

The AQA GCSE Religious Studies Syllabus, 'Christianity and Islam' and the 'Two Chairs Exchange.'



Using academic research to deliver and extend the new AQA GCSE RS Syllabus: a mini scheme of work with resources and lesson plans.

by

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Project Summary:

This project aims to distil ideas from James Hodkinson's academic research on the history of Christian-Islamic relations and use them to help deliver the AQA GCSE curriculum. The Two Chairs concept draws on examples from German history and culture, and presents them in an engaging manner for KS4 pupils. The concept centres on an ideal of interfaith relations that seeks to build relationships between faiths on the basis of both differences and similarities, i.e. to explore shared ethics, beliefs, practices and scripture (similarities), but also to understand and respect the mutual distinctiveness of religious law, observance and belief (differences).

In the following you'll find a resourced five lessons designed by Cecilia Townley and James Hodkinson. In each the Two Chairs concept is not so much students should write about explicitly, but a learning tool that helps pupils both to conceive and write about more sophisticated relationships between the two faiths *and* a method around which to base group work and paired activities. The idea challenges students to look at key issues from multiple faith perspectives and thus to broaden their responses to the 12 mark questions on the exam paper specifically, and their thinking and writing generally.



*The Hafis-Goethe Monument in Weimar, Germany.
Opened in 2001.*

Detailed description:

Implementing a new curriculum is always stressful. There's a great culture of resource sharing amongst teachers of RS/RE already in evidence on online forums and social media, though one area that seems to leave colleagues nonplussed or concerned are the 12 Mark essay answers. The following mini-scheme of work is designed to help enrich pupil's responses to key questions that may arise in the 12 Mark answers of the exam paper, though also to enrich their thinking and writing. The scheme:

- outlines the historical context and core ideas of the **Two Chairs** idea;
- promotes exploring both similarities and differences of belief and practice between faiths;
- Promotes comparative thinking, asking pupils to view common themes and problems from multiple faith perspectives;
- aims to enrich pupils' writing and to move them beyond polarized, normative and judgemental thinking;
- aims to achieve this through a set of resources, including a short introductory film, five lessons plans with power-points to help launch and drive the lessons, revisiting the core idea throughout in both theory and practice.

To begin with, here's some: **historical background**. This may or may not be used in the lessons - or used with varying amounts of detail, according to a group's needs and interest. In a collection of poems entitled the West-Eastern Divan (1819), the 19th Century German writer Johann Wolfgang Goethe imagined himself meeting the 14th Century Persian poet Hafis of Shiraz, and engaging in dialogue with him. The relationship was far more than a meeting of opposites, though: instead Goethe found himself identifying closely with aspects of Hafis's faith (Islam) though without losing his Christian heritage. The poems illustrate the idea that we find both similarities and differences if we look closely at other cultures and faiths - especially if we attempt to view the world through the eyes and beliefs of others, rather than thinking solely in terms of our own faith.

The spirit of the Goethe's original idea is embodied in the iconic Hafis Monument in Weimar, Germany, which uses two stone chairs, mutually distinct but hewn from the same granite block, to represent an imaginary meeting between the two poets, and between members of two different cultures generally. Those cultures are engaged in a particular form of non-confrontational dialogue, exploring aspects of their mutual

differences and their similarities. A short video film can be used to outline this background and launch the lessons.

In the broadest sense, the lessons seek to use cultural artefacts (images, poems) to enrich debate about belief, doctrine and its exegesis. Throughout the image of the Two Chairs remains as memorable, iconic model that remains in pupils' cultural vocabulary as a 'meme'. It encourages pupils to compare and contrast how a Christian and a Muslim might view the same problems, though to do so in as objective a manner as possible. What, for example a Christian learn from Mohammed/a Muslim, or a Muslim from Jesus/St Paul/ a prominent Christian thinker on themes like punishment, human rights, gender and sexuality? What can the Two Chairs idea bring to pupil's discussion of interfaith relations? What importance does empathy have in this context? The lessons seek to explore these topics and also take the Two Chairs ideas as a template for group work activities.

Contents of the Scheme:

1. A short, introductory student-facing video to be used in the first lesson;
2. A first lesson on interfaith dialogue;
3. A second and third lesson applying the two chairs idea to issues of human rights;
4. A fourth lesson on conflict, peace and resolution;
5. A fifth lesson on women's rights.

The lessons are numbered sequentially and could be delivered back-to-back as a revision programme to boost performance in the build-up to examinations or another suitable time. However, the scheme can also be 'split' and used to deliver stand-alone lessons within topics across longer periods. Whilst Lesson 1 involves an introduction with a film clip and the subsequent lessons offer starter activities which revisit that material, the introduction could easily be swapped into the starter section of any of the other lessons - so you could launch with lesson 2, 3, 4 or 5 and rejig the order to suit yourselves. Please feel free to be creative with these plans - they are detailed in an attempt to make them 'ready to use', though they are not set in stone. We'd most appreciate your use of and feedback on the core Two Chairs idea, however.

After the lessons:

We would really appreciate hearing back from anyone who was used the scheme of work and the two chairs approach. What worked well and what was more problematic? How did the Two Chairs element of the lessons make a contribution? Will you be taking the approach forward and using it elsewhere? This will help the research project no end. The authors can be followed online:

James Hodkinson tweets here: @Dr_James_H

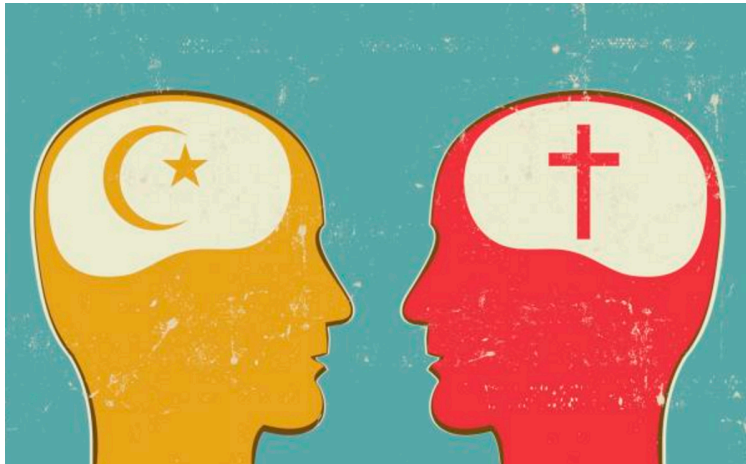
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1. Lesson Title: Is Interfaith dialogue possible?

Syllabus Focus:

This lesson consolidates learning in 3.1.2.1 Beliefs and teachings - Christianity and 3.1.5.1 Beliefs and teachings - Islam

Aims and Objectives:

Students should explore areas of belief and practice between Christians and Muslims where there is both commonality and difference. Then evaluate if it possible for Christians and Muslims to engage in meaningful dialogue.

Key Learning Points:

Students will know about matters of belief and practice that divide and unite Muslims and Christians and critically assess if differences in faith can be overcome.

Breakdown

Timing (approx.)	Activity Type Starter/ plenary/ pair & group work/ thinking/ research/ extension.	Description of Content
10 mins	Starter	Introduce the key concepts of the Two Chairs Exchange - Video
5 mins	Written exercise (pairs) (slides 2-3)	If you were a Muslim/ Christian invited to an interfaith event, what would be your hopes/fears?
10 mins	Class discussion I (slides 5-6)	Why might people be reluctant to share their faith at an interfaith event? How might the principles behind Two Chairs Exchange, and Goethe's attitude towards interfaith dialogue be a helpful way to move forward interfaith relations? Or is deep encounter between different faiths a potentially divisive and dangerous thing?
15 mins	Research in pairs (slides 7-8)	What do Christians and Muslims believe about interfaith dialogue? See various websites.
10 mins	Class discussion II (slide 9)	What are the benefits of meaningful interfaith dialogue? Why is it important for believers? Is it possible to be steeped in one's own conviction, yet be able to listen to and learn from another faith? Why? Why not?

10 mins	Discuss essay question: set for homework. (slide 10)	See below
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Assessment:

'Interfaith dialogue is crucial for religious people in the UK today'. Evaluate this statement.

In your answer you:

- should give reasoned arguments in support of this statement
- should give reasoned arguments to support a different point of view
- should refer to religious arguments
- may refer to non-religious arguments
- should reach a justified conclusion.

12 marks.

2. Lesson Title: Religion and Human Rights - a Two Chairs Approach

Syllabus Focus:

3.2.1.6 Theme F: Religion, human rights and social justice
Issues of equality

Aims and Objectives:

This lesson looks at whether religion supports human rights or whether being religious drives prejudice and intolerance through the issue of gay rights. The Two Chairs Exchange model of thinking will help students evaluate critically the relationship between religion and human rights, and work collaboratively.

Key Learning Points:

Students will understand why religion may be perceived as contrary to human rights and evaluate if this view is justified. They should know what scripture says about human rights and understand how this teaching is put into practice.

Breakdown

Timing (approx.)	Activity Type Starter/ plenary/ pair & group work/ thinking/ research/ extension.	Description of Content
10 mins	Recap/ starter (slides 3-6)	NB: lesson presumes Homework will have been set in previous lesson (see supporting sheet). Recap: what are the principles of Two Chairs Exchange? Brief class discussion - what are human rights and why does religion appear to curtail these rights? What does the British Humanist Association believe about religion and human rights?
15 mins	Pair work (slides 7-9)	Read case study on gay cake row. Read related scriptural sources. Students create an imaginary dialogue using Two Chairs principles between a humanist and a Christian in this issue.
10 mins	Plenary - deeper thinking (slide 10)	Feedback to the class with discussion. How might apparently polarised views be reconciled? Read Peter Tatchell response to the issue. How might gay/lesbian Christians respond?
20 mins	Pair work (slide 11)	Consider the Two Chairs dialogue in the light of the deeper thinking. Research how a Muslim might respond to the issue and include them in the dialogue.
15 mins	Final Plenary (slide 12)	Discuss if the two parties can reach understanding of the other without compromising core beliefs and whether the principles of Two Chairs have been helpful in facilitating dialogue. Set assessment essay for homework

Optional	Extension work I-III	Differing Islamic Views on gay rights: Islamic sources on gay rights; alternative tasks.

Assessment:

'Religion undermines human rights'. Evaluate this statement.

In your answer you:

- should give reasoned arguments in support of this statement
- should give reasoned arguments to support a different point of view
- should refer to religious arguments
- may refer to non-religious arguments
- should reach a justified conclusion.

12 marks.

3. Lesson Title: The right to freedom of thought, religion and belief

Syllabus Focus:

3.2.1.6 Theme F: Religion, human rights and social justice

Issues of equality, freedom of religion and belief including freedom of religious expression

Aims and Objectives:

Students will examine whether religion makes believers intolerant of those who do not share their faith and will use the principles of the Two Chairs Exchange to explore what Christians and Muslims believe about tolerance for other faiths.

Key Learning Points:

Students will know what Christianity and Islam teach with regard to tolerating other faiths, understanding that there may be diverse teaching within each faith.

Breakdown

Timing (approx.)	Activity Type Starter/ plenary/ pair & group work/ thinking/ research/ extension.	Description of Content
10 mins	Starter (slides 3-4) Class discussion: slide 5	Ensure students are familiar with the key principles of Two Chairs Exchange. What might it be like living as a minority Christian or Muslim faith group?
10 mins	Research I (slide 6)	Stimulus video links of examples of Christians and Muslims facing persecution e.g. Christians in Pakistan, Srebrenica genocide. Why might Christians/ Muslims think the other religion is intolerant?
10 mins	Research II (slides 7-9)	Read scripture passages that make inclusivist and exclusivist claims. <u>Support sheet included for use!</u>
20 mins	Paired work (slide 10)	Including reference to key scripture, write a dialogue using the core principles of the Two Chairs Exchange between a Muslim and a Christian, in which each explores the other's right to believe and practise their religion.
10 mins	Plenary (slide 11)	Discuss whether it is possible a Christian might learn from the teachings of Muhammad and how a Muslim might learn from the teachings of St Paul without compromising their own religious beliefs

Assessment:

'Religion makes people intolerant of those who do not share their faith.' Evaluate this statement

In your answer you:

- should give reasoned arguments in support of this statement
- should give reasoned arguments to support a different point of view
- should refer to religious arguments
- may refer to non-religious arguments
- should reach a justified conclusion.

12 marks.

4. Lesson Title: Conflict, Peace and Resolution

Syllabus Focus:

3.2.1.4 Religion, peace and conflict

Aims and Objectives:

Students will consider whether Christianity/ Islam considers itself as peaceful and the other as barbaric and explore whether using Two Chairs Exchange principles can challenge these preconceptions

Key Learning Points:

Students will compare and contrast the views of Islam and Christianity with regards to peace, justice and how war might be justified.

Breakdown

Timing (approx.)	Activity Type Starter/ plenary/ pair & group work/ thinking/ research/ extension.	Description of Content
10 mins	Starter I + II (slide 3-5)	Ensure students are familiar with the key concepts of the Two Chairs Exchange; Show images of Muslim and Christian brutality in war and invite students to reflect on why believers of one religion may fear the other.
15 mins	Research I + II (slides 6-7 and 2 worksheets)	Explore: the apparently pacifist teachings of Jesus; the teachings of Muhammad on war/ violence; Christian and Muslim teachings about justice, including greater jihad.
15 mins	Class discussion (slide 8)	What would a Muslim say about Jesus's teachings? What would a Christian say about Muhammad's teachings? Are there more points of similarity or difference between the religions teachings on justice?
10 mins	Pair work (slide 9)	Create a dialogue using the principles of Two Chairs Exchange 'The goal of life is to seek peace and do good'
10 mins	Plenary (slide 10)	Class feedback and preparing for essay

Assessment:

'Religion helps to bring about peace in the world.' Evaluate this statement

In your answer you:

- should give reasoned arguments in support of this statement
- should give reasoned arguments to support a different point of view
- should refer to religious arguments
- may refer to non-religious arguments
- should reach a justified conclusion.

12 marks.

5. Lesson Title: Gender difference, women's rights.

Syllabus Focus:

3.2.1.6. Theme F: Religion, human rights and social justice: Status of women in religion

Aims and Objectives:

Students will explore the nature of the relationship between men and women, analyzing similarities and differences between religious and secular views about gender roles.

Key questions: Is one faith more open to gender equality than others?
Can you be a Christian or a Muslim and a feminist?

Key Learning Points:

- Know what scripture teaches about gender roles and gender difference in both Christianity and Islam
- Critically assess whether views about gender roles are cultural or religious
- Evaluate if Christianity or Islam offers the most attractive model for gender equality, or if a secular approach is best.

Breakdown

Timing (approx.)	Activity Type Starter/ plenary/ pair & group work/ thinking/ research/ extension.	Description of Content
10 mins	Starter (slide 3)	Ensure students are familiar with the principles of Two Chairs Exchange. Discuss picture of the two volleyballers. What do students think each woman might be thinking about the other?
10 mins	Research I and II (slides 4-5)	What do Ephesians 5:22-33 and Quran 4:34 say about the role of women Explain how feminists might react to these passages? How might believers respond?
10 mins	Class discussion (slide 6)	Are these models of femininity cultural or religious?
10 mins	Research III (slide 7)	Articles 'What the Koran really says about women' / 'Christian feminism is not an oxymoron'
10 mins	Pair work (slides 8-9)	Write a two chairs exchange dialogues between Muslims, Christians and humanists, in which they discuss their attitudes towards women's rights. Rearrange 'chairs' to place Christianity and Islam in dialogue.

10 mins	Plenary (slide 10)	Feedback from paired work and preparation to write essay
Assessment: Men and women do not have equal rights within Christianity and Islam. Evaluate this statement. In your answer you: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• should give reasoned arguments in support of this statement• should give reasoned arguments to support a different point of view• should refer to religious arguments• may refer to non-religious arguments• should reach a justified conclusion. 12 marks		

