

Happiness in times of trouble

Danielle Banham teaches RE to 7-9 year olds at Thurton Primary School in Norfolk. She tried out some ideas with her class, exploring whether we can still be happy in times of trouble.

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| The Dalai Lama | The Dalai Lama lives in exile from his own country in Tibet. He is famous for spreading happiness. He says: 'It is very important to generate a good heart. From this, happiness for both yourself and others will come.' | What are his troubles? How do you think he stays happy? What do you think he means by 'a good heart'? |
| Saint Paul | Saint Paul was put in prison because of his Christian faith. From his jail he wrote: 'I have learned, however I'm placed, to be content. Rejoice in the Lord. I'll say it again: rejoice!' | What made Saint Paul happy? What do you think he means by 'rejoice in the Lord'? |
| Tawakkol Karmen | Tawakkol Karmen works for justice in Yemen. She was jailed and chained for her work. As she accepted the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize she said 'I certainly see the beginning of a humane, prosperous and generous history full of love and fraternity.' | What might have made Tawakkol sad? Do you think you can be happy about the future even if you are in trouble today? Why? |



Children enjoyed identifying the things that make for happiness even in trouble



Positive psychology and RE for 8-year-olds

This activity began by asking children to think about what makes them happy. It's easy for RE to get stuck at this point, with a single answer, and the emotional range of a flat line: Chocolate. Playtime. X Box.

To give deeper thinking time to pupils, we used a team challenge to fill in a six-section writing frame, asking what makes you happy at home, at school, with friends, about the world, in my heart, and 'one more'. This produced groups of children who identified up to 35 sources of their happiness, and got them talking about the happiness in your heart as opposed to the happiness that comes from owning things, and the contrast between excitement and contentment – two kinds of happiness.



We then wanted them to consider specifically the question: (How) can you be happy in times of trouble? We gave three examples: a Buddhist, a Christian and a Muslim. Wanting standards of thinking to deepen, we asked some challenging questions: What does the Dalai Lama mean by a 'good heart'? Can you be happy about the future if you are in trouble today? Pupils gave some great answers.

We also asked pupils to take the word 'HAPPY' in a big outline and give an artistic rendering of all the things that contribute to their happiness in the letters. They enjoyed this partly because of the free flow of ideas, and partly because the ideas needed to be many, so thinking was deepened.

Danielle comments on the work

To me, the RE aims of this work included:

- Developing a deeper understanding of what it means to be happy (we follow a programme called 'Values for life' in our school so this fitted in perfectly and we are going to have this value as our focus next term - we are a happiness factory!)
- Exploring how religion gives purpose to people's lives
- Providing a chance for reflection on their own lives and own happiness
- Considering how beliefs can influence people (hugely!)

It's a mixed Year 3/4 class and they were in mixed ability groups with Year 4s supporting Year 3s where needed. There are 32 of them this year.

To introduce the ideas to the class, we first discussed happiness and what it means to be happy. We gathered ideas on the IWB and talked about relevant issues such as 'Does money make you happy?' We then moved on to think about what happy looks like and some lovely ideas came up like sunshine, rainbows, family and friends (cute!).

I felt the children responded extremely positively as this was something they could all relate to and picture in their minds. They had no trouble understanding the tasks and knuckled down quickly. Everyone had something to say – even the shy ones – and each contributed in his or her own way.

I think they enjoyed completing work about something happy and uplifting. They love being able to express things through art, so this was the perfect activity. Some of the younger ones struggled to completely understand how the ideas about St Paul and the Dalai Lama linked to happiness so I sat with some of them and we went over it at a simple level. They are a bubbly class and lots of things make them happy :)