



Philosophy
Circles

What is a 'religion'?

'Religion' is a classic concept that we're generally familiar with, yet an agreed definition is remarkably hard to pin down. It's beset with interesting questions like 'Can you have a religion with only one follower?' or 'Does a religion need a belief?' This session is particularly good to do after a study of more than one religion.



Get pupils into pairs, and begin with a game of ['Word-Tennis'](#) based on the theme of religion. Let vocabulary bounce back and forth in the pairs. If there's space, quickly expand to a game of 'Word-Volleyball' with the class split in two.

This establishes some common concepts related to religion, and provides a helpful reminder of learning about RE to date.



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Introduce the sorting cards attached. Which of them is needed to make a religion, a religion? I've found the best way to explain the task is to do one as an example. So pull the top one from the pile and say 'Does a religion need a holy building? Yes or No?' and mimic putting it in one of two piles.

This is a brilliant way of establishing what philosophers call 'sufficient criteria' for a concept. It often provokes excellent examples and counter-examples from their existing knowledge.



Once a group is done, you could challenge them to add any other criteria they can think of. We've created ten, but there's certainly a few more, such as a religious leader.

Each card is an interesting Y-Question in itself, but once each group is done, you could find one for all to discuss by looking for differences in opinion between groups. You'll easily find questions like those in the italicised paragraph above, that can run and run. Alternatively, ask groups to nominate the feature that created the most disagreement.

Be careful not to ask children in minorities – say, the only avowed Christian in a group – to be as the 'native informant', that is, representing the view of all Christians. This wouldn't be expected of children in the majority!

NEXT STEPS

To apply all this thinking, can pupils come up with a definition of religion? If time, respond / ask others to evaluate the suggestions, to help refine them.

For example, if a pupil says 'A religion is a group of people who believe the same thing' – ask if a football crowd who all believe their team is the best is a religion. It might be like one (!) but if not, there must be something more that distinguishes a religion.

Another question that invites pupils to apply their thinking is 'Is it possible to invent a religion?' Their answers to this will depend on what they've already discussed. When put like this, it may even make them change their thinking.

Your school has paid for this resource, so please do not pass it on - we need to earn a living too!
Please recommend our free resources available at www.thephilosophyman.com

Holy buildings



A god or gods



A symbol



Lots of followers



A history



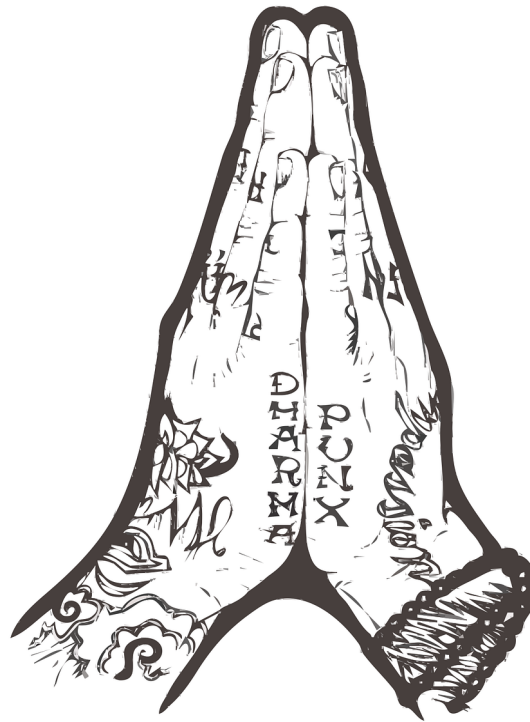
Special traditions



Stories



Prayers



Teachings



Belief / faith

