



Suitable for:  
Teachers

### The History of Islam

Barry Rubin, Mason Crest 2010, ISBN 978142205310, 64pp, hbk, £9.99.

### Islam in Europe

Michael Radu, Mason Crest 2011, ISBN 9781422213636, 64pp, hbk, £9.99. ISBN 9781422213667, 64pp, pbk (2010) £8.95.

This series originates in the USA, produced by the Foreign Policy Research Institute, an American thinktank, and claims to provide a balanced explanation of the religion of Islam and its people. Each volume, set out clearly, contains photos, a chronology and a small bibliography.

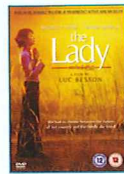
The publishers pronounce the series to be a success. However, others have found the books disturbingly anti-Islamic, both in tone and message. In the main Muslims are portrayed as being inherently violent; Islam is regarded as a second-rate religion and the underlying warning is that one should be wary of Muslims in any society.

Having looked at several books in the series, I am in agreement with this latter view. None of these books is written by Muslims and they are often prejudicial. There are many places where the language is misleading, the rhetoric inflammatory and the information inaccurate. Some examples of this may be found in the very negative portrayal of the prophet Muhammad, the assumption that the majority of Muslims understand jihad as a struggle against non-Muslims to increase Islamic territorial control, and a very limited acknowledgement of the contribution of Muslims to European culture and knowledge.

There is no sense of joy or celebration displayed by any of the Muslims in the photographs. The text and page colouring reinforces the gloom of the message portrayed in the narrative.

These books are prejudicial and ideological and therefore unsuitable for use in the classroom.

Jackie Metcalfe



Suitable for:  
Ages 14–19

### The Lady

A film by Luc Besson with Michelle Yeoh and David Thewlis, DVD 2011, 127 mins, £9.00.

For about a dozen years I've been urging RE teachers of Buddhism to get their pupils to learn the story of Aung San Suu Kyi, Burmese democratic leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner, because her astounding moral courage and exemplary determination in the struggle for freedom in her land are an inspiration.

This moving and detailed film of her life begins in 1947, jumps to 1999 and then returns to follow her emergence as Burma's pro-democratic leader, and her long imprisonment. Dramatic licence – but not too much for me – makes the story flow, and the contrast between an often grey and rainy Oxford and Rangoon, by turns exotic and menacing, gives the story energy, pace and drama. The film score is outstanding, ranging from U2 via Pachelbel's *Canon* to the music of Burma itself.

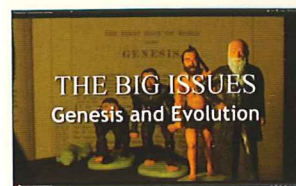
The brutal regime of the Burmese military, which ran from 1962, is shown rather simplistically, led as much by superstition as by economic self-interest. The occasional brutality of the images in the film is a brooding presence whenever the military appear, and explodes occasionally in brief scenes of violent death or torture, so a '12' certificate is justified.

The central dilemmas of Aung San Suu Kyi's life are to do with the practice of non-violence and the tension between the struggle for national freedom in Burma and the love of family. These are presented with great clarity. It is the latter of the two that is most dramatically presented here, as Aung San demonstrates her willingness to suffer with her people as she waits for the freedom in which she believes.

It is not surprising, but perhaps a regret, that the film does not explore any of the religious influences on Burmese life and culture, apart from occasional non-specific references to monks and monasteries, but the movie as a whole offers an opportunity for students to build their understanding of Buddhist teaching and practice in an inspiring way.

This is a superb resource for religious education – I recommend that you buy it, watch it, teach it and clip it for your classes.

Lat Blaylock



Suitable for:  
Ages: 7–14

### Science & Belief: The Big Issues An online resource

Videos available on YouTube (<http://tiny.cc/rh0j1w>) and teachers' notes (40pp) free from RE Today: <http://www.retoday.org.uk/news/science-belief>

Videos filmed by Two Cats Can: [www.twocatscan.co.uk](http://www.twocatscan.co.uk)

There are 12 videos in this series, each lasting about 10 minutes. A sequence of three 'information' programmes introduce topics leading to questions for debate, followed by a video of round-table discussion of the topics.

After the initial comments from young people, the setting of the videos promotes interest. Russell Stannard sits at an antique desk. On and around the desk there are curious and interesting items – a grandfather clock, a telescope, a crucifix, models demonstrating evolution, a model of DNA, books, a menorah. These vary to some extent from video to video. From the drawers of the desk, he takes out items from time to time to illustrate the discussion – a clock, a model of ET, and so on.

On the desk, there is a computer screen where film and still images appear to illustrate and develop the discussion. As well as the effective use of image in the discussion and development of the issues, Russell Stannard also refers to sources and other expertise. The conversational style makes the argument and discussion easy to follow. He also refers back to the comments made by the young people. At the end of each video there are two questions which appear in text on the screen.

The round-table discussion is also well handled. Questions appear on the screen. Discussion is filmed, sometimes with the screen divided, to show different participants, which I found effective. The video ends with the discussion still continuing, which indicates clearly that this material is not presenting tidy answers but is raising questions. Nevertheless there is clarity and lucidity.

This style of learning might be particularly appropriate for young people, but could equally well be used with adult groups, encouraging them to be more open to question and debate, to offer their own views, opinions and experience in a more open way.

Stuart Scott



Suitable for:  
Teachers

### A Sense of Place: Peace Justice Reconciliation

DVD and CD-ROM. Emma Jardine, RE Consultant (Staffordshire LA), produced by QLS, Staffordshire, 2012, £15 inc VAT.

*A Sense of Place: Peace Justice Reconciliation* is an exploration on DVD and CD-ROM into the National Memorial Arboretum (NMA) by a group of GCSE Religious Studies students from two high schools in Staffordshire.

The students' experience of visiting the NMA and their thoughts and reflections on the concepts of remembrance, peace, justice and reconciliation are presented through seven short films. The films can be used singly, or in sequence interspersed with opportunities for discussion and creative work. They are also an ideal preparation for a visit to the NMA, which is to be recommended.

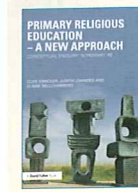
'Music Video' shows the students being shown round the NMA against a background of the song 'Where We Come From' sung by Wolverhampton-based singer/songwriter Sam Draisey. This helps create a reflective and respectful atmosphere, with the lyrics providing food for thought about the meaning and power of the key concepts at the heart of the resource.

The other films (Initial Thoughts; What Causes War?; Remembrance; Symbols; Reflections; Final Thoughts) focus on the students sharing their personal thoughts and questions as a result of their visit, and articulating simply and powerfully the impact of their visit. These films are all the more powerful for being presented by the young people themselves, and are also accessible to 7–11s, for example as stimulus to classwork or assemblies related to Remembrance Day.

The CD-ROM contains lesson plans and accompanying resources for four lessons exploring the themes of the resource. There is also a bank of 91 high-resolution photographs from the NMA which provide additional stimulus material for RS lessons, and can also be used in other areas of the school curriculum, for example assembly.

*A Sense of Place* is a powerful learning resource for RE, all the more so for being presented by young people and rooted in their own learning journey. It is a flexible and cost-effective resource, packed with excellent stimulus material.

Rosemary Rivett



Suitable for:  
Ages 14–19

### Primary Religious Education: A New Approach

Clive Erricker, Judith Lowndes and Elaine Bellchambers, Routledge 2010, ISBN 9780415480673, 224pp, pbk, £22.99.

In *Primary Religious Education: A New Approach*, you can trace the history of the many different pedagogies of recent decades which have come and gone since old-style RE and its confessional approach was abandoned. We have had the easy, 'going-nowhere' road of the factual approach with its inevitable content-overload; swing the pendulum and you have a rather wishy-washy 'spiritual' approach which optimistically assumes that if you present children with the stimulus of 'a religious element charged with the sacred beauty of faith ... something numinous' then awe and wonder will ensue.

This book challenges the twin attainment targets 'Learning about Religion' and 'Learning from Religion' so often trotted out as a rationale for RE. Once this two-pronged approach seemed to make sense, but somehow the two ideals never met – and while the former could be merely pointless, doesn't the latter sound just a bit smug, with too many assumptions being made?

Judith Lowndes and Clive Erricker wrote (with the support of a working party including Elaine Bellchambers) and launched *Living Difference*, the 2004 Agreed Syllabus for Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton (later adopted by Westminster and Camden) in which there is just one single attainment target: 'Interpreting religion in relation to human experience'. In this approach, religious content in RE is reduced, and concepts drive the learning instead – concepts which extend beyond RE into children's own lives and make the learning meaningful. In a chapter about the evaluation of *Living Difference* undertaken in 2008/9, one teacher explains: 'The skills in LD are frankly functional skills in today's world. I want them [pupils] to be able to think for themselves, to justify what they think.'

This accessible book tackles such matters as 'What is good RE?' ('Good RE should enable pupils to engage with the issues which arise out of religion, both positive and negative'), 'Why conceptual enquiry?' ('educational development is not essentially dependent on the subject content, rather the subject is a vehicle used for the larger educational development of the learner') and How can we make RE meaningful?

One teacher who has seen the value of the conceptual approach says: '[It] helps teachers to deliver interesting RE – it's got variety and point and it's linked to kids' lives ... how those particular concepts affect children's lives.'

There are case studies and sound practical advice on how to transform your own practice as well as a very helpful perspective on harnessing the strengths of non-specialist teachers. Other issues explored are the danger of promoting stereotypes by ignoring the diversity and conflicts within religion, the immense value of cross-curricular links and, crucially, the challenge of achieving the right atmosphere and ethos in which 'teachers are required to link what goes on in the classroom with home and the wider communities. They need to have established good, appropriate relationships, value the pupil as a human being rather than on an academic level and respect pupils' ideas and expressions of belief.' (p40)

Anyone who strives to find ways to make the subject relevant and challenging to pupils will find that this book not only provokes thought but also provides clear insight into a well-founded but ultimately commonsense approach to RE.

Kathy Bagley

In the last issue of *REtoday* (Autumn 2012) we published a review of this resource with incorrect publication details. We offer our apologies to the publisher and the reviewer, and now repeat the review, this time with the correct details.