



Looking at Easter: a sociological lens in the infant classroom



Harriet Butcher

Harriet Butcher teaches RE at Offenham CE First School in Evesham, Worcestershire. She enabled her infant pupils to be sociologists for a day in RE.

Where did the idea come from?

This academic year I have been participating in an 'Excellent RE' continuing professional development project led by Adam Robertson, RE adviser with RE Today. We have explored all areas of RE teaching, aiming to improve the quality of RE. We were introduced to the idea of investigating RE through different 'lenses'. Using the NATRE 'Big Questions: Big Answers' series, Adam gave examples of ways pupils could take on the roles of theologians, philosophers and sociologists, to gain a deeper insight into and more knowledge of different religions and worldviews. The idea was to see if this would also strengthen children's understanding of what people believe and how this is reflected through everyday lives.

What did I do?

Our infants unit of work was 'Why does Easter matter to Christians?' This was planned from the Understanding Christianity resources. When planning, I create a sequence of learning, titling each lesson with a key question. We have recently introduced 'Knowledge Catchers', where the children answer the key question at the end of each lesson, using knowledge they have acquired.

Eager to try out the idea of 'lenses' to enhance the quality of my RE teaching, I decided to include a lesson with the question 'Who celebrates Easter and what is important to them?' This presented pupils with the opportunity to become 'sociologists' and investigate how people live in the world today, in relation to their religion.

I began the topic as usual with an assessment of the children's existing knowledge. I then used a general approach to Easter by beginning to link the idea of 'new life' by spotting signs of spring. This is something I would refer back to as we progressed towards the theological aspect of this unit.

The children are familiar with the 'big story' of the Bible and its core concepts. The Understanding Christianity frieze panels are referred to in both collective worship and RE lessons. For Easter, I used the Salvation panel. I continue to show the children this frieze panel each lesson, ensuring they understand where it fits within the 'big story'.

I feel it is important that the children are given opportunities to express their own ideas and beliefs and make connections to their own lives. For this reason, I decided to plan the sociology lesson at the beginning of the sequence and then continue with the theological input in the remainder of the lessons.

Here is my sequence of learning for this unit:

- Why is Easter important to Christians?
- Can we spot signs of spring?
- Who celebrates Easter, and what is important to them?
- What are the key events in the Easter story?
- Why is the Easter story both happy and sad?
- How do Christians remember the story of Holy Week and Easter?
- What do Christians believe about Jesus' resurrection and new life?

The sociology lesson began with a short introduction to the role of a sociologist. The children always enjoy learning new terminology. This term was placed in our RE Learning Zone, alongside other key vocabulary for the unit of work.

In my PowerPoint resource, I often include a key 'character' who talks directly to the children. I also chose to include a symbol for sociology as a visual prompt. Moving forward, I plan to include a symbol whenever the children are using each of the 'lenses', to help them to distinguish between the different roles. I am also thinking of badges for children to wear.

We began with a simple analysis of some existing data about Easter celebrations that I retrieved from YouGou and Statista.com (after searching for 'Easter statistics in the UK'). The children were made aware of how they were 'linking their learning' by applying their data-handling skills from their maths lessons to their RE learning. Exploring the existing data allowed them to understand the type of data that they would be collecting.

We discussed Easter celebrations: children identified Easter as a Christian festival, and were aware that many people choose to celebrate Easter, regardless of their religion, and that for some it has become a secular tradition. The children decided that they would like to find out who celebrates Easter within our school community and how they choose to celebrate.

I used the headings from the examples that I showed to the children, alongside some of my own, to create my own survey, which I then presented to the children. I explained how the table worked in terms of collecting the data, and they used their maths skills to tally the results.

