

Document name: *Young people and religion: creative learning with history* IN PRACTICE resources summary sheet

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OpenLearn course: Young people and religion: creative learning with history

OpenLearn url: <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/religious-studies/young-people-and-religion-creative-learning-history/content-section-0>



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Introduction – IN PRACTICE: Resourcing your workshop

Time

If the workshop is to be delivered in an intensive manner, we recommend setting aside three full days, although with good management and tight timetabling, it will be possible to deliver it in two days. It would therefore be suitable for inclusion in an activity week, such as those run by some schools in periods following exams when there is a natural break in delivering the core syllabus. A museum or public library might offer the workshop as part of a school holiday programme. A youth group might include the workshop over a weekend or as part of a residential week away, provided necessary equipment and possibilities for filming are available at the chosen location.

An alternative model, which has also proved successful, is to run the workshop as a course of several shorter sessions spread over several weeks. If this approach is adopted, a corresponding total amount of contact time (15-20 hours) is advised. If that format is adopted, it will probably be necessary to include at least one extended session in order to facilitate filming especially if this is to be done in locations away from the usual base.

Equipment

Ideally, if budgets allow, the use of small Go Pro cameras or similar is recommended. These are easy to use and provide satisfyingly good quality results. The guidance in subsequent sections of the course reflects the RETOPEA project's own experience with these cameras.

Realistically, however, many participants will use their own mobile phones or an iPad or other device provided by the organisers. The quality of the resulting films is unlikely to be as good as when using a camera such as a Go-Pro, but the underlying learning experience will be similar. If personal mobile phones are used, the ethical risks, particularly of inappropriate sharing of sensitive material, will need to be acknowledged and mitigated. Further advice is provided in Session 3: Create.

If a Go-Pro camera is used, films will need to be edited on a laptop or PC using whatever basic editing software package is readily available. If filming has been done using a phone or iPad, then an editing app can be downloaded to the device. To ensure the smooth running of the edit, you are strongly advised to consult someone in your community with IT skills in the early stages of planning the workshop and for them to be available on call while participants are editing their films.

Session 1 – IN PRACTICE: Exploring views in your group

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As an initial step we recommend using a simple questionnaire and discussion both to inform yourself further on the views of the young people you work with, and to stimulate them to begin to think more about the issues for themselves. You should consider in your context whether, in view of potential sensitivities, you should make participation voluntary, and in any case avoid forcing contributions from individuals who may feel uncomfortable. The RETOPEA project team's experience, however, has been that young people are usually very willing to participate and indeed welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues.

First, ask participants to spend five to ten minutes to quietly and anonymously complete a short written questionnaire on the following lines:

How important (if at all) is religion to your life?

Please circle a score between 1 (not important at all) and 5 (of great importance).

Have you ever observed prejudice or bias against religion in the area where you live?

Please circle one of the following answers: Yes – No – Not sure.

Have you ever experienced bias against your religious or non-religious beliefs?

Yes frequently – Yes sometimes – Hardly ever – No – Not sure.

You should also allow space for open comments and explanations. The questionnaire should prompt useful initial thinking that then leads into subsequent lively discussion.

Once you have collected the questionnaires you should then lead a discussion. The ideal seating plan is a circular arrangement of chairs, with teachers and facilitators also part of the circle, so as to encourage discussion amongst the young people. Remember that the point of the group interviews is to give as much agency as possible to the young people to share and respond to views.

The discussion should cover the following themes:

Representations of religion and religious diversity in the media (including questions, such as 'How accurate or inaccurate, fair or unfair, do you think different types of media are when they discuss different religious groups?')

Religious diversity in the past (e.g. 'Historically, how religiously diverse do you think your city/town/ country/ Europe has been? Are there any particular 'turning points' when your city/town/ country/ Europe became more or less religiously diverse?')

Religious diversity in present-day society (e.g. 'In the present day, to what extent do you think religious diversity offers benefits or challenges to society?')

Potential connections between approaches to religious diversity in the past and present (e.g. 'Are there ways in which we can learn from history?')

The nature of religious tolerance – what does it mean in practice?

It is recommended that you allow up to one hour for the discussion. The aim is to trigger conversation. It can be a good idea to invite participants initially to discuss in pairs before sharing with the larger group. Use your professional skills to facilitate the conversation by:

giving participants time to think even if this means the occasional awkward silence

allowing young people their voice but steering the conversation back if they get stuck on irrelevancies

affirming healthy differences of opinion or experience but managing conflict or aggression firmly.

allowing time for each question, though if particular questions have triggered good discussion, allow this to run.

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Make some notes to record your impressions of their reactions and ideas. These will help to inform your subsequent guidance of the docutubes process.

Session 1 – IN PRACTICE: Helping young people navigate and use the collection

Approaches to the clippings collection are likely to be determined by two key considerations:

The age and ability of the group

The amount of time available for the workshop or course.

If your time is limited or if the participants are younger and/or of lower ability, it may well be best for you, the teacher or leader, to make your own preliminary selection of between three and six clippings and to introduce them to the group. Especially for younger teenagers, three may well be sufficient; with an older group you might make a somewhat larger selection and assign two clippings each to subgroups who would then discuss them and report back to a plenary session. Especially for clippings that include text from historic documents, some explanation and clarification of unfamiliar language may be helpful. The website also includes (in the 'Narratives' section) examples of selections made for pilot workshops, which illustrate some of the thematic linkages that might be made, and how the clippings can be related to participants' own experience. One of these selections could be adopted as a 'package' or, preferably, modified and developed to accommodate the situation and interests of the group. This approach requires a session of 1.5 to 2 hours in order to ensure participants understand the selected clippings and are engaging thoughtfully with them. Participants should be encouraged to consider the questions on the website associated with each clipping and might be given a printed question-sheet (as illustrated in Video 1) to prompt additional thinking and ideas.

Ideally though, you should encourage older (16+) young people to work in small groups of three or four, to browse the collection for themselves with a view to making a selection of up to five clippings that particularly engage their interest, and that they would like to study and discuss further. They could start with one of the themes identified on the website and/or use the search facility to look for clippings on a particular topic, religion, period of history, or country that interests them. Participants should be encouraged to feel free to make their own choices, while also thinking about ways in which their choices can be linked with each other and related to their own situation and experience. Young people will need sufficient time to carry out such a process effectively and to their own satisfaction. A session of at least 1.5 to 2 hours is therefore recommended for that purpose.

Session 2 – IN PRACTICE: Planning with the clippings

It will be important to allow the young people to spend plenty of time discussing their ideas about religious diversity and toleration, past and present. They may have already developed ideas during the Engage phase, but the Plan phase is about crystalising those ideas. To do this, you will want to divide them into the groups of 2–4 that they will be working in.

You can then follow the process outlined below.

Get each group to focus on one or two clippings. You might want to ask them to discuss the question: 'Which clipping(s) surprised or interested you the most, and why?'

Now ask why they think the historic clipping(s) they have chosen is relevant to present-day issues of religious diversity and toleration. You could ask questions like: Is it relevant to your own experiences of religious diversity and toleration? Is it relevant to something you have heard about in the news?

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Now ask them to summarise in each group what their 'key message' might be in a docutube, which relates past and present.

Once the young people have done the groundwork, they will be ready to start planning their docutube in detail.

Session 2 – IN PRACTICE: Getting your group to pitch their film

As you saw in Video 1, it can really focus the minds of the young people if they know they will be 'pitching' their film to either their teacher or peers (or both). Give your group a definite time when they will need to be ready to do this. The response to the pitch should be both encouraging and constructively critical. You can give your groups a chance to go back, if necessary, and refine their plans.

You might want to ask the groups questions like?

What is your key message?

Who, where and what are you filming?

What roles will the different people in your group have?

Have you thought about safety, ethics and copyright (see the next section)?

Session 3 – IN PRACTICE: Familiarising your group with the filmmaking process

It is recommended that you give participants the opportunity to 'warm up' and familiarise themselves with being behind and in front of the camera. This can simply involve them taking turns in filming each other, briefly saying their name or talking about what they had for breakfast.

Alternatively, if you have a little more time, you could ask them to film each other responding to either or both of the following two questions:

What does religious toleration mean to you?

How can history help you think about religious diversity and toleration today?

Answering these two questions provides the opportunity for young people to experience what it is like to have to answer a complex question in a concise way in front of a camera.

This is not footage that needs to be included in the docutube (though it could be, should a group wish to). The main purpose of this activity is to help participants familiarise themselves with the filmmaking process and with the equipment, giving them the opportunity to check both video and sound. This activity can also help to establish what roles the different team members might like to focus on in the creation of the docutube in their small group. Some young people might find that they feel more comfortable behind the camera, others might prefer to speak to the camera as a presenter or actor.

Session 3 – IN PRACTICE: Deciding on roles in the group

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To avoid any disagreements between different members of the group in the process of taking turns, it might be helpful for participants to draw lots or toss a coin. One group that worked particularly well together played 'Rock, Paper, Scissors' to decide whose turn it was for different tasks.

Session 3 – IN PRACTICE Filming locations and timing

Ideally, you should book several rooms that groups can use for filming. You might need to weigh up whether you are prepared to let your groups leave the premises (if so, make sure you gain parental consent, if required). You could also consider linking the workshop to a visit to a museum or gallery.

Depending on the overall amount of time you can give to the workshop, give a realistic deadline for completing the filming. We would recommend two hours at a minimum, though more time would be preferable, and will probably be essential if travel to a museum or other location is involved.

Session 3 – IN PRACTICE: Encouraging good filmmaking practices

Remind the groups to film a variety of shots and keep them short, working through the script they have developed in the 'Plan' phase of the workshop.

Advise them to delete obviously unsuccessful shots immediately from the camera, so as not to clutter the edit unnecessarily.

Session 3 – IN PRACTICE: Introducing the principles of video editing

A good way of introducing the principles of video editing is to illustrate the idea of a video cut by 'splicing' together two pieces of till roll with scotch tape, where one piece of till roll represents a wide shot of a garden, the other a close-up of a person.

Show the same process on OpenShot (or whichever editing software you are using) by dragging a shot onto the timeline, bringing another next to it, and playing the resulting edit.

There are online tutorials to help you get to grips with the technical aspects of editing with software like OpenShot.

Session 4 – IN PRACTICE Guiding the reflection

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When watching the docutubes together, ask each group what worked well, and what they would improve if they were to do it again. Reassure them that video production is a complex skill. Try to keep the focus on content that is not technical (e.g. 'I found it really interesting when you said X – can you tell us more about that?'). And – importantly – encourage participants to reflect on what they learned about religious toleration and peace in the past and present when making their docutube.

Ask them to reflect on what they have learned from working with the RETOPEA clippings, including the need to engage with information in a critical way, as well as the value of considering different kind of sources and multiple perspectives. Also encourage participants to reflect on the experience of working with other young people to make their docutube (for example, in terms of listening to each other, understanding each other's point of view, sharing tasks and finding solutions together).

Session 4 – IN PRACTICE Creative solutions

A docutube is not long – nevertheless, accidents and issues do happen on film shoots and edits, and it is not unusual to find that something a group planned to use to make their docutube work isn't available, or is unusable for some unexpected reason. Here are some practical suggestions for what to do if this happens:

A voice-over is an easy way to add missing information, or to connect sections together. This can usually be recorded straight onto the video at the editing stage.

Sound and vision do not need to come from the same source – if a location shot has too much wind noise, for example, you can take that audio off and replace with music or a voice over. And you can cut away from a talking head to show a location shot, but keep the audio as a voice over.

Consider using still photographs or images from the clippings to illustrate what is being talked about – this can be very effective!

Members of the team can still shoot extra 'pick up' shots while others are editing, to fill any gaps – for example, talking heads, shots of their fellow participants at work, or even drawings or props.