

Using Films in RE

If you are interested in how to use films in RE (films other than the obvious specialist RE materials, or videos of the Hajj that is...) you would do well to consult <http://www.refuel.org.uk/curric/xphase/filmfaith/> This website was constructed by the North East Religious Learning Resource Centre and I have shamelessly plagiarised their lesson suggestions for “Prince of Egypt” and “The Snowman” below. They also have worked examples using films such as, “Toy Story”, “The Messenger” and “Deep Impact” and a constantly expanding, really helpful, set of website links.

Films are always popular with children, and a poll of any class will probably reveal a broad knowledge of current film culture. It will probably also reveal that many children are watching films which are *not* recommended for their age range, and, in some cases, which you may consider to be inculcating inappropriate behaviour. Children tend to be passive consumers of films rather than critical observers – they are not necessarily aware of how their mood is being manipulated by music, or the mechanics of the film – and instead of analysing the film content they simply absorb and internalise it. By using short extracts appropriately in RE lessons, you can help pupils to become critical readers of films and to evaluate the implicit messages they contain.

Whichever theme you are addressing in RE there will be films that can be used to illustrate it. Immediately, of course, you will realise that not all of these are appropriate – to quote a really obvious example, if you are teaching Easter and the resurrection you are not going to want a zombie movie, or “The Mummy Returns”! However, mainstream films frequently address some of the big questions of life – exactly the same things as you have featured in your RE Syllabus – so why not make use of them?

Film can be used in many ways especially as a starter activity or to support thinking skills activities such as a community of enquiry.

Don't worry about the copyright implications of using commercial films in RE, you are allowed to show films in whole or in part in a teaching session as long as it is part of the curriculum and you are not making a financial charge for the activity. (Incidentally, you are not supposed to show films for the purposes of “entertainment” in school according to copyright law – I wonder how many schools did just that this Christmas?)

The question of showing an extract of a film which is classified as only for those older than your pupils is a different matter. Here it would be wise to seek permission from the Headteacher and governors first (demonstrating the film's educational value in the context you are using it) and then alert the parents in advance of its use, thus giving them the opportunity of withdrawing their child from the lesson should they so wish.

Here are two examples of using film to stimulate RE work, these are both taken from the REfuel website.

1) Approach religious material allegorically: Creation, the Creator and the Created

Film to use:
The Snowman
Section to use:
- The Boy creates the Snowman
(start at beginning and end at 3 minutes - the completion of the Snowman)



In exploring the content of this clip it is important to appreciate the cinematic techniques used and to encourage pupils to consider these when they discuss their responses to the film.

Cinematic Points to consider:

- This clip is dialogue free - how does the music convey mood / emotion?
- How do the different camera angles help to express the developing relationship between the boy and the Snowman?

Points for the Teacher to consider:

There are parallels between this clip and the Judaeo-Christian creation story: first there was nothing, from the materials available God forms a man, the man is created in God's own image. The creator personally forms and then cares for the creation. The creation has free will.

Key Questions that may be useful to explore in unpacking this clip:

The boy initially made a snowball that hit the house - was this a good way to use the snow - how do we know?

Does the boy take care when he is making the snowman?

How is it dressed - where did these clothes come from?

When the snowman is finished is the boy happy: does he like his creation?

What do you think will happen next?

Outline the Snowman coming to life: When the snowman comes alive will he like the boy?

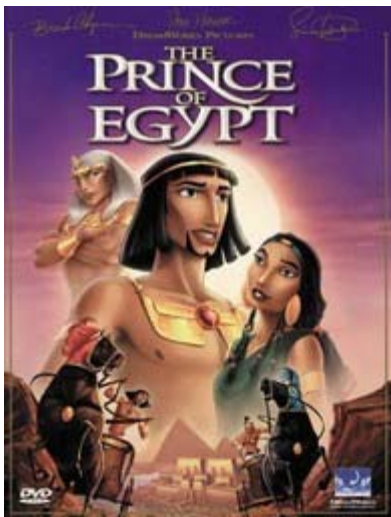
Many people believe that God created the world and all the people in it. Is God like the boy or is He/She different?

If you were able to create someone what would they be like - what powers would they have? How would you treat them? (You could give pupils a 'recipe' page here for them to list the 'ingredients / personality / powers' of their creation.)

The Snowman tells us that a creator can create, love and play with his creation but it also tells us that the creation is free. The boy does not control the Snowman - it sometimes does things that the boy does not like. In the end the boy has to accept that his creation will melt away and 'die'.

If you could ask / or say something to God about the world what would it be?

2) Explore the Lives of Founders / Religious Experience / Revelation / The Nature of God



Film: Prince of Egypt Section to use: The Burning Bush - Moses learns that God has a task for him. (start at 41 minutes and end at 46 minutes - Moses leaves the cave)

In exploring the content of this clip it is important to appreciate the cinematic techniques used and to encourage pupils to consider these when they discuss their responses to the film.

Cinematic Points to consider:

- How are colours used to denote mood/emotions?
- How do the different camera-angles help to convey what is happening?
- How is God characterised through the voice / dialogue / colours?

Points for the Teacher to consider:

- The voice of God is composed of male and female tones.
- In the Bible the encounter takes place on 'the mountain of God' - why set Moses' encounter in a cave?
- The power of God is mainly seen through Moses' experience - the camera is rarely on the tree itself.
- The cinematic account makes several omissions and deviations from the biblical account.

Key Questions that may be useful to explore in unpacking this clip:

What is God like? (Male/female, kind/unkind, friendly/scary)

How did Moses' emotions change during his encounter with God? (A 'Fortune Line' may be helpful here)

If you had an experience like this how would you feel? Would you feel worried or special, happy or sad, brave or frightened?

Moses was asked to stand up for his people and help them to be free - who would you help / stand up for?

Extension task

This film starts with the following quotation:

"The motion picture you are about to see is an adaptation of the Exodus story.

While artistic and historical licence has been taken we believe that this film is true to the essence, values and integrity of a story that is a cornerstone of faith for millions of people worldwide."

With older pupils you could compare this cinematic presentation with the biblical account (Exodus 3:1-4:17). How has the film altered the biblical account, what has been added, left out or changed? Why do you think the writer / director decided to make these changes?