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RE Today
Services

Ten fine ways to use visual images of Islam in the RE classroom.



For the classroom 7-16

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Theme: Visions

Stephen Pett, RE Today National Adviser, provides ten great ways to use vision and image in RE, with examples from Islam. Apply them to any faith community.

These strategies can apply to any images within the RE classroom, including images of Islam such as we have been developing for publication in the new RE Today pack 'Picturing Islam, Picturing Muslims.' The strategies are designed to engage pupils, drawing them into the images and looking closely. They offer ways to enable pupils to ask questions, to interpret and to make sense of the images and the ideas they illustrate, enriching their knowledge and connecting their learning more widely.

Here (opposite) is one picture of five Muslim teenagers wearing some T-shirts

that express faith – a great way to explore iman (belief) with your class. Which of the ten strategies below would be best to use in exploring this image with your age group?

1. **Ask the artist, quiz the photographer.** Ask pairs of pupils to think about the questions they would like to ask the artist or the photographer. They could use different question stems as a starting prompt, such as: 'Who ...', 'Where ...', 'Why ...', 'When ...', 'How ...' and 'What if ...' Include questions that use their imagination, such as what it might be like for the artist/photographer or people in the picture to express faith in the way they dress; and questions that puzzle them, where an insider's view would make it easier. Each pair then passes its picture and sheet of questions along to another pair, and they try to answer (maybe after reading more information). Then raise some more questions and pass the picture again.
2. **Cropping or framing.** Ask pupils to crop images to identify significant parts. This can be done by giving pupils a small cardboard frame and ask them to place it on the picture. Ask pupils to identify which is the most important part of the image, for example, or which part is the most interesting, the happiest, the calmest, or represents prayer or holiness or worship; or ask them to show understanding of significant key terms (e.g. 'Hajj', '*salah*', '*iman*'). As pupils do this they must explain why they think this part of the image shows the most important, holiest, etc. Allow other pupils to move the frame and explain their own thinking. To make a judgement they must offer some reasons.
3. **Tags – select and deploy key words.** Photos uploaded onto the internet are usually given 'tags' – these are the key words that sum up what the picture shows, so that if you were searching for lots of images of a particular subject, the search links to the relevant photos. Ask pupils to work in pairs to think of the five key words, or tags, that sum up what the picture shows. At the simplest level the tags will be purely descriptive (e.g. 'building', 'worshippers'), but tags can be linked to mood or emotion or other concepts (e.g. 'calm', 'peaceful', 'prayer'), and should show some accurate terminology (e.g. 'Qur'an', 'Shahadah').
4. **Pair, share and say why.** Ask pupils to look at all the pictures and see if they can pair them up. A simple way to organise this with younger pupils is to use circle time and leave the pictures out on the floor together, asking pupils to take turns to match up to images and say why. You can set up some obvious examples (those that show prayer, or calligraphy/art,

or mosque exteriors) but some other pairings will rely on pupils' ability to devise, imagine or create connections. *Note that some Muslims will be uncomfortable if calligraphy that includes the names of Allah is put on the floor – use tables instead.*

5. **Look, talk and draw.** Put pupils in fours. Give a simple picture (e.g. a roof garden) to Pair A in the four. They have to look at it together for one or two minutes before you take the picture away. Pair A describe the picture to Pair B, and then stop talking while Pair B try to draw the picture. After a few minutes, you can allow Pair B to ask Pair A one question. Allow Pair B to look at the picture and talk with Pair A about how close they got to drawing it. As pupils get used to this kind of activity, you can use more detailed images (see 'Images from memory' – the next activity). The activity uses and develops skills such as visual memory, observation, descriptive language, co-operation and teamwork.
6. **Images from memory.** Pupils should work in groups of four. One from each group comes up and looks at the chosen picture – a complex and detailed image is very suitable for this – for ten to 15 seconds, then goes back and either begins to draw it, or (more difficult) describes what he or she saw to the second pupil in the group, who begins to draw it. Then Pupil 2 comes up to look for ten to 15 seconds, returns and draws or describes to Pupil 3, who draws. Allow all pupils at least two chances to look and draw each image. When pupils have produced an image, show them the picture. Which group was most accurate? This activity requires pupils to look closely and be interested in the image when you finally reveal it, and prepares them to interpret the image. Follow up with a discussion and some interpretive activities.
7. **Preparing for a visitor.** For example, when you invite a Muslim visitor, use a set of Islamic images to help pupils prepare questions, and to shape the conversation with the visitor. Opening questions could include:
 - a. Which pictures do you like?
 - b. Which pictures show something you do?
 - c. Which picture do you think is most moving?
 - d. Which pictures do you find strange or unusual?Deeper questions:
 - a. Which of these pictures would you say makes a person feel close to God?
 - b. Which picture would you call 'spiritual' most of all?
 - c. Can you choose two pictures which show what Muslims believe about ... God/the Qur'an, etc.?

d. Are there any pictures you don't like? Why?

8. **Similarities and differences.** Give pupils a selection of images. Ask them to sort them. With younger pupils you might give them an instruction first – such as 'Which images include people worshipping and which don't?', and limit it to two pairs of pictures for easy sorting. Then ask them to see if there are any other ways of sorting them. These might include different countries, places of worship or the home, happy/sad mood, historic or contemporary. Ask pupils to explain the reasons for their groupings. Explore which groupings are to do with similarities between the images and which are to do with differences.
9. **In the gallery.** Imagine that this picture is being displayed in a gallery. As a class, come up with a title for the picture. It needs to help people looking at the picture to know what it is about, but it also needs to be interesting, to make people want to look. Imagine that there needs to be two descriptions of the picture – one for younger children a little lower down the wall (using small words and short sentences) and one for taller, older people higher up (using bigger words and longer sentences). Technical words should be given and explained. Take this further with 'Exhibition catalogue' below.
10. **Exhibition catalogue.** Ask pupils to imagine that an art gallery is putting on an exhibition on a specific aspect of, say, Islam or being Muslim; for example, 'The story of Islam', or 'Being Muslim today' or 'Islam: different times, different places'. Ask pupils to select appropriate images from the pack and write a short description and explanation of each for the exhibition catalogue. They should give the image a title, explain how it relates to the theme of the exhibition and justify why it should be selected for this exhibition.

What other images should be included? Ask pupils to find at least three more images to include – video images, songs and objects can all be considered for inclusion, alongside more famous and traditional artworks. Pupils need to write their exhibition catalogue outlines for these extra items too. Take it further by getting pupils in pairs or individually to write the introduction to the catalogue, showing their grasp of the ideas and issues linked to the essential concepts and their key questions.