included:

- Labelling a puja tray and the symbolism of each item.
- Looking at the story of Rama and Sita and retelling it.
- Researching Diwali traditions and watching footage of Diwali celebrations in Leicester.
- Exploring images of Hindu deities and identifying them.
- Finding out about Ahimsa and what choices e.g. vegetarianism Hindus might make based on this.

There was some lived experience seen in videos of Diwali and puja being carried out.

### **RE adopting a R&W approach**

Lesson 1 of a unit - 'Life as a Hindu child in Britain.'

LO: To think about their own and others' personal worldviews and what influences them.

Place on the desk six things about you [the teacher] that reflect what is important to you. For example; photos of family on phone, wedding ring, a charity wristband, religious symbols, pictures of things you love stuck on your planner, etc. You could bring something from home, such as a favourite ornament, picture or book. Hold up each one and ask the class to suggest why this is important to you and what it might suggest about your personal worldview. Draw six pieces of a jigsaw on the board (without edge pieces)- once the class have identified what each item tells them about you, write it on the board, e.g. married, 4 children, favourite song, vegetarian, etc. This is a collection of things which express some things about your personal worldview, explain that there are no edge pieces because these things can

be added to and change over time.

***What is important to me?***

Give each child some blank jigsaw pieces. Ask them to write and draw four special things or ideas that are important to them. Have a look at all the children's jigsaw squares. There will be similarities and differences.

- Why are these things or ideas important to you?
- What has influenced your choices?

***What is important for two British Hindu children?***

Some of the children may have religious elements in their jigsaw squares, some might not. Discuss how religion is an important part of some people's lives. Watch this clip of Simran and her brother Vraj who are British Hindus ([www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02n5xj7](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02n5xj7)). Watch it once all the way through. Then discuss what Simran and Vraj said were important to them.

Give groups blank jigsaw pieces and watch the clip again. Ask them to work as a group to complete jigsaw pieces for either Simran or Vraj. They can choose to write about Simran or Vraj's important things; religion, hobbies, likes and dislikes, and important aspects to their life:

- What were most important to Simran and Vraj?
- Did you have anything in common?
- What might have influenced them?

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RE Today Services [www.retoday.org.uk](http://www.retoday.org.uk)

## Glossary

We suggest engaging with this section as you go through the training, or after, rather than before.

This training focuses on the pedagogical shift in the RE classroom as we transition away from the World Religions Paradigms towards a Religion and Worldviews approach. Below are proposed definitions of some of the key terms discussed during the training:

- **Religion:** The term 'religion' is a complex and contested term. The complexity of the term 'religion' allows for rich dialogue and debate about its nature in relation to beliefs about god(s), the divine, the supernatural and/or the transcendent; its function in communities and societies; its origins in the divine or in human culture; the relationship between believing, belonging and behaving. 'Religions' are instances of 'religion', and relate to the term in different ways ([The Handbook for Curriculum Writers](#), p. 15).
- **World Religions Paradigm (WRP):** To be classified as a religion by Western societies, a tradition has needed to share a number of aspects with Christianity, including scriptures, a churchlike organisational structure with a priesthood, a belief in one or more divine powers, and a doctrinal system (Smith, 1964; Dubuisson, 2003). As Dubuisson states, '[t]he West not only conceived of the idea of religion, it has constrained other cultures to speak of their own religions by inventing them for them' (2003: 93). This ethnocentric, Christianity-centred approach is the foundation of the WRP, which has been influential in the teaching of RE.  
The criticism is that the WRP perpetuates.

If you would like to read more about this, please see pp.7-8 of ["Worldviews: A Multidisciplinary Report"](#).

- **Personal worldview:** A person's personal worldview describes and shapes how they encounter, interpret, understand and engage with the world. A person may have a coherent and considered framework for answering questions about the nature of ultimate reality, knowledge, truth and ethics, or they may have never given such questions much thought – but they still have a worldview,



including the beliefs, convictions, values and assumptions that influence and shape their thinking and living ([The Handbook for Curriculum Writers](#), p. 15).

The short animated film, [Nobody Stands Nowhere](#), can be a good way to help make sense of the concept of personal worldview.

The Handbook for Curriculum Writers suggests updating this language. The Handbook (p.36) proposes using “personal worldview” to refer to the worldviews of pupils and “individual worldview” to refer to the worldviews of the people we study in RS. We encourage pupils to reflect on their own personal worldview, but in our case studies we analyse individual worldviews. This distinction is meant to reassure pupils and parents that the purpose of RS is not to analyse pupils or to make pupils change their own worldviews. We recommend discussing this with other teachers in your own context to decide if this extra terminology is helpful to you.

- **Communal worldview:** The shared worldview of a family or a faith community (e.g. belonging to a local place of worship) where people often share some similar beliefs, ideas or actions ([Coventry City Council, 2024](#)).
- **Organised worldview:** A set of beliefs, ideas, rituals and practices that form a recognisable worldview with familiar characteristics. These are often taken from a sacred text or as a result of a long-held tradition (e.g. a religion) but can also be nonreligious in nature (e.g. Humanism) ([Coventry City Council, 2024](#)).
- **Institutional worldview:** The CoRE report uses the term ‘institutional worldview’ to describe organised worldviews shared among particular groups and embedded in institutions. These include what we describe as religions (e.g., the Catholic Church) as well as nonreligious worldviews ([CoRE, 2018](#)). Broadly speaking, the term organised worldview is preferred to institutional worldview as it is more flexible and includes organised worldviews that are not embedded in institutions.

NB: A R&W approach does not see personal, communal, and organised worldviews as separate entities. Instead, the aim is to explore the complex relationship between them. Individuals within organised traditions may be more or less orthodox in their beliefs and practices, or in their engagement with

theological or philosophical discourse, or in their day-to-day practice, or in their identification with that worldview. A R&W approach looks at the relationship between people and the organised worldviews to which they may belong, as well as using this exploration to give pupils opportunities to reflect upon their own personal worldviews (adapted from [The Handbook for Curriculum Writers](#), p. 15).

In this training, you will hear the speakers talk about disciplines and/or disciplinary lenses that might be used in the RE classroom to help you adopt a Religion and Worldviews approach. Below are suggested definitions of Human and Social Sciences (HSS), Philosophy and Theology as these tend to be the dominant disciplines that shape RE in primary schools.

- **Human and social sciences:** The human/social sciences enable pupils to grapple with questions about the lived and diverse reality of religion and worldviews in the world. It explores the diverse ways in which people practise their beliefs. It engages with the impact of beliefs on individuals, communities and societies. Pupils will investigate the ways in which religions and worldviews have shaped and continue to shape societies around the world. This approach can promote better understanding of the ways in which religion and worldviews influence people's understanding of power, gender, compassion, and so on. It also enables pupils to consider the nature of religion itself and the diverse ways in which people understand the term 'religion' (Norfolk Agreed Syllabus, 2019).
- **Philosophy:** Philosophy enables pupils to grapple with questions that have been raised and answers about knowledge, existence and morality. It is about finding out how and whether things make sense. It deals with questions of morality and ethics. It takes seriously questions about reality, knowledge and existence. The process of reasoning lies at the heart of philosophy. Philosophy is less about coming up with answers to difficult questions and more about the process of how we try to answer them. Studying the works of great philosophers is part of developing an understanding of philosophy. It uses dialogue, discussion and debate to refine the way in which we think about the world and our place in it. Philosophy contains three fields of enquiry which are applicable to a balanced framework for RE. These are metaphysics, logic and moral philosophy (Norfolk Agreed Syllabus, 2019).
- **Theology:** Theology enables pupils to grapple with questions that have been raised by religions and worldviews over the centuries. It looks at where beliefs come from, how they have changed over

time, how they are applied differently in different contexts and how they relate to each other. It involves investigating key texts and traditions within different religions and worldviews. It explores the ways in which they have been used as authoritative for believers and the ways in which they have been challenged, interpreted and disregarded over time. It assesses the key beliefs of religions and worldviews as well as exploring the significance of experience on the claims made by religious and nonreligious people (Norfolk Agreed Syllabus, 2019).

These definitions are drawn from the [2019 Norfolk Agreed Syllabus](#), which also provides examples of how different disciplinary lenses might be used in the RE classroom.

Other useful key concepts used during the training include:

**Decolonising:** Decolonising the RE curriculum involves re-evaluating and reshaping educational content to include diverse perspectives (including voices that have been traditionally silenced or marginalised by colonial influences), and by moving away from the study of (non)religion through a Western Christian lens. The aims are to address biases, omissions, and power asymmetries by incorporating historically underrepresented viewpoints (this includes organised worldviews that have traditionally been ignored by the World Religions Paradigm, as well as personal worldviews that have traditionally been framed as not valid if they differed from what was taught through the World Religions Paradigm).

**De-essentialising:** Essentialising is the idea that certain groups/communities have inherent, unchanging characteristics that define their identity. It is, for example, saying things like “all Muslims pray five times a day”, or “all Christians go to church on Sundays”. By suggesting these traits are fundamental to what someone is can be damaging - what if one of your pupils is a Muslim but does not pray five times a day? Or one of your pupils identifies as Christian but does not go to church? This would make RE an alienating space since it does not acknowledge how lived experiences of (non)religion may vary. De-essentialising RE means adopting a Religion and Worldviews approach by moving away from oversimplified, stereotypical, and biased representations of complex (non)religion identities.

**Embodiment:** Embodiment emphasises the sensory, emotional, and physical experiences, enabling us to move away from an approach that just focuses on the cognitive (i.e., beliefs, or sets of ideas we have in our heads). Embodiment allows us to acknowledge the importance of the body and the affect in RE, and how we

experience and live (non)religion through bodily sensations.

**Positionality:** Pupils will develop an understanding of their own positionality in the world through RE as they reflect on how their personal worldview influences, and possibly biases, their understanding of the world (adapted from Coventry City Council, 2024).

**Reflexivity:** Reflexivity is a type of learning through which an individual explores their own experiences as a learner to become more conscious and self-critical (adapted from Coventry City Council, 2024).

**Reflectivity:** Reflectivity, or the act of being reflective, encourages pupils to think about what they have read, watched, listened to, learned and encountered so that they can relate their learning in the RE lesson to their own lives and begin to make meaning from it (adapted from Coventry City Council, 2024).

## Further reading, guidance, and resources:

- Culham St Gabriel's Trust (CSTG) provides a series of short courses, including 'Introduction to a Religion & Worldviews approach', and 'Digging deeper into a Religion & Worldviews approach'. Short courses can be accessed here: <https://courses.cstg.org.uk/>. The Open University also has a [free course, entitled 'An Education in Religion and Worldviews'](#).
- The Education Board of the Diocese of Coventry hosts a number of resources on Christian Advocacy, which adopt a Religion and Worldviews approach, and refer to the different disciplinary lenses. The resources can be found here: <https://coventrydbe.org/resources/> (Scroll down to the logo; the resources are Open Access, except the mood boards which are password-protected. The password can be found in the teacher handbook).
- The National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE) has published booklets looking at specific religious and nonreligious worldviews, but also at a more general focus on big ideas and celebrations perfectly tailored to teach religious education at EYFS, KS1 and KS2. Resources can be accessed here: <https://www.natre.org.uk/resources/termly-mailing/primary-exploring-religion-and-worldviews/>
- The 2019 Norfolk Agreed Syllabus for RE was one of the first locally agreed syllabuses to adopt disciplinary lenses in RE. The document can be accessed here: <https://www.schools.norfolk.gov.uk/media/13960/download/pdf/norfolk-religious-education-agreed-syllabus-2019.pdf>
- The 2024 Warwickshire and Coventry Agreed Syllabus for RE adopts a Religion and Worldviews approach and also makes use of the different disciplinary lenses. While the document is not Open Access, some resources are, including 'Introducing Religion and Worldviews to Pupils' for EYFS, KS1, KS2, and KS3. The documents and PowerPoints can be accessed here: [Introducing Religion and Worldviews to Pupils – Coventry City Council](#)
- The Religious Education Council for England and Wales (REC) has commissioned a number of

resources, including exemplar frameworks. These can be accessed here:

<https://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/rwapproach/> and

<https://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/resources/advice-for-teachers-others/>.

- The Theos Think Tank animated film “Nobody Stands Nowhere” by Emily Downe, and created in partnership with Culham St Gabriel’s Trust and Canterbury Christ Church University. The film unpacks the idea of worldviews and invites the viewer to consider how their own unique view of the world might co-exist with other, sometimes quite different, vantage points held by those around them. The video can be accessed here: <https://youtu.be/AFRxKF-Jdos>
- The video “Welcome to a Religion and Worldviews approach” captures teachers’ voices, and summarises the way RE has evolved, as it adopts a W&R approach. The video can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/644860244/64c04865c9>
- The videos used in this training can be found here:  
[https://mediaspace.nottingham.ac.uk/playlist/dedicated/1\\_naaf156b/1\\_qdl2vxca](https://mediaspace.nottingham.ac.uk/playlist/dedicated/1_naaf156b/1_qdl2vxca)

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