

BIG IDEAS OVERVIEW FOR AGE GROUPS

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Big Idea 1: CONTINUITY, CHANGE AND DIVERSITY	We are surrounded by distinctive things that are often called 'religious' or 'holy'. These include buildings, festivals and celebrations, rituals, books, acts of worship and symbols. These are usually different for each religion and non-religious worldview. Within the same religion or non-religious worldview people may believe different things and practise in different ways.
Big Idea 2: WORDS AND BEYOND	People have developed several different ways to explain their religious beliefs and feelings, such as using words in different ways when writing about spiritual or religious things in stories, poetry and drama. Many people also use symbols, art, music, drama and dance to express their beliefs and to tell their favourite stories. Some people believe that it is wrong to use certain forms of non-verbal expression. People may learn different things from these stories and symbols and might not agree about their meaning.
Big Idea 3: A GOOD LIFE	Most religions and non-religious worldviews introduce children to stories from the lives of their exemplary people as examples of the qualities and characteristics they might try to achieve. They also teach about specific actions that are right and wrong and about good and bad attitudes. This guidance can help people treat each other fairly and live together without upsetting or hurting each other or damaging the environment.
Big Idea 4: MAKING SENSE OF LIFE'S EXPERIENCES	Some people have amazing, puzzling or mysterious experiences that make them ask big questions about life. Others find deep spiritual meaning in everyday experiences. There are many stories about people's experiences and encounters that have made them change their lives. Some people find that belonging to religious or non-religious groups which share their beliefs, values and traditions gives them a sense of belonging.
Big Idea 5: INFLUENCE, COMMUNITY, CULTURE AND POWER	There are signs of religious and non-religious worldviews all around us and lots of evidence of their influence on our communities. Many local and national holidays are held at the time of religious or other festivals and religious leaders are often important people locally. Several well-known traditional stories and songs reflect the ideas of religious traditions present in the community. Religions are not equally influential everywhere. Some places are more religious than others; some families are more religious than others. Most schools have children from different religions and non-religious worldviews.
Big Idea 6: THE BIG PICTURE	Stories are very important in religions and in non-religious worldviews. They are used to explain ideas about life, and may include God, gods, spirits, humans and animals and the rest of the natural world. Religious and non-religious worldviews help people grapple with some of the big questions of life, such as 'What happens when people die?' and 'Where did the world come from?'. Many of these stories are well known because they have been handed down over generations for hundreds of years. They are often found in holy books.

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Big Idea 1: CONTINUITY, CHANGE AND DIVERSITY	<p>The name 'religions' is given to systems of belief, practices and values which share some common features, such as beliefs, values, places of worship, festivals, pilgrimages, rituals, texts and symbols. All the elements of each religion are closely connected and can only properly be understood in relation to each other. Each religion and non-religious worldview is made up of several groups of people who often believe different things and practise in different ways. For some people their religion is more important to them than it is for others. Religions and non-religious worldviews change over time; sometimes as a result of historical events or technological developments or as a result of people moving from country to country and taking their traditions with them.</p>
Big Idea 2: WORDS AND BEYOND	<p>People often can't find the words to express their feelings and beliefs. They often use imagery, for example symbol, metaphor, simile, analogy and allusion to interpret their religious or spiritual experiences and beliefs. People also express and communicate beliefs and experiences without words: through art, artefacts, symbols and icons; through dance, drama and symbolic gestures; and through music and ritual. There are different views as to which forms of non-verbal communication are appropriate to use, particularly in a religious context. All of these forms of expression not only provide a means of expressing complex ideas, they are also vehicles for learning, wisdom and inspiration for some and important evidence for those who want to understand the beliefs, ideas and values of others. Nevertheless, people find different meanings in all these forms of expression.</p>
Big Idea 3: A GOOD LIFE	<p>Religions and non-religious worldviews provide guidance for their followers on how to live a good life. Moral teachings come in many forms including songs and poems, codes of conduct and rules, proverbs and wisdom sayings and stories, including stories about people from the distant past or from recent times who set a moral example to their followers. It may be their particular actions or behaviour that inspires others or it may be their teachings that their followers apply to their lives. Many religions and non-religious worldviews also have codes of behaviour or sets of rules which tell people what actions are right and wrong and what their duties are. In many cases a balance is struck between advocating specific behaviours and guiding people to judge what is the right thing to do in a given situation and to act for the right reasons. There are different ideas about why people should aim to live a good life. Some believe that it is the will of God, others that it is for the good of everyone, or for the good of the whole world. There is considerable agreement over desirable virtues and qualities and what is right and wrong, good and bad, across religious and non-religious groups. However, there are also important disagreements between groups and within groups.</p>
Big Idea 4: MAKING SENSE OF LIFE'S EXPERIENCES	<p>Many people have amazing, puzzling or mysterious experiences with the wonders of nature, other people, the arts, or with a power above or beyond the material world. These encounters may be highly affecting, changing their lives in a positive way and sometimes giving them a sense of destiny. Some people account for these experiences by saying that humans have an inner consciousness or spiritual nature. Certain individuals throughout history are said to have had extraordinary insights into the meaning of human life and have passed those insights on to others. In many cases their experiences have had a major impact on religions and non-religious worldviews or have even led to a new one. Many people find that religious rituals and other practices provide opportunities for them to make connections with God or gods and each other, or with what is most important to them. When practised in community with others, these experiences may give them a deep sense of identity and belonging.</p>
Big Idea 5: INFLUENCE, COMMUNITY, CULTURE AND POWER	<p>Many communities around the world are influenced at several levels by their traditional religions and non-religious worldviews. Families who no longer practise a religion may continue to celebrate religious festivals, follow traditional religious rituals at key points in life and uphold traditional values. Local community leaders may be motivated by religious or non-religious worldviews, and religious leaders are often important people in the community. Organisations and individuals may be inspired by religions and beliefs to make a positive difference in their communities, while others sometimes use their religion or worldview to justify actions that do harm. Many well-known pieces of music and works of art reflect the ideas of religious and non-religious traditions present in the community. In some communities, one religion or worldview is influential; other communities are influenced by many different religions and worldviews living alongside each other. In some communities, religions and non-religious worldviews have little influence apart from among their followers.</p>
Big Idea 6: THE BIG PICTURE	<p>Stories from religions and non-religious worldviews are used to communicate important teachings and often form part of longer narratives. Some religious narratives begin with stories to explain how and why God created the universe and everything in it. Others focus more on the nature of the world itself rather than how it came to be. All religions and non-religious narratives have a lot to say about where human beings fit into the grand order of things. They seek to help people understand the mysteries of life such as whether or not there is life after death and how people might find meaning and purpose in their own lives. People come to understand these stories in different ways. These stories are valued because they come from trusted people or traditions. They are often found in texts believed to be divinely inspired and therefore sacred or holy. Non-religious narratives today usually draw upon scientific theories of how the universe began and predictions about how it will end.</p>

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<p>Big Idea 1: CONTINUITY, CHANGE AND DIVERSITY</p>	<p>There are a number of features that constitute a religion or non-religious worldview which can only be understood in relation to each other. Such features need to be understood in the context of their historical and cultural settings and the messages and lived experiences of the community being studied. Many people in the world belong to a religion; many others subscribe to non-religious worldviews; many others do not identify with any belief group. Religions and non-religious worldviews tend to be made up of several smaller groups. They usually share core beliefs and practices but there can be many differences between them. As a result, it is important that we do not make assumptions about all members of a religion on the basis of one group or individual. Most people recognise that religions do not stay the same; they change as a result of a number of factors, such as political and cultural differences, disagreements about ideology and authority, changes in population, the intervention of an influential person or group with a new interpretation of the religion – often several of these. Some think that religions and non-religious worldviews must adapt to the times. Others believe that there is one eternal truth for all time and that therefore their religion or non-religious worldview cannot change. Some people who do not agree with the decisions their leaders have made may break away and set up a new group. There are important differences in beliefs, values and practices between religions. There are also close connections between some religions for historical and cultural reasons.</p>
<p>Big Idea 2: WORDS AND BEYOND</p>	<p>Throughout history to the present day, people have used many methods to express their most profound beliefs and experiences. Sometimes this is in verbal form, and is communicated either orally or in writing. Non-verbal forms of communication may be used to communicate complex issues and make connections to key ideas, beliefs and practices. Different styles of non-verbal forms of communication, such as portraits, calligraphy, icons, sculptures, abstract, geometric and decorative arts and artefacts, may be used to express different aspects of religious or non-religious ideas or experiences. The extent to which these non-verbal forms of expression are used varies from religion to religion and between people of the same religion. The aim of some religious pictures, songs and choral music is often to remind people of important events, myths and stories in their tradition. They are also evidence of the faith of the community for which they were created. Both verbal and non-verbal forms of expression can be challenging to interpret and often raise further questions. The interpretation will, in part, depend on what is believed about the origins and inspiration behind them.</p>
<p>Big Idea 3: A GOOD LIFE</p>	<p>People have different ways of approaching moral issues. Some prioritise developing the virtues, personal qualities and characteristics that would make them a 'good' person – one who would live by these virtues and act on them when encountering moral challenges. Many people turn to religions and non-religious worldviews for guidance and personal examples of the virtues and qualities they should aspire to. Some people consider how their actions affect other people; some think that if they follow rules and codes of conduct they will do the right thing. It is very difficult to live a good life, even for people who try to follow the rules and guidance provided by their tradition. This is partly because the guidance from any tradition, religious or non-religious, does not extend to every situation with a moral dimension that face people today. So, we have to do our best by asking questions like 'what would be the best outcome from this situation?' or 'what might a person who is recognised as 'good' have done in this situation?' or 'what does this rule about right and wrong suggest I should do in this situation?'. Some religions and non-religious worldviews have different expectations for different groups of people. Some distinguish between rules revealed by God, those developed as a result of reasoned human reflection, those that are customs and traditions developed by community leaders over many years, and those that reflect the nature of the world.</p>
<p>Big Idea 4: MAKING SENSE OF LIFE'S EXPERIENCES</p>	<p>Many people find profound meaning at some points in their lives in mystical, religious, spiritual or peak experiences. These experiences may be prompted by encounters with the wonders of nature, beautiful works of art or music or with tragic events. Some people believe that any of these experiences are capable of putting them, or others, in touch with a greater power or powers or with other realms of existence and provide insights into the world and their place within it. Some individuals and groups say that experience of religious rituals and other practices help them make a connection with God or gods and with each other, or with what is most important to them. The experiences of a few key people are believed to have given them extraordinary insights into the nature of reality. They hold important and different places within one or more religions or non-religious worldviews. Some believe that these experiences are related to a spiritual dimension of human beings, which may or may not be associated with religion. Others deny that humans have a spiritual nature, believing that a human being is no more than a complex, highly evolved animal. Whether they see themselves as spiritual, religious or not, many people get a sense of identity from belonging to the same group as others who believe the same things, see the world in the same way, and have the same values. This can develop strong feelings of identity, belonging, loyalty and commitment.</p>
<p>Big Idea 5: INFLUENCE, COMMUNITY, CULTURE AND POWER</p>	<p>Religions and non-religious worldviews exist at several levels. Most people encounter religions at local level where they can make a difference to communities and individuals. At national level, everyone is affected when a religious or non-religious group influences the country's political and legal systems, its education system or the times of national holidays. Religious and non-religious groups also influence people's ideas about what is right and wrong and affect the way they respond to ethical issues. Some people see their role as one of offering a critique of prevailing social attitudes and practices. Religions and non-religious worldviews influence culture and community in places where they had power in the past and may still have it. Consequently, around the world countries and communities have very different relationships with religions and non-religious worldviews, from theocracies, where God is the source of all authority, to secular states, which may claim to be neutral in matters of religion and belief. Many communities have become more diverse and have responded to this diversity in different ways. Changes in community are also reflected in the arts, which in most communities continue to remind people of their traditional religious identities while also being affected by contemporary religious and non-religious ideas. Most religions have a global presence and respond to the hardship that results from natural disasters, war, prejudice or disability. The relationship between religions, cultures and communities is both complex and controversial, since it can be peaceful and harmonious or can lead to conflict and disagreement. The appeal to ideas about a superior authority or vision represented by God, an authoritative text, a powerful leader or a compelling vision of the future may be used to justify social and political actions. This may lead to social and spiritual improvement, but it may lead to intolerance and violence.</p>
<p>Big Idea 6: THE BIG PICTURE</p>	<p>Many religions and non-religious worldviews provide a coherent account of what the universe is like and why it is as it is. These accounts may be called 'grand narratives'. Grand narratives frequently begin with stories of how the universe came to be, whether or how it will end and the place of human beings in it. Other narratives treat these questions in terms of an ongoing cycle of life, death and rebirth. In most religious and non-religious narratives, people are acknowledged to be in some way imperfect. There are many different ideas about why this is so and some grand narratives provide guidance on how to be liberated from this state. Most religious narratives support the idea that there is some form of life after this one, which may be a spiritual existence or another physical one. Some religious narratives say that what happens to people after death depends on how good a life they have led; others emphasise faith in divine power; others stress belonging to a community and performing appropriate ceremonies; many combine all of these. These explanations of the meaning and purpose of life from a variety of sources. These can include community traditions, scientific evidence, personal experience, and reasoning. For many religious people the most important source of their big picture of the world is found in sacred texts, often believed to have been divinely inspired. Many¹ people identify with narratives that deny the existence of any divine beings or predetermined purpose in life and state that the only things that exist are those that can be experienced with the physical senses or verified by science.</p>

¹ This is a reference to UK statistics.

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<p>Big Idea 1: CONTINUITY, CHANGE AND DIVERSITY</p>	<p>There is no consensus on the meaning of the word 'religion' or how it may be clearly distinguished from a non-religious worldview. Religions and worldviews are often understood as multi-dimensional, where the main elements are doctrinal/philosophical, ritual/practical, mythological/narrative, ethical/legal, experiential/emotional, social/institutional, material/symbolic and economic/political. Some argue that they are best studied as whole systems of beliefs, practices and values; others as lived realities in individual communities. No religion or non-religious worldview is monolithic. Rather, they are diverse. Some people believe that there can only be one truth, and there can only be one true version of a religion, not several. Others value diversity and respect each other's right to difference. During the 20th and 21st centuries religions and non-religious worldviews have been challenged to give their response to many issues, particularly those involving gender, sexuality, marriage, roles of men and women, the environment and the role of religion in education. They have also been challenged from other schools of thought such as science, philosophy, history and sociology, as well as the media, in addition to being challenged by each other. Religious groups and individuals have responded differently to these challenges. They have to ask whether their differences allow them to work and live together in mutual respect and tolerance or whether their differences make such co-operation impossible. Awareness of a wider range of religions and non-religious worldviews can deepen, challenge or change people's views and commitments. Some people believe that there can only be one truth, that only one religion can be true and that there can only be one true version of a religion, not several. Others believe that truth may be found in many different religious and non-religious traditions. However, people may respect each other's right to difference, whatever their beliefs about truth. In response to religious plurality, many religious and non-religious groups are now involved in inter-faith organisations at local, national and international level, often with the purpose of working together for a cause.</p>
<p>Big Idea 2: WORDS AND BEYOND</p>	<p>It is very difficult to describe metaphysical concepts using everyday language, particularly in religions, which frequently refer to ideas beyond our ordinary understanding such as God, nirvana, soul and heaven. In attempting to express the inexpressible, people have used what philosophers call 'religious language'. People of all religions and non-religious worldviews have developed technical terms to express what they believe. They also use everyday language through metaphor and analogy. Non-verbal forms of communication may have an explanatory power of their own. Some pictures, songs and choral music can remind people of important events and stories in their tradition. Other works have less obvious meanings and require more interpretation. Many musical compositions and works of art were originally created to inspire or aid devotion or commitment. Today, these works are available in a wider range of contexts. Whether displayed or performed in a religious building to inspire worship or made available to the wider public in a concert hall or gallery, they can inspire people to reflect on spiritual ideas and ask important questions. Each religion and many different groups within the same religion differ in the extent to which the use of some or any forms of art is compatible with their beliefs and practices. The uses of some forms of non-verbal expression can lead to debate within religious groups. There are many ways of understanding verbal and non-verbal expressions of beliefs, experiences and commitments. They may be interpreted through studying the original purposes of the authors or artists, but also by studying the different meanings they may have for people today. Some forms of expression, such as sacred texts, are believed to be divinely inspired and may be interpreted in that light.</p>
<p>Big Idea 3: A GOOD LIFE</p>	<p>Religious and non-religious groups agree on some moral issues and disagree on others. They may have different <i>reasons</i> for their views and they may disagree with each other and among themselves about how to interpret their ideas of right and wrong, good and evil, and how to apply these ideas to difficult moral questions of today. People have different theories, which may be religious or non-religious, about how and why we ought to live a good life. Some teach 'virtue theory'. They say that in order to lead a moral life we should concentrate on developing a good character and good personal virtues such as generosity and compassion, which would then make us behave generously or compassionately. Others teach deontological theories. They say that the way to lead a moral life is to do one's duty or to follow the rules which tell us what is good or bad, right or wrong. A third group teach consequentialism. They say that we ought to act in the way that brings about the best overall results, no matter what those acts are. When people discuss contemporary moral issues from these perspectives, they may come up with very different answers. One of the big moral questions which is relevant for religious and non-religious worldviews alike is whether or not there are unchanging moral rules. Are there rules that apply to all people and at all times, irrespective of culture and regardless of circumstance, or does right and wrong depends on context and circumstance? Many moral conflicts result from clashes between these two points of view. This is partly because ideas about morality are closely connected to a group's core teachings about Ultimate Reality, what it is to be human and how we should relate to our planet. Various religious and non-religious organisations have tried to identify rules and principles that should apply universally.</p>
<p>Big Idea 4: MAKING SENSE OF LIFE'S EXPERIENCES</p>	<p>Some believe that consciousness is the key feature of being human. It is believed by some to be God-given constituting people's spiritual nature, which marks them out from the rest of the animal world and enables them to think beyond their ordinary experience. Some people regard their spirituality as the inner personal dimension of being religious, while others see themselves as spiritual rather than religious because they do not identify with traditional religious institutions or meta-narratives. There are also people who do not identify with either religion or spirituality. A few individuals are believed to have had exceptional experiences that have resulted in insights into the meaning and purpose of life which they have communicated to others. This can lead to the formation of new religions and non-religious worldviews, something which is still happening today. People from different religions and non-religious worldviews might disagree about the origin and meaning of religious, mystical, spiritual or peak experiences. Some find that religious rituals and other practices may enable them to experience a deep connection with God or gods, nature, their own consciousness or with each other. Membership of groups with whom they share beliefs, values and traditions often gives people a heightened sense of awareness, mystery, identity and belonging, and bring about a transformation in their lives.</p>
<p>Big Idea 5: INFLUENCE, COMMUNITY, CULTURE AND POWER</p>	<p>Religions and non-religious worldviews exist at several levels. Most people encounter religions at local level where they can make a difference to communities and individuals. At national level, everyone is affected when a religious or non-religious group influences the country's political and legal systems, its education system or the times of national holidays. Religious and non-religious groups also influence people's ideas about what is right and wrong and affect the way they respond to ethical issues. Some people see their role as one of offering a critique of prevailing social attitudes and practices. Religions and non-religious worldviews influence culture and community in places where they had power in the past and may still have it. Consequently, around the world countries and communities have very different relationships with religions and non-religious worldviews, from theocracies, where God is the source of all authority, to secular states, which claim to be neutral in matters of religion and belief. Many communities have become more diverse and have responded to this diversity in different ways. Changes in community are also reflected in the arts, which in most communities continue to remind people of their traditional religious identities while also being affected by contemporary religious and non-religious ideas. Most religions have a global presence and respond to the hardship that results from natural disasters, war, prejudice or disability. The relationship between religions, cultures and communities is both complex and controversial, since it can be peaceful and harmonious or can lead to conflict and disagreement. The appeal to ideas about a superior authority or vision represented by God, an authoritative text, a powerful leader or a compelling vision of the future may be used to justify social and political actions. On the one hand this may lead to social and spiritual improvement, but on the other hand this may lead to intolerance and violence.</p>
<p>Big Idea 6: THE BIG PICTURE</p>	<p>Many religions and non-religious worldviews have constructed an overarching narrative, sometimes called a 'grand narrative', which seeks to offer ways of understanding the big questions about the universe and the nature of humanity. Final answers are not always provided, but such narratives usually provide a context within which the questions may be understood. There are variations of belief about these narratives. Some people consider that their religious narrative cannot change, as it is true for all time. Others say that the narrative needs to be adapted or re-expressed to take account of new discoveries, changes in community or new cultural settings. Many people believe in a balance between innovation and common shared practice, but where and how to strike such a balance is often a subject of debate. Most religious narratives recognise an Ultimate Reality that may be expressed as a personal and loving God, an impersonal source of existence, or an eternal truth or principle that governs the universe. Other narratives, both religious and non-religious, focus more on the nature of the world itself and the human condition rather than on questions about the nature of God and creation. Religions and non-religious narratives tell very different stories about the nature of human beings and their place in the universe, but most of the religious narratives include common themes, such as why there is suffering in the world, why humans seem to be flawed, how they might find liberation or salvation or how they might make the world a better place. In some narratives death is the end for humans and all life forms; in others, humans, and sometimes other life forms, continue after death, although there are many different views on the form that existence beyond death will take, and on whether it is desirable. Most narratives that attempt to explain what the world is like appeal for their authority to one or more of community traditions, sacred texts, scientific evidence, personal experience and reasoning. For many religious people the most important source of their big picture of the world is found in sacred texts, though the nature of the 'truth' or 'truths' found in the texts is disputed. Many religious people accept scientific accounts and find no conflict with their religious beliefs. Others say that it is only possible to believe one or the other.</p>