



Birds

Birds in religious texts

Age: 7-14

Topic: Religious Studies

Time: 1 hour



Learning through Landscapes

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What equipment will I need?

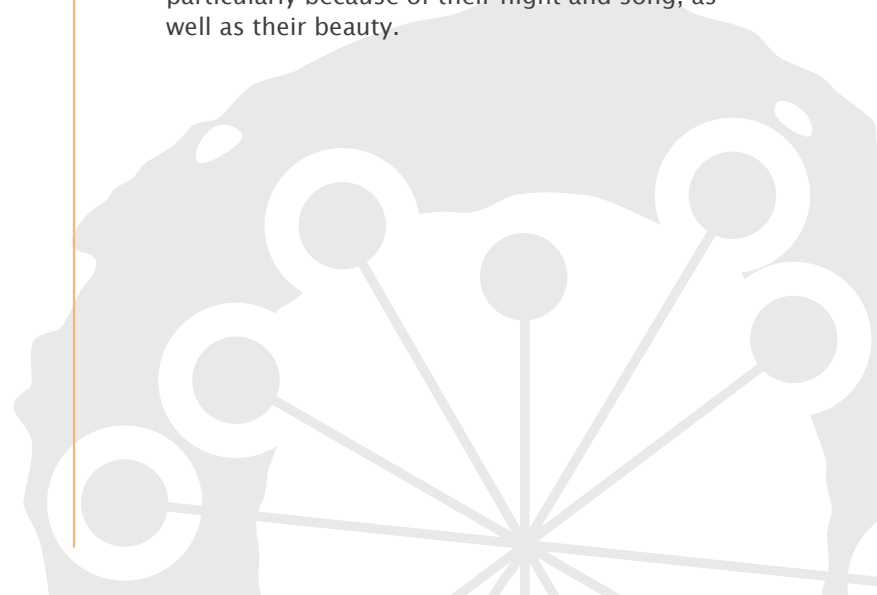
- Print-outs of the religious text passages listed below.
- Religious education topic books.

How will learners explore this?

1. Split children into groups of 5, and hand each group a passage of text. Get children in their groups to read one verse of religious text:
 - Christianity and Judaism: Genesis Chapter 8 (particularly 8:6-12). Noah sends a raven then a dove from the ark.
 - Christianity: Matthew Chapter 26 (26:31-35 and 26:69-75). A cockerel crows after Peter betrays Jesus, as Jesus predicted.
 - Islam: Sura 105 of the Quran. A flock of birds appear in the sky to pelt an invading elephant army with clay fragments, protecting Mecca from destruction.
 - Hinduism: Tree of Jiva and Atman. Two birds are in a tree, one (representing the individual soul, Jiva) eats fruits, while the other (representing an aspect of God beyond individual desires, Paramatman) looks on. The bird eating fruits has become distracted by individual pleasure.
 - Buddhism: Suvannahamsa Jataka (136). A father returns to his impoverished family in the form of a golden goose, allowing them to sell his feathers. His wife becomes greedy and plucks all of his feathers, which grow back worthless.
2. Ask the children to answer the following questions based on the passage they have read: What was the bird doing in this text? What does the bird symbolise in this text? Is this a 'positive' or 'negative' human emotion? Why is a bird used and not another animal?
3. One by one, each group can present their text and their answers to the class.

How can we show the learning?

- Once each group has had an opportunity to speak, discuss with the class the common themes in religious texts featuring birds.
- Do birds symbolise similar things across religions, or different? What might this say about how humans relate to birds more generally?
- What do birds symbolise in religious texts?
 - Crows often symbolise doom or bad things to come, while doves and other birds symbolise hope, peace, new beginnings, wisdom.
- Why might this be?
 - One thing to consider is song; we as humans find complex, melodic bird songs beautiful, but the caw of a crow is an unpleasant noise. Could this be the origin of this symbolism?
- Why do birds have such an important place in religious texts compared to other animals?
 - Birds hold a special place in human cultures, particularly because of their flight and song, as well as their beauty.



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