How do people express their ideas about God?

A Unit of RE for the Diocese of St Albans, Year 5/6
How do people express their ideas about God?

Year Group 5/6

ABOUT THIS UNIT
This unit of RE focuses on some of the ways in which poetry, music, art, architecture and drama are used to express aspects of Christian understandings of God. There is a comparative activity which attends to the similarities and difference between Muslim or Hindu understandings of God as well. The main focus is on Christianity. The unit provides opportunities for children to experience how different art forms can be used to express feelings, emotions and intentions (linking with Social and Emotional Aspects for Learning, (SEAL)). Pupils will learn how these art forms are used in a religious context to express faith and insight into beliefs about God. The unit provides for pupils to make their own self-expression of their understanding of God in an artistic medium.

Estimated time for this unit: Usually 10+ hours of teaching time.

Where this unit fits in:
This unit will help teachers in fulfilling local Agreed Syllabus requirements. It has been designed to connect with the Agreed Syllabuses for Bedfordshire, Luton, Hertfordshire and Barnet in appropriate ways, and reflects the learning model of the National Non-Statutory Framework for RE (QCA 2004).

RE in the Church of England School:
- This unit makes an important contribution to the RE curriculum in the Church of England school, and connects with the intention that RE should be excellent by enabling the spiritual development of all pupils through a reflective and thoughtful study of Christianity and of religious and spiritual ideas. In this unit, the focus on God and talking about God is at the heart of the exploration of ultimate questions.
- Quality RE in the Church of England school makes space for pupils to explore questions and makes the resources of the Christian tradition available to them. Learning about Christian ideas, symbols and expressions connected with God is at the heart of this work.
- It takes the personal worth of every child, and the family culture of each seriously, seeking to explore religious ideas and emotions in ways that are authentic and have integrity. The idea that every child matters to God is explored with pupils.
- It offers opportunities to children to think for themselves, and be broad minded and open hearted in their encounters with faith, and to develop their own beliefs and ideas about God.

Issues of continuity and progression:
This unit builds upon the Y3/4 unit on Jesus, and connects to the skills pupils are developing in literacy. It can be organised to make a key contribution to learning in the expressive arts curriculum.

KEY STRANDS ADDRESSED BY THIS UNIT
- knowledge and understanding of religious beliefs, teachings and sources
- knowledge and understanding of ways of expressing meaning
- skill of asking and responding to questions of identity, diversity and belonging

ATTITUDES FOCUS
- Self-awareness: this unit provides for pupils to develop their awareness of their own beliefs and their own creative abilities.
- Appreciation and wonder: this unit enables pupils to experience the power of the arts in responding to spiritual issues and questions for themselves.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prior learning</th>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Resources</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is helpful if children have:</td>
<td>In this unit children will have an opportunity to use words and phrases related to:</td>
<td>Text</td>
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| participated in drama and role play | Religion:  
- Christianity:  
  - vestments, stained glass, icons, festival, service, miracle plays, Pentecost  
- Islam, eg prayer mat, mosque, mosaic, calligraphy  
- Hindu, eg murtis, gods and goddesses, Shiva, Ganesha, Ultimate | Margaret Cooling - Jesus Through Art (RMEP), 1998  
Wood, Logan and Rose - Dimensions in Religion: Places and Spaces (Nelson Thornes)  
Phil Grice - Active Resources for Christianity 1 (Heinemann) - ISBN 435303724  
‘I Wonder’ (Story of St Alban)  
A useful pack of materials for exploring Easter at different levels is published by the Diocese of Bath & Wells, 2002, Easter: a whole-school scheme of work; Wells: The Old Deanery RE Resources Centre. Price £10  
Picturing Jesus and Picturing Easter (RE Today, 2003/2008) provide good ideas for visual learning here. |
| visited different places of worship and begun to compare the practices and rituals of believers | | Web |
| learnt the techniques of mixing colours and of using different materials to create texture | | Artefacts |
| collaborated with others in group work | | Audio, visual and video resources |
| participated in movement and dance activities using music | | Contemporary classical spiritual music is good to use in this area: John Tavener, John Rutter, Andrew Lloyd Webber are examples.  
Some contemporary artists such as Bill Viola or Mark Wallinger offer challenging imagery as well (web links)  
Worlds of Faith - Channel 4, ‘Ganesh - The Elephant God’  
Local Radio Commentaries, BBC Five Live (CD or website) | |

**Religious study and shared human experiences:** 
eg the language of emotions of worship, ideas about self-expression in arts, the language of expressive arts (dance, drama, sculpture, glass art, painting, textiles, music)
Cumbria and Lancashire Learning Online has excellent resources for RE: [www.cleo.net.uk](http://www.cleo.net.uk) Look in Subjects, RE, KS2.

[www.ngfl-cymru.org.uk](http://www.ngfl-cymru.org.uk) is the Welsh Virtual Teacher Centre. It contains some good materials for teaching to this age group. Look at the KS3 sound presentation on Worship (very useful in this unit for Y5-6).

- examples of music from different religions
- posters, photographs and postcards of paintings
- miracle plays translated for children
- internet sites
- museums and art galleries
- [www.fischy.com](http://www.fischy.com) provides some of the best contemporary music for children in Christianity

**Architecture and music:**
Schools will do well to connect with local examples of Christian architecture and music in this unit.

**Contributions to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**
The unit enables pupils to develop:

**Spiritually** by engaging increasingly deeply with beliefs as they are expressed through the arts, and articulating their own beliefs and values in creative work

**Socially** by working in co-operative and collaborative settings

**Culturally** by appreciating the cultural value of different forms of art, and understanding that ways in which the arts are valued in diverse Christian and other religious communities.

**EXPECTATIONS:**
At the end of this unit:

**Nearly all pupils will be able to (L3):**
- describe some ways in which music, art or drama are used in some religions to express beliefs
- make simple links between examples of religious expression and the beliefs, ideas and feelings that underlie them

**Most pupils will be able to (L4):**
- understand that expressing faith can involve feelings and emotions and that in religions the arts provide a context for this expression
- understand that religious beliefs can be expressed through creative and expressive arts
- apply a broad idea of worship to examples of emotions such as awe, peace, joy and wonder
- show that they understand the significance and symbolism of these emotions to believers
- apply the idea of expressing their spirituality creatively for themselves
- explain some similarities and differences between different expressions of faith (eg a creed and a piece of music, a Bible story and a work of art, a parable and a dramatic sketch)
- explain their own views of the symbolic expression of beliefs in, for example, a church building, a stained glass window or a sculpture of Jesus
- express views about aspects of faith which are difficult to verbalise, explaining how these can be expressed through music, art and drama in religion.

**Some pupils might be able to (L5):**

ASSESSMENT SUGGESTIONS
Provide for pupils to show what they have learned by these two tasks.

A. Expressing my learning: how can my own spiritual ideas be shared?
   ▪ Spend some circle time with the class reviewing the unit and its stimuli. Make sure the questions used ask more than facts and information. A ‘Philosophy for Children’ approach may be useful.
   ▪ Ask each child to choose: if they could select one piece of music, drama, poetry, art and architecture to sum up Christian beliefs about God, which ones would they choose and why?
   ▪ Ask pupils to make a small booklet of ten pages. Five pages should have a picture of the five things they selected above. The facing page in each case should answer the question: why does this express spirituality to me? (or similar).
   ▪ This booklet is a suitable item for an assessment if you need one for this unit.

B. A piece of creative work that expresses my own spirituality
   ▪ In association with the art curriculum, enable pupils to plan, design and make a painting, poem, dance, drama or sculpture that expresses their own sense of the spirit. Use a broad definition of ‘spiritual’ for this – model inclusivity so that anyone can be ‘spiritual’ whether they are conventionally ‘religious’ or not.
   ▪ Pupils might express their sense of the spiritual with reference to self, others, the earth or God (‘the transcendent’ if you prefer).
   ▪ This task meets objectives at L4 in the art curriculum: making purposeful images and artefacts, drawing to express/visualise/dream/imagine.
   ▪ This work will be enhanced by good modelling. www.natre.org.uk/spiritedarts showcases some brilliant children’s work in the web gallery for the ‘Art in Heaven’ competition.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY QUESTIONS</th>
<th>LEARNING OBJECTIVES</th>
<th>TEACHING AND LEARNING</th>
<th>LEARNING OUTCOMES</th>
<th>POINTS TO NOTE</th>
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</table>
| What do we mean by self-expression? | To think about how we express ourselves, especially our deepest commitments and ideas. To recognise that expressing faith involves feelings and emotions. To describe how feelings can be expressed through movement in response to music. | **How do we express our feelings?**  
- Explore with the children facial expressions, body language and tone of voice, eg shouting, whispering.  
- Develop a drama activity: ‘EMOTIONAL MOVEMENT’. Pupils in groups create a three-minute mime sequence using examples of emotions. They plan and perform moving through a range of emotions such as excitement, anxiety, fear, relief, puzzlement, sadness, despair, regret, exhilaration, amazement.  
- This sequence is one interpretation of the events of Holy Week. Pupils can return to this later in the unit.  
- Discuss other ways of expressing our feelings to others, such as writing poems, diaries, letters, stories, paintings, sculpture, music and dance.  
- Watch a video of a piece of dance. Ask the children to note down what feelings are being shown. Discuss their notes as a class. Use movement or drama to show their understanding of how people express their feelings.  
- There will be children from traditions which do not use the arts as a means of religious expression, eg Quakers, so do not assume that the arts are meaningful for all religious groups. | Describe different emotions and feelings, making links to the ways characters in film or story might feel (L3). Make links between characters in stories and myself on the basis of shared emotions (L3). Think about the stories that have emotional power for them. (Literacy connection) | This unit is about the expressive arts as well as about RE and PSHE. It’s good from the start to show pupils the integration of these areas, and to plan learning which is dramatic, artistic and musical. The unit makes wide use of pupils’ multiple intelligences. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do people believe about God? What do Christians believe?</th>
<th>Picturing and describing God</th>
<th>This work connects to the curriculum for both ICT and Art.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>That God is an idea which people find both important and mysterious.</td>
<td>• Provide pupils with range of images* of ‘God’. Ask pupils to consider which most closely reflects their own ideas – or add their own to the sheet (if appropriate – remembering Muslims do not depict God or Muhammad in pictorial form).</td>
<td>Describe some different ways in which people try to say what they believe about God (L3)</td>
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<td>That there are many different ways of expressing beliefs about God.</td>
<td>• Use a selection of views of God from young children. Either listen to CD track 2 (Heinemann Active resources pack) or use quotes from ‘Faith in the Future’ p15, or the database of pupils’ writing at <a href="http://www.natre.org.uk/childrentalking">www.natre.org.uk/childrentalking</a>. Compare them with list of attributes of God - eternal, creator, transcendent, immanent, omnipotent, omniscient. (see Pupil resource sheet p27 Heinemann)</td>
<td>Make links between different forms of expression, eg in words, in images (L3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>To think carefully about their own images, beliefs and ideas about God, and compare these with other, different ideas.</td>
<td>• Talk about/look at children’s images of God. There are dozens available at <a href="http://www.natre.org.uk/spiritedarts">www.natre.org.uk/spiritedarts</a> Talk about where children get their ideas from about God.</td>
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<td>Provide pupils with a ‘fact sheet’ which lists the key terms used to describe God. The definitions should be listed separately - pupils match words to definitions (as a test of their understanding!).</td>
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<td>Set two questions for written response: ‘Explain two ways people describe God. Describe two things which influence people’s ideas about God’. Emphasise to pupils that the reason for the diversity of images may be about the mysteriousness of God.</td>
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<td><strong>How are Christian beliefs about God expressed in various ways?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Comparing expressions of beliefs</strong></td>
<td><strong>Describe three different expressions of beliefs about God and Jesus in Christianity (L3)</strong></td>
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| That beliefs about God can be expressed in words, but also in music or art  
To develop skills of comparison and discussion in relation to the task  
To understand some Christian beliefs about Jesus and the varied ways they are expressed | • Begin by asking pupils to look at a copy of the Creed. Print it in the centre of a piece of A3 or A2 paper, and get pupils in 4s to write 10+ questions about the words around the edge. This will help pupils to read carefully, and shows the teacher what they do — and don’t — understand already.  
• Use a piece of music (a song such as or a hymn such as ‘There is a green hill far away’ is suitable), an image of a stained glass window (possibly showing the Last Supper, Crucifixion or Resurrection) and the words of the Creed that express ideas about Jesus. Ask pupils to talk about which is the best expression of Christians’ beliefs about Jesus and why.  
• Begin by putting pupils in groups of six, with each of the three stimuli to consider. Three pairs must each argue for the item they have been looking at: what makes it good.  
• Share ideas and arguments on the whiteboard, and have a class vote on which is the best expression of beliefs about Jesus | Make links between these three items (L3)  
Show that they understand the variety of expressions of belief in music, stained glass and words (L4) | |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do the images, paintings and sculptures of Christians today express beliefs about Jesus and the worship of God?</th>
<th>Can you express moods and feelings in colour, paint and art? Why is this important?</th>
<th>To describe some ways in which art can express emotions (L3)</th>
<th>There are cross-curricular links with art and design, using the correct colours, styles and textures for painting images of Jesus such as Orthodox icons.</th>
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<tr>
<td>That colour can be used to express religious feelings and ideas</td>
<td>Ask a member of the clergy to bring the coloured vestments for different seasons of the Christian year. What do the colours used in church symbolise? Help the children to carry out research to find out about the stories and symbols in some Christian festivals and design and make a banner for a festival, such as Pentecost. Explain the meaning of vestments and colour in many churches. Identify and explain the significance of some symbols in Christianity. <strong>In what different ways have artists expressed their beliefs about Jesus?</strong></td>
<td>To describe and show that they understand the ways in which Christian artists express their beliefs about Jesus through their work (L3/4)</td>
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<td>That art can be sacred and spiritual for believers</td>
<td>Ask the children to suggest why people engage in artistic activity. Study reproductions of famous artists’ portrayals of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and his teachings. Explore how they use symbolism, colour and texture to express meaning. Compare a range of traditional and modern art. Explore by questioning. How does the work of art make you feel? How do you think the artist felt? How are images used to teach religious beliefs, to instil moral values or to inspire passions? How much do artists try to illustrate religious texts authentically or present personal interpretations? What is the artist taking from the Bible, and what is being added to the Bible? Children could paint their own images of moments from the Gospel narratives they choose themselves. Make links to the art curriculum to find appropriate time, resources and skills for this activity.</td>
<td>To express some views, beliefs and ideas of their own in a piece of art work that is spiritual for them (L5)</td>
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<td>Understand the variety of symbolic meanings in paintings</td>
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To describe some ways in which art can express emotions (L3)
To describe and show that they understand the ways in which Christian artists express their beliefs about Jesus through their work (L3/4)
To express some views, beliefs and ideas of their own in a piece of art work that is spiritual for them (L5)
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<th>How do Christian communities use and enjoy music to express their beliefs about God?</th>
<th>How and why do we find music moving?</th>
<th>How do Christians use music for worship and expression of beliefs?</th>
<th>To make links between the music of the Christian community and the beliefs of the Christian community (L3)</th>
<th>To show they understand how and why Christians use music to worship God (L4)</th>
<th>To apply some of their own spiritual and religious ideas to the music they love (L4)</th>
<th>There are cross-curricular links with music and PE.</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| That many forms of music are used by the Christian communities to express worship, beliefs and faith | - Listen to a joyful piece of music. Choose a piece of contemporary or classical music and ask children to reflect on it. How does music make you feel?  
- Enable the pupils to choose how they want to respond to the music, eg through paint, through words, through movement. Help them to explore by questioning. What emotions did I feel in the activity on painting, creative writing or dance? What sort of feelings might people of faith experience in worship (eg love, peace, tranquillity, wonder, awe)? | - In small groups, ask children to prepare a response to the music, from the perspective of a group of Christian believers expressing feelings of joy to their God.  
- Consider with pupils some songs they know from Collective Worship. Which would Jesus’ favourites be? Why? What do the songs express about Jesus and about God?  
- Using a range of instruments, get groups of pupils to compose their own music to express a series of emotions: examples might include joy, thankfulness, sadness, fear, excitement. Enable pupils to present their work to the whole group (or to younger pupils). It may be possible to do a performance for an assembly. Include examples of religious words set to music which are familiar to the children, eg a setting of the Lord’s Prayer, of Psalm 23, the Hallelujah | | | | Music is an effective medium of communication for children with learning difficulties. PE, through team working, provides many opportunities for spiritual and moral development. |
| To understand how religious beliefs, ideas and feelings can be expressed in a variety of forms of music | | | | | | This aspect of the unit can be extended for some children if appropriate. |
Chorus. Make sure you include examples of child-friendly contemporary Christian music, such as those from ‘Kid’s Praise’ or the Sticky Kids, or Steven Fischbacher’s extensive ‘Fischy Music’.

**Six pieces of music for my spiritual iPod**
Ask pupils to think about their own ‘spiritual music’: what music would they choose to express their own deepest ideas? Ask them to choose six songs, or pieces of music that they would call ‘spiritual’ on their iPod (if they had one).

| How can a building express beliefs? | To understand that the architecture of a Christian building is an expression of belief and worship. To apply the idea of expressing beliefs through buildings for themselves. | **How is faith expressed through the buildings Christians make?**
- From virtual tours, photographs or a visit if possible, explore with pupils the significance of a major Christian building. (St Albans Cathedral is only one example, but a good local one: there is a virtual tour at [www.stalbanscathedral.org.uk](http://www.stalbanscathedral.org.uk).)
- Ask pupils to consider first of all what did the people who made this building believe in? What mattered to them?
- Give pupils ten or more possible explanations of the meaning of a great religious building and ask them to rank these, first from the point of view of the people who worship there, then form their own point of view.
- Examples: St Albans Cathedral expresses these beliefs:
  - God is there when people meet together
  - Humans need holy places to help them think about God and life
  - The history of Christianity helps makes sense of Christianity today
- Silence and music can help us listen to our own hearts. |
| Describe some ways in which a church building can express Christian beliefs (L3) Show understanding that the great religious sacred spaces are not like museums, but have a function today to inspire people to worship (L4) There are good links here to the history curriculum, in which pupils learn to 'decode' a building from the past and make sense of its architecture. |
**How can drama express beliefs?**

That drama is a means of reinforcing important stories and teachings in religions.

How drama often reinforces teaching of the faith stories of the Bible *(eg Parables)*.

That they can use drama to express their own understanding of a religious or spiritual question.

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<tr>
<th>How have Christians used drama to express their understanding of Jesus’ teaching?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Children view a video of Christian dramatic re-telling of a part of the gospel narrative, to open up the idea that drama can present old stories in fresh ways. For example, in Christianity, children might engage with mystery or miracle plays, versions of the parables <em>(eg from BBC RE Curriculum Bites: The Tramp’s Parables)</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- In teams, pupils dramatise one of the Parables of Jesus: the Lost Coin, the Lost Son (Luke 15), the Pearl (Matthew 13) or the Parable of the Talents (Luke 19). This can be done by improvisation, but some scripted versions are also available.</td>
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<td>- If time is available, actors can design and make costumes/masks and write descriptive accounts of their own feelings, and those of the characters they portray. The work could be presented in assembly to younger pupils in the school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Consider with pupils: How do these dramatic stories link up to questions about right and wrong, life and death, God and religion?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Talk about how drama can be a means for presenting and reinforcing religious stories and teachings, and reflect on ways in which stories can be a means of exploring values, beliefs and big questions.</td>
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<tr>
<th>To describe the meaning of one of Jesus’ parables through taking part in a drama (L3)</th>
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<td>To show understanding of the links between drama and story from the Bible (L4)</td>
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<th>To apply ideas from Jesus’ teaching in group drama work (L4)</th>
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This work can be connected to elements of the speaking and listening programme of the renewed literacy framework.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What have we learned in this unit of RE?</th>
<th>Expressing my learning: how can my own spiritual ideas be shared?</th>
<th>I can describe some things that express the spirit of Christianity. (L3)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To reflect for themselves on their own ideas about spiritual life and self expression</td>
<td>- Spend some circle time with the class reviewing the unit and its stimuli.</td>
<td>I can show, using the right words, that I understand how different art works express Christian belief (L4)</td>
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<td>To respond to the challenge of self expression of the spiritual in a way they choose</td>
<td>- Ask each child to choose: if they could select one piece of music, drama, poetry, art and architecture to sum up Christian beliefs about God, which ones would they choose and why?</td>
<td>I can express my own views about the ways Christians’ spirituality is expressed in the arts and architecture (L5)</td>
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<td>- Ask pupils to make a small booklet of ten pages. Five pages should have a picture of the five things they selected above. The facing page in each case should answer the question: why does this express spirituality to me? (or similar)</td>
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<td><strong>Challenge: Can you make a piece of creative work to express your own spirituality?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Use a broad definition of ‘spiritual’ for this work – model inclusivity so that anyone can be ‘spiritual’ whether they are conventionally ‘religious’ or not.</strong></td>
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<td>- A gallery or exhibition of the pupils’ work would be a great starting point for younger children to see in their work on ‘talking about God’ (Y1).</td>
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