



Caring for our world



Humanism for Primary School Children

Making the most of life

Contents

Introduction for parents and teachers	page 3
Believing different things (an introduction to Humanism)	page 4
Big Questions (introduction to philosophy)	page 6
The Golden Rule	page 9
Living Together (qualities to make good citizens)	page 10
Celebrating Life (dealing with birth, marriage and death)	page 15
Festivals and Traditions (celebrating diversity)	page 17



Appendices

Cross-Curricular Summary
Lesson Plans
Internet Resources

INTRODUCTION FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS

This series of activities is designed for children working at Level 2 (children aged between 7 and 12).

The document is designed to fit in with the Curriculum for Excellence and has the following aims:

- To help children to think creatively and independently, providing them with skills to become **Successful Learners**.
- To help them develop their own beliefs and view of the world and make informed decisions as **Confident Individuals**.
- To understand different beliefs and cultures and to learn to develop informed ethical views to become **Responsible Citizens**.
- To work in partnership and to apply thinking skills as **Effective Contributors**.



The document explains the world from the Humanist Viewpoint, allowing pupils to consider alternatives to religion when dealing with issues of morality and personal search. It can be used in a cross-curricular way as it discusses many issues relating to Citizenship and Social Studies.

The information and tasks are designed to encourage children to think about the world around them and the impact their decisions have on themselves and others.

The document can be used in the classroom or at home. Most of the tasks can be considered independently, but there is great scope for group work, co-operation and class discussion. Much of the teaching is based on the notion of independent and interdependent thinking and exploring ideas which mean pupils should be encouraged to engage in supportive discussion.

There are teacher's notes and lesson plans with learning outcomes to help support teachers using this document. In addition, there is a separate appendix, demonstrating how this document fits in with a cross-curricular approach. Additional reference material is suggested in the Internet Resources section for further reading materials and activities.

BELIEVING DIFFERENT THINGS

People all over the world have different beliefs. Some people believe in God, some are not sure (**agnostics**) and others do not believe in God (**atheists**). People can believe in lots of different things and still be good friends.

If your friends tell you about their religion or beliefs it is important to listen politely and then you can tell them what you believe. You should never make fun of what a person believes, but it is okay for you to disagree with them.

We should not fight about our beliefs.

What is Humanism?

Humanism is not a religion, but it is a way of thinking and living. This is called a **philosophy**. Humanists do not believe that God exists and believe that this is our only life and therefore it is very important to make our lives as worthwhile and as happy as possible for ourselves and others.



This symbol of the Happy Human is used by Humanists to represent their positive attitude to life.

Here are some of the things that Humanists think are important:

- People should be honest and try to live good lives.
- People should be free to believe what they want to believe, as long as they do not harm others.
- Nature is natural and humans are part of nature. Nature works by itself without magic or help from another being. Therefore we have a responsibility to care for our planet and look after it for generations to come.
- We should use history and science to find out about the world we live in.
- It is good to ask lots of questions and to think and talk about things to try to improve our world.

TASK

The symbol of the Happy Human represents Humanists. How many symbols can you find which represent other religions, philosophies or charities? (Here are some ideas which might help get you started – Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, Red Cross, Cancer Charities, Animal Welfare Charities.)

Why do you think symbols are important?

Choose one of the symbols you have found and investigate why the symbol was chosen.

TASK

This chapter listed five things that Humanists think are important.

Discuss in your group what you think is important in life. Agree on the five most important to your group and list them.

Be prepared to present these to the class and explain why you have chosen these five.

TASK

This chapter explained some new words. Can you explain what the words **agnostic**, **atheist**, and **philosophy** mean?

Discuss these with a partner and write down a definition for each word.



BIG QUESTIONS

Philosophy

People have always wondered about the world we live in. Philosophers ask lots of questions about the world and suggest possible ideas and answers. Philosophers think about problems deeply. Throughout history philosophers have helped us change the way we think about the world we live in. As our world changes around us, new questions and ideas grow.

Have you ever wondered about the world and asked yourself questions such as:

- How did the world begin?
- Why am I here?
- Am I dreaming?
- Is there a God?
- What is right and wrong?
- Could we travel in time?
- Do we have the right to use animals?

If you have, then you too could be a philosopher.



Rodin's Thinker

EARLY QUESTIONS

Ancient people also asked questions about the world we live in. Why does it get dark at night? Why do volcanoes erupt? What is a rainbow? In the 21st century these questions are easy to answer, but ancient people tried to make sense of them without the scientific knowledge we have today.

Ancient people such as Romans, Greeks, and Vikings believed in many gods to explain the world around them. People were frightened by natural events, such as thunder and lightning and earthquakes and believed their gods were angry and therefore developed rules that they hoped would keep the gods happy. Certain things were regarded as right or wrong and so laws were developed to keep their gods happy.

Today, laws are more about keeping the world a safe and good place in which everyone and everything can live.



TASK

Many religious leaders and philosophers consider the issues of right and wrong. Consider the following statements and think about whether they are right or wrong. What would you do? Why?

- You find £10 in an envelope in the street. There is nothing to say who it belongs to. Is it alright to keep it? Would you think differently if it was £50? What if it was a piece of jewellery?
- Someone at your school keeps calling a Pakistani girl names and making her cry. It doesn't affect you so it is alright to ignore it.
- Walking home from school, you notice the street is a mess, full of litter. When you finish your crisps you drop your packet too.
- You are playing with your friends when you notice some beautiful flowers growing nearby. You decide to pick them to take them home for your family.
- It's your turn to feed the family pet, but you are desperate to go out to play so you pretend to forget.

Are some questions about right and wrong easier to answer than others? Why?

THE BIGGEST QUESTION OF ALL

Since the beginning of time people have wondered how the world began and so far no one really knows the answers. In ancient times people used stories to explain the creation of the world and the stars and planets.

The Aborigines from Australia believed in Dreamtime when their ancestors made all the animals. A Tahitian creation myth tells how all life came from an egg. There are several creation stories in Hinduism and followers believe there are times when the universe takes form and times when it dissolves back into nothing. The in-between times are known as the days and nights of Brahma, who is the Hindu god of creation. The Christian and Jewish bible says that God made the world in six days and made the first woman out of a man's rib.

Many people used to think the world was only about 6000 years old, but now scientists agree that is actually almost a million times older – about 5 billion years old.

Humanists think the creation stories from around the world are man's way of trying to make sense of the world and answer the biggest question of all. Humanists think the best way to find answers is to ask questions and look for clues, using science to study nature, rocks and the universe.



THE GOLDEN RULE

The Golden Rule is used in so many religions that it must be a very good rule. People from all over the world have different ways of saying the Golden Rule, but they really mean the same thing.

Here are some examples:

“Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.”

Jesus (Christian faith)

“What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow man.”

Rabbi Hillel (Jewish faith)

“Treat the earth and all that dwell thereon with respect.”

Native American Indian

“Do not earn your living harming others. Do not seek happiness by making others unhappy.”

Buddha (Buddhist faith)

“What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others.”

Confucius (Chinese philosopher)

There are many ways you could say the Golden Rule. You might say *“Be nice to people and people will be nice to you”* or *“Being kind is cool.”* Whatever way you choose, it is a good way of thinking and living.

TASK

Make up your own Golden Rule and design a poster to show what it means.

Make sure your slogan is clear.



LIVING TOGETHER

Helping Others

Helping others is an important part of being humanist. It would be wonderful if everyone in the world had enough food and good housing. It would be wonderful if there was no war, no illness and that all children could go to school. Unfortunately our world is not like that and many people are poor, starving and sick.

Those of us who have enough money to live on can help those who don't have enough. We can give money or time to charities that help people. Helping others can make you feel good about yourself. Humanists believe it is very important to help others and to try and make the world a better place for all.

TASK (Points for discussion)

Have you ever done something to help someone? What did you do? How did it make you feel?

What charities do you think are important?

Be All You Can Be

We are all different. This is good because we need different people to do different things in the world. Some like to study science to help with medicine or to find out more about our world; some like to paint or make music to help make people happy; and some like to do lots of sport to keep themselves and others healthy.

When you are young it is difficult to know what you want to be and it is good to try lots of different things. There will be some things you can do well and others you would like to be better at. Sometimes learning something new can be difficult and take a long time, but by watching others, practising and asking for help it is possible to learn most things.

TASK (Points for discussion)

What do you like to do? What are you good at? What would you like to be able to do? What do you enjoy learning about?

What do you do if you are finding something new difficult to do?



Being Friends



Are you a good friend? What sort of things make someone a good friend?

Here are some ideas from other children:

- Being honest
- Listening
- Making people happy
- Being sensitive and helpful
- Sharing

Being a good friend helps you grow up to become a responsible citizen who cares for others and the world. Here are some thoughts that Humanists have on these suggestions:

Being Honest

Sometimes telling the truth can be difficult. If you have done something you are ashamed of or you know will get you into trouble, it can be difficult to be honest. Always telling the truth makes you a better person. When you tell a lie you are not being true to yourself and people will trust you less. Trust is a very important quality and helps people live and work together.

What sort of things have you done to make people trust you?

Listening

People enjoy talking about things they have done or something that has made them happy or sad. You will always have friends if you learn to listen to people. Sometimes people may tell you something you already know, but even if you do it's nice for you to listen as they enjoy sharing their news or story with you.

How do you let people know you are listening to them? How do you feel if people don't listen to you?

Being different means that sometimes we don't always agree with what our friends are saying. It is important to understand that everyone has a right to say what they think. By listening carefully it is sometimes possible to come up with solutions to a problem or a compromise. **Compromise** means both sides giving up some of what they want. Each side thinks it is worth it to end the argument.

We need to listen to keep peace in our families, at school and in our communities.

TASK (Group discussion, opportunities for role play as feedback)

Your friend wants to play outside, but you have your new jeans on and don't want to spoil them. You'd much rather play a computer game together.



What are the advantages and disadvantages of each choice? How could you make a compromise?

Making People Happy

When people are feeling sad, it's good to try and make them happy. Some people always seem in a bad mood while others seem happy and are always smiling. What kind of person do you prefer to be around?

We all have bad moods, but the best person to change your mood is you. If you are feeling 'cranky' or 'crabbit', what can you do to put you in a happier mood?

Being Sensitive and Helpful

People's words and expressions show how they feel. If you are sensitive, it means you try to understand how that person is feeling. To be sensitive you can imagine what it would be like to be that person e.g. how would you feel if the same thing happened to you? How would you feel if someone said that to you?

Sometimes we hurt people's feelings accidentally. What would you do if you accidentally hurt someone's feelings?

TASK (points for discussion and opportunities for role play)

You notice someone is being teased in the playground. Everyone is having a laugh and thinks it is funny.

How would you feel if you were the one being teased?

What should you do if someone is teasing you?

Sharing

Sharing is an important part of being a good friend. As well as sharing toys or possessions, it is good to share ideas and knowledge. If we don't learn to share we usually end up being on our own.

TASK (points for discussion)



Who do you think is in this picture? What are they sharing? Why are they sharing?

TASK

This section has looked at the qualities that Humanists believe make a good citizen and a good friend.

Consider all of the points discussed so far and make a job advert for a best friend. When companies want to employ people they list all the good qualities they want you to have and then they say what you will get in return. Think about the qualities you expect a best friend to have and think about what qualities you offer to your friends.

Use the appendix at the end of this to complete your job advert. Many companies have a slogan and a logo. It might be a good idea to add this to the bottom of your advert to make it stand out from the rest.

NAME _____

FOR THE POSITION OF BEST FRIEND YOU WILL:

-
-
-
-
-



IN RETURN YOU WILL RECEIVE:

-
-
-
-
-

SLOGAN/QUESTION

LOGO

CELEBRATING LIFE

Introduction

Every culture in the world celebrates important events in life such as birth, becoming an adult, marriage and death. Different religions and cultures celebrate in different ways. Humanists also have special ceremonies to mark these life events. Most of these ceremonies are designed to suit the families involved.

Birth

Humanists have Naming Ceremonies to celebrate the birth of their child.

Family and friends gather together to congratulate the parents and welcome the baby into the community. Parents may explain the meaning of the name given to the child and special adult friends (Patrons) are chosen who promise to help the parents bring the child up to be happy and fulfilled in life. Presents and cards are given and sometimes people write their hopes for the child in a special book.



TASK

Imagine a new baby has been born into your or a friend's family. Think of a nice hope or wish for the baby that you could write into the commemorative book.

How can family and friends help parents when they have a new baby?

Coming of Age

Some families celebrate the coming of age at the start of teenage years, at 16, 18 or 21. These ceremonies are used to mark important changes in a young person's life and to offer them support and wish them well for the future.

What big changes do you think will take place during your life?

Marriage

When a couple decide to marry or live together they commit themselves to a loving relationship. Every ceremony is different as people want different things. Some like to get married outside, in a nice hotel, or somewhere that means something special to the couple. Most people like to dress up in nice clothes. They choose promises to make to each other and special friends act as witnesses to these promises. As with most ceremonies, there is usually a big party for friends and relatives.

Death

Humanists believe this is our only life and that we should therefore strive to live it to the fullest by setting high standards for ourselves and others. So when someone dies, Humanists believe it is important to celebrate the life they have lived.

When leaves fall from the tree in autumn, they become compost for the soil and help new plants and trees grow. When a person dies, Humanists like to remember how they touched their lives and how their ideas and thoughts have influenced them. In this way, Humanists think that they leave behind a little bit of themselves that can influence generations to come.

A funeral ceremony allows family and friends to grieve the loss of a loved one and say their final farewells. To celebrate the person's life the family usually chooses music which the deceased enjoyed during his/her lifetime; sometimes quotes are made about the things the person found important and often friends speak about the special times they had together.

TASK (Points for discussion)

What things have you achieved in your life so far?

What celebrations have you been to that you have enjoyed? What did you wear? What sort of things did you do? What did you eat?

What kind of music do you like to hear at celebrations and parties?

TASK (Mind Map)

Plan a party to celebrate your friend's birthday. Your teacher will help you plan this as a colourful mind map.



FESTIVALS AND TRADITIONS

Introduction

Humanists celebrate many festivals and enjoy the fun of Christmas and Easter without the religious aspects. Many festivals and traditions have grown over time and various religions have adopted and adapted ideas to suit their own religious stories. This has made many festivals a mixture of religious stories and ancient historical and cultural traditions. This is why many festivals are celebrated in different ways throughout the world.

Winter Festivals

Most cultures and religions celebrate a winter festival, which often includes festivals of light to brighten up the dull winter nights and to celebrate the coming of spring. Humanists prefer to call the winter festival **Yuletide**, an old Scandinavian name for the winter festival.

Here are some old traditions which you may recognise in Christmas festivals today.

- The ancient Romans started their celebrations on 17th December, the birthday of Saturn, and halls were decked with evergreen foliage and gifts were exchanged.
- The Romans used firs to represent the return of greenery brought by the sun, but it was the Germans who first brought the evergreen trees into the house during winter solstice festivals.
- Ancient people regarded mistletoe as sacred and the Scandinavians associated it with the Goddess of Love. Mistletoe was regarded as a token of peace and kissing under the mistletoe was a Roman custom.
- From the time of the ancient Egyptians, goose was the main course of winter solstice feasts. Henry VIII of England is credited with replacing goose with turkey. Turkeys were first introduced to Europe in 1519 by the Spanish, who learned of turkeys from the Aztecs.
- In Sweden the Christmas season begins with **St. Lucia's Day** on December 13. "Lucia" is Latin for "light", and the "festival of light" probably has its roots in pagan solstice celebrations.



Humanists believe everyone should be able to celebrate their winter festivals in a way that suits them and their family. For most Humanists Christmas is a time for families to share good times together and a chance to share gifts with those you love. As you can see there are many traditions we use today that have their roots in ancient times.

Here are the names of some other winter festivals you might want to find out more about:

- **Hanukkah** is a Jewish Festival of Light.
- **Eid** is an Islamic time of fasting, feasting and gift-giving.
- **Diwali** is the Hindu Festival of Light to celebrate the New Year.
- **Chinese New Year**.
- **Christmas** as a Christian festival.



Spring Festivals



Many ancient people also celebrated Spring festivals, a time of rebirth and new life. Easter is named after Eastre, the Goddess of Spring. The use of rabbits and coloured, decorated eggs stems from these early spring festivals.

Here are some Spring festivals which you may want to find out more about:

- **Mardi-Gras** or **Shrove Tuesday** is mainly celebrated in Roman Catholic countries and communities. Translated it means "fat Tuesday", and is the day on which there is a last opportunity to indulge in food and drink before Ash Wednesday and the start of the fast of Lent, the 40 days leading up to Easter when Christians commemorate Christ's fasting in the wilderness.
- **Holi** is a very colourful Hindu festival. It marks the end of winter when the harvest has been gathered in.

- **Purim** is a lively Jewish festival held in the spring, celebrating the story of Esther, Queen of the Persians.
- **Cherry Blossom Festival**. This is a famous ancient Japanese festival held in early spring.
- **Vesak (Buddha Day)** is the major Buddhist festival of the year as it celebrates the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha all on the one day.

As you can see there are many festivals from around the world. Humanists understand and enjoy the importance of traditions, culture and festivals to all societies, regardless of religious faith. They also think it is important to look to history to find out where some of our traditions come from.



TASKS

Read and answer the questions about 'The Christmas Tree Story'.

Choose a festival and find out what you can about the history and traditions of that festival. Has the festival changed over time?

(Points for further discussion)

What festivals do your family celebrate? Do you have your own special family traditions?



THE CHRISTMAS TREE STORY

Plants that remain green all year round have always had a special meaning for people in the winter. In the northern hemisphere, the shortest day and longest night falls on the 21st December and is called the Winter Solstice. Ancient people believed that the sun was a god and that winter came each year because the sun had become sick and weak. They celebrated the solstice because it meant that the sun God would at last begin to get well. Evergreen bows reminded them of all the green plants that would grow again when the sun God was strong and summer returned.

The Romans, Egyptians and Celts all had their own ceremonies that involved evergreens, but it is the Germans who are credited with starting the Christmas tree tradition as we know it today. They used Christmas trees as a sign of re-birth and a time to celebrate the new year. Many early Christians did not like the tradition, as they were seen as pagan symbols. People could be fined or punished for decorating Christmas trees. However, things began to change in the 19th century.

In 1846 Queen Victoria and her German Prince Albert were sketched by the London News with their children standing round a Christmas Tree. The Christmas tree immediately became popular throughout the western world. Now Christmas would not seem right without a Christmas Tree. (taken from the *History of Christmas* □ www.history.com)

Questions

1. When is the shortest day?
2. What did the ancient people think happened to the sun each winter?
3. What did the evergreen plants and trees remind them of?
4. Which country started the Christmas tree tradition as we know it today?
5. Why did the early Christians not like the Christmas tree?
6. Which Queen made the Christmas tree popular?

Humanists believe that children should be allowed to investigate and consider many different beliefs and religions, including non-belief, in order that they can grow up and decide for themselves about the world in which they live.

This document has considered most of the ideas and thoughts that Humanists feel are important and moral.

CONTACT US

Email: <http://www.humanism-scotland.org.uk/contact-us/contacts/education-officer.html>

Or you can write to us at:

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Or telephone: 0870 874 9002.

Websites where you and schools can access free educational resources

<http://www.humanism-scotland.org.uk/education/resources.html>

<http://www.humanismforschools.org.uk/>

