



Buried Treasure

A Westhill Award funded project by Cumbria SACRE



Concept

The concept behind this project was to provide students with an opportunity to access sacred texts. By going directly to the source, this demonstrates that not only do the great religions of the world have something to say that is relevant for today, but they also have similar things to say.

The sacred texts are the 'buried treasure' - buried under thousands of years, traditions, ceremony and translation. The aim was for students to explore the writings from five different religions on five different themes. First, they read the quotations and consider what they mean. Next, they test out if they think they hold some truth or relevance for the world today through a practical activity and use their findings to review the quotations again. Then, they move on to the next station and repeat the pattern.

When all five have been completed, each student creates artefacts (the treasures) using a range of art materials. They select and write out one of the quotations and decorate it. Materials used include sparkly beads and gem stickers but also more natural treasures such as shells and feathers. Students have free choice about which quotation they use and how they create their treasure.



Development conundrums

Deciding which themes should be focused on was a consideration that caused some interesting discussion amongst the Cumbria SACRE Working Group for this project. *Could it really NOT include peace? Aren't truthfulness and honesty the same thing? Could two concepts be linked together?* This was an aspect of the project that was not anticipated and has led to a richer understanding of these concepts by members of the Working Group beyond their own faith or belief.

We had to think carefully about how the groups would move around to each station and how to organise the right amount of resources and activities that could be easily reset for each new group. We also wanted to gauge the students' understanding and attitude of sacred texts so we decided to carry out a baseline assessment at the start and an evaluation at the end of the day.

We also considered the number of art materials we would need for students to create their artefacts. *How many sparkly beads would we need? Would they copy each other or come up with their own original artefacts?*

The most interesting challenge was around the sacred texts themselves and this led to much discussion and reflection between the Working Group. Some of the key issues were:

- *Who would decide which were the best quotes to be used for each theme?*
- *How do we ensure those used are authentic/authoritative?*
- *What version or translation of the sacred texts should be used?*
- *Would students be able to cope with archaic language Thee, Thou etc?*

Implementation

Pilot - St Oswalds, Burneside – Spring 2019

We ran a small pilot with a Year 5/6 class for an afternoon in order to gauge how we might need to plan on a larger scale with more schools over a whole day. This proved challenging, especially as the time allowed was cut by twenty minutes when we arrived. We had decided to focus on two themes with students working independently on the activities in small groups. We moved the activities, rather than the student groups to save time. Approximately half of the class looked at one theme and half at the other one. Although the time constraints were challenging, students got to make some treasures and they all engaged with the activity enthusiastically. We received some valuable feedback from the class teacher at the end of the day.

The key things learned from this small pilot were that the concept worked but we felt that each group needed a facilitator to explore the quotations more purposefully and manage the activity. We also realised that more time should be given to introducing the copies of the sacred texts on display.



The big day itself - Queen Katherine School, Kendal Summer 2019



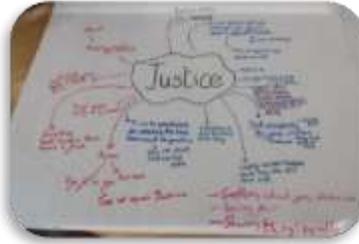
This was held at a secondary school with groups from six primary schools each bringing along four students. Due to a request by the Head of RE of the secondary school, the day was hosted by their RE ambassadors rather than as a transition activity with Year 7s or 8s.

At the start of the day, students completed a baseline assessment survey and a continuum line activity to give an indication of the students understanding of sacred texts and religion. This also gave an energetic start to the day.

Next, the five faith representatives from Cumbria SACRE (Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Jewish and Muslim) talked about their sacred texts – using their personal copies and these were on display throughout the day. This felt very meaningful by putting sacred texts into a contemporary context.



Each group had a facilitator, largely drawn from Cumbria SACRE Working Group members – who had been carefully briefed and provided with prepared resources. Moving around to each station ran smoothly and although the format was the same at each table the variety of activities meant this was fresh and engaging for each theme and group.



Creating the gems for the treasure boxes provided valuable time to reflect on the quotations and concepts. Free choice of which quotation to use resulted in lots of the same quotations being used and some not used at all. After each school had put all their quotes into their own treasure box and tables were cleared of creative materials, there was a question session in groups with individual faith representatives.

The day closed with a return to the baseline questions and continuum exercise.



Changing it up - Newbarns and Furness Academy, Barrow in Furness Spring 2020

The project was modified to allow the whole year group at Newbarns primary to take part. The sessions were repeated with half the class taking part in the morning and the other half in the afternoon. They were also joined by a groups of Year 7 students from Furness Academy which meant we could see how it worked as a transition activity, as had been our original aim of the project. The shortened timescale was managed by having five groups and five topics but students only moved around three times. This meant they did not all experience every topic but we felt it was important not to compromise the time spent with each theme.



We were able to see whether refinements made from the day at Queen Katherine School were implemented successfully. For example, an experiment with magnets for the topic on love was simplified and a new story for the truthfulness topic was sourced.

The faith reps who facilitated the first event were not available for this day and so others were asked. This provided Cumbria SACRE with some new contacts and additional learning for the Working Group as these facilitators were a fresh pair of eyes on the project.



Some of the art materials used for the first day were no longer available so other materials had to be found – there would be around 80 students taking part throughout the whole day so we needed to make sure we had sufficient to capture the students' imagination.

A simplified assessment tool was developed with four words chosen to represent how the students felt about the sacred texts (calm, confident, confused, unsure) They were given coloured stars and asked to vote for whichever words best described their feeling at the start and end of the session, using different coloured stars to see if there was a shift in attitudinal thinking towards sacred texts. Although we provided a short opportunity for class feedback on this, it was recognised the assessment activity could have been extended further in small groups with more chance for reflection.





Spreading the word – Robert Ferguson Primary School – Autumn 2019

Having learned about the project at a P4C training session a teacher from Carlisle implemented the work over a half term using one of the topics each week for two Year five classes. She gave feedback that she could have given a much longer time to the project to properly explore the themes. A key difference in this project was that students were allowed to write their own version of the quotations: *“the children wrote their own quotes following each lesson and placed them in our 'treasure' box. They loved this! We often ran over time as most of the children liked to share their quote with the class as they placed it into the box. Even children who wouldn't normally be keen to speak out in class. I did a display of their quotes in school. It was lovely to see children from other year groups stop and read them as they walked past.”*



Highlights

Cumbria SACRE has never carried out a project on this scale, visiting schools and working with students and teachers in a more creative way like this. It was wonderful to see the concept in action – witnessing how the students engaged with the activities. It's been interesting to see how it has developed and been adapted far beyond the original idea. This has been an extremely positive and valuable learning experience for Cumbria SACRE Working Group, enabling us to build our confidence beyond Q and A faith and belief panels and speaker visits. Without doubt, it has strengthened relationships between Working Group members and puts us in a good place for developing future projects.





So far, approximately 180 students from 11 schools around the county have taken part in the project. There has been a positive response from all the schools involved, the teachers and students. The responses made by the students have been thoughtful and insightful, and some beautiful artefacts have been created for a Treasure Box for each school. We hope we have provided a memorable experience of being with faith representatives and engaging with sacred texts that has a positive impact in future RE lessons.

A presentation about the project was made at the annual Cumbria SACRE RE conference in June 2019 and some of the activities were facilitated for teachers attending, which was well received. This enabled us to demonstrate how the Buried Treasure activity exemplifies the conceptual and enquiry approach required by the Cumbria Agreed Syllabus for RE.

Philosophy for Children

The funding enabled the Project Lead to undertake some SAPERE Philosophy for Children training at Level 1 and Level 2A. This was invaluable in helping to develop and strengthen how the activities were created and facilitated. It also enhanced the evaluation element of the project.

Key learning

Transition opportunities between KS2 and KS3 – this element needed a little more consideration and facilitation. The older students from Furness Academy were paired up and each assigned to a group at Newbarnes but they didn't seem to particularly engage with each other. One consideration might have been to undertake some ice-breaker activities, so they felt more comfortable together.

Quotations – there were a great many for the students to try and process in one day. Some of the language was a challenge but not so much in the archaic nature as had been predicted, but more in the meaning of some words e.g. tranquillity. This will require the facilitator to make sure all words are understood to a level where the quote makes sense for students. We felt that doing less and going deeper with a quotation might lead to more lasting learning.

Each concept could be looked at separately in a classroom context allowing more time to reflect on the words, the meaning of the sacred texts and their similarities and relevance for today. There is a need for flexibility, and an open-minded approach to the timescale for sessions e.g. at St Oswald's where timings unexpectedly changed. Having faith reps added a great deal to the day but having to find five for a session would make it complicated to stage this in the same format for every class.

During the art making, lots of the same quotations were chosen by students. This could be managed so students choose a quote with most personal meaning, but allow groups to take responsibly for making sure there is a diversity of quotes for their Treasure Box. It was felt



that more focus was required on the selection and writing out of the quotation, with extra time spent on exploring the meaning.

Some students wanted to write their own version of the quotation and they did this at Robert Ferguson School. The benefit of this is that students have clearly thought about the meaning. However, a key point of the project is to connect directly with the sacred text - the buried treasure – so it is important that the specific quotations are emphasised as well.

Recording the student’s own assessment of the day was challenging. The use of the words and star stickers was better in that it showed a visual representation for the whole class. However, there wasn’t time to explore why the students felt the way they did. For example, if a student used a sticker to indicate they were *confident* at the start and were *unsure* at the end this could mean they had begun to open up and think differently rather than they hadn’t understood. The importance of dialogue as part of self-assessment activities was recognised. A visual self-assessment scale has since been identified and circulated to teachers involved in the project and there is agreement it would make a valuable tool for the Unit of Work.

Lasting resource

- Each school that participated has been left with a treasure box containing the gems that students made.
- The collection of quotations from different religions relating to five themes is a valuable resource.
- New contacts and connections have been made with and between schools, SACRE and faith reps in the county.
- The project is now being developed as a Unit of Work to help fulfill the requirements of the Cumbria Agreed Syllabus for RE. This will be called: “*What can we learn from sacred texts?*” and will be available on the Cumbria [SACRE website](#).

With thanks to all participating schools and members of Cumbria SACRE Working Group, faith representatives from South Cumbria and Cumbria Development Education Centre.

This report was written by Cumbria SACRE Baha’i representative, Karen O’Donoghue who is the Buried Treasure Project Lead. Any enquiries about this project, please contact the Clerk to Cumbria SACRE sue.mcgaw@cumbria.gov.uk

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Unity



Honesty



Love



Truthfulness



Justice

