

What happens when we die?

Pupils may have lots of questions that may arise from the Covid 19 pandemic, either from the news, what has been spoken about at home or from a personal experience.

Some of these questions may be really big questions that need to be tackled in the classroom. 'What happens when you die?' is a really big question to tackle and is often avoided in general conversation – pupils will have their own ideas gleaned from many different sources: they may have their own very personal concept of what happens after death; a half understood recollection of a story they were told ("he's gone to sleep") which may even have frightened them rather than helped them ("what if I go to sleep and don't wake up?"); or even be deceived by TV and video games into thinking death is of no consequence. Some pupils, and many adults, will just think that death is the end of life, there is nothing more to talk about. When working on this enquiry the teacher will need to be sensitive if there are any recently bereaved pupils in the class and may need to talk with them or their families individually before embarking on the enquiry. ***The unit is not designed as bereavement counselling.***

This unit has been designed to assist in answering and exploring those big questions, to give ideas and resources as to how the big question of 'What happens when you die?' is asked. All the unit does not need to be taught and there may be other ideas and resources that could be used and should be used.

The unit comprises of a set of questions that can be used in both KS1 and KS2. It is based on a series of big questions that can be explored through all the major religions and world views. In KS1 these questions can often be explored through story books and the pupils own thoughts.

There is also a teacher's guide at the end of this document that outlines the six major religions and world views beliefs on what happens when you die and burial rituals and also includes further resources.

What happens when we die?		
Big questions	What may be explored	Links
What does life mean?	To explore what life and living on earth means. Explore rites of passage through life and how people lead their lives.	Links can be made with creation stories, rites of passage such as naming ceremonies, weddings and other religious events in life.
Why does someone die?	To explore the idea that dying is a part of every living being and it happens for different reasons. Explore some of the religious views on death and their relationship to God or no god. Exploring idea that the body is a shell and it is the soul that leaves the body.	Links can be made to Jesus and the resurrection, ideas of good and bad. Link with ideas on reincarnation.
How can we say goodbye?	Explore different ways funerals are held in different religions and world views. What happens at a funeral, what is said and where a funeral can take place? Why do we have a funeral?	Linking different religious and world view ideas, Linking with religious traditions and laws.
What comes after death?	To explore and consider a variety of ideas and beliefs about what happens when and after we die.	Linking different ideas of heaven and hell. Or that there is nothing after we die.
How can we remember someone?	Explore different ways a person is remembered; grave, funeral urns or just memories.	Linking different religious ways of mourning, practices after a funeral and why it is important to remember a person.

Resources

Resource	Key Stage	Brief outline
When Dinosaurs Die – A guide to understanding death by Laura Brown and Marc Brown	KS1 and lower KS2	A succinct and thorough children's book that helps dispel the mystery and negative connotations associated with death, and also explores the feelings we may have regarding the death of a loved one and the ways to remember someone after he or she has died.
The invisible String – Patrice Karst	Essential KS1 but a good book to explore in more detail with KS2	Explores the idea that the love between people never goes away.
Heaven – Nicholas Allen	KS1	A simple exploration of what heaven may be like through the eyes of a dog and a little girl.
Badgers Parting Gift – Susan Vardy	Lower KS2	Story of how an elderly badger deals with his looming death and how his friends react.
Water bugs and dragon flies - explaining death to young children by Doris Stickney	KS2	Explaining Death to Young Children. Down below the surface of a quiet pond lived a little colony of water bugs. They were a happy colony, living far away from the sun.

		For many months they were very busy, scurrying over the soft mud on the bottom of the pond.
https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zkdk382/articles/zbgp7nb	Upper KS2	KS3 bite size film from the BBC about different religions ideas on death and the afterlife.

What do faiths and world views believe about death and the afterlife?

There are different ways of thinking about life after death and these include;

- Reincarnation
- Resurrection
- Rebirth
- Immortality as a legacy – no life after death but we will exist in what we leave behind
- Immortality as a memory of others – no life after death but we will only exist in the memories of family and friends
- Nothing

Buddhism

Buddhists believe in reincarnation, the idea that when they die their energy passes onto another form. To Buddhists all life is a cycle of death and rebirth known as **samsara** and this is dependent on the actions in the person's present and previous lives. Ultimately Buddhists want to achieve **Nirvana or enlightenment** and to escape from samsara. To make this escape Buddhists follow the good actions set out in the **Eightfold Path**;

- Right view – Know the truth
- Right intention – free your mind of evil



- Right speech - say nothing that hurts others
- Right action – work for the good of others
- Right livelihood – respect life
- Right effort – resist evil
- Right concentration – practice meditation
- Right mindfulness – control your thoughts

To ultimately achieve Nirvana a Buddhist then has to accept the **Four Noble Truths** of;

- Suffering (Dukkha) – suffering comes in many forms
- Origin of suffering (Samudaya) – the root of suffering comes in three forms – Greed and Desire, Ignorance and Delusion, Hatred and Destructive urges
- Cessation of suffering (Nirodha) – the aim to see situations that may enchant or mislead them
- Path to the cessation of suffering (Magga) – the middle way or to follow the eightfold path

Death rituals

When a Buddhist is dying a monk or family members will read important words and reassure the person of their good deeds. The person dying should be in a virtuous state of mind and calm for the moment of rebirth.

As Buddha was himself cremated many Buddhist funerals involve cremation rather than burial but not all. The different traditions of Buddhism some of the rituals and traditions will reflect the type of Buddhism followed.

The ashes are then either; scattered, buried or kept at home in an urn.

Christianity

Christian beliefs on life after death are based on the **resurrection** of Jesus and when they die they will be judged for the deeds they did in their worldly life.

Some Christians believe that this judgement will happen upon their death and they will either go to **Heaven** or **Hell**. Other Christians believe in the **Day of Judgement** when everyone will be judged at the same time and then it will be decided if a person enters Heaven.

Some Christians believe that hell is a real physical place which will involve painful torture for eternity. Some Christians believe hell is not a real place but it is a way of talking about existence without God.

Roman Catholics will be given the last rites, the last prayers and ministrations shortly before their death and this will be administered by a Catholic priest. The last rites prepare the soul of the dying and involve a person's last confession so the person is then prepared for individual judgement.

Burial Rituals

Christians are either buried in consecrated ground or cremated and the service will be led by a priest. The service usually consists of; readings, reflection, prayers of thanks giving, penitence and readiness for death, commendation and farewell. Finally the committal, which is the solemnest moment of the service with the words 'We therefore commit (his or her) body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in the sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life.'

If cremated the ashes will be returned to the family who then choose what they wish to do with them.

A Roman Catholic funeral is slightly different and is often said with a full mass, with more readings and different liturgy's read.

Hinduism

Hindus believe in reincarnation after death, meaning the soul or **atman** reincarnates into a different physical body or life form and this cycle can repeat over and over again is referred to as **Samsara**. To leave this repetitive cycle of birth and death, a person must attain **Moksha**, the ultimate goal of overcoming ignorance and desires but also the desire of Moksha itself.

Burial rituals

It is preferable for Hindu's to die at home and after death a candle is lit and placed by the head of the deceased and the body placed in the entrance of the home facing south. The body will be bathed. Anointed in sandalwood, shaved if male and then wrapped in cloth, a casket will be used in the UK. The body is always cremated and preferably within 24 hours of death.

Prayers, mantras and hymns will be recited by the family and friends around the casket and near the end the custom of placing rice balls close to the body will be observed.

The body will enter the crematorium feet first, with the family and friends reciting prayers. The bereaved will encircle the casket and say prayers.

Traditionally, the ashes are scattered on the holy river Ganges and some Hindus will send their loved one's ashes to India for this to happen. If this is not practical or affordable then the ashes may be scattered on water ways.

Humanism

Humanists believe that they only have one life and they should do their best to be good and kind throughout the time they are alive. There is nothing else apart from human beings, no god or gods to organise and run things. Humanists do not believe in an afterlife and when a person dies, they just die, it is the last phase in life.

Burial rituals

Humanists like to mark the rites of passage in special ways but without using religious rituals. A humanist funeral will be a burial or a cremation, but it is organised and run without the mention of a god or an 'afterlife'. The purpose of the funeral is for the family and friends to remember and celebrate the life of the person who has died. A celebrant may be used to conduct the ceremony, however there is no fixed format or words or music to be used. As a funeral has no legal status and people are free to hold a ceremony wherever and however they choose. Humanists often hold their ceremonies in a cemetery, crematorium, or woodland burial site.

Islam

Islam teaches that there is life after death, and this is known as **Akhirah**. In Islam, it is Allah who decides when a person dies and most Muslims believe that when they die, they will stay in their graves until **Yawm al-din**, the Day of Judgement. On that day, they will be raised from their graves and brought before Allah and judged on how they lived their earthly lives. This belief is known as the resurrection of the body.

Those who have performed more good deeds than bad will enter **Jannah**, or Paradise. Jannah is a place described as a 'garden of everlasting bliss' and a 'home of peace'. In Jannah there will be no sickness, pain or sadness.

Those who have performed more bad deeds than good will enter **Jahannam** or Hell. This is a place of physical and spiritual suffering.

Muslims believe that Allah is forgiving, merciful and compassionate, so not all bad actions will be punished. Allah will forgive those who have repented for their sins and those who have done some good in their lives, for example showing kindness to others.

There are, however, some sins that many Muslims believe to be unforgivable. These include the sin of shirk. Which is the sin of regarding anything as equal or partner of Allah. ⁱ

Burial rituals

Muslims have very firm guide lines on funerals as according to Islamic law a person should be buried as soon as possible after death and certainly within three days. Most Muslim families will use an Islamic funeral director who are experienced in the

arrangements that need to be made. ⁱⁱ Though some mosques have a committee made up of volunteers that are dedicated to carrying out funeral rites.

When a Muslim is dying, they try to say the last words of Muhammad, the prophet of Allah: Allah, help me through the hardship and agony of death. The dying person is encouraged to recite the **Kalema of Shahadaat** and if they are not able to then a relative or anyone nearby can recite it for them. This is the 1st pillar of Islam- To declare that there is no God except Allah and to declare that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is the messenger of God. Upon death other people will say: To Allah we belong and to Allah we return. The deceased's body is washed and wrapped in a white cloth or shroud by persons of the same sex which is known as **Ghusl**. Muslims prefer not to use a coffin (this is not allowed in the UK) and the body is always wrapped and covered in simple sheets, known as **Kafan**. Muslims never cremate a body as burning the body is an act of disrespect and dishonour.

Prayers are said in the Mosque and led an Imam with women and children separate from the men. In Islamic tradition only men attend the grave side and bodies are buried facing Mecca which is the Muslim holy city in Saudi Arabia.

Judaism

Judaism teaches that there is a life after death but the details are unclear and often confused. What most Jews agree that it is important how a person lives their life and they will be judged by these actions but what happens after death is left to God.

Burial Rituals

When Jewish person is dying, Jews try to say the **Shema** (a prayer showing their belief in God). After the death they say the **Kaddish** or funeral prayer, praising God. ⁱⁱⁱ

Jewish burials take place as soon as possible usually with twenty four hours and the body prepared according to tradition. Though this can differ depending on being orthodox, reform or conservative Jew. The body is usually washed and dressed in a plain white shroud. If the body is male it may also be buried with articles such as the Kippah or pray shawl (Tallit) but the fringes will cut off showing the person is now free of religious laws. The coffin is very plain and simple and once in the coffin the body is not seen again. ^{iv} Cremation is only acceptable with reform Jews and is forbidden with other sects of Judaism. After the funeral two periods of mourning will be adhered to. The first for seven days, **Shiva**, when a candle is lit for seven days and the family will stay at home

to pray. A second period called, **Shloshim**, meaning thirty is entered where the family return to normal but recite daily prayers and hymns.

When somebody loses a close relative the custom is to wish him “a long life” as life is the most sacred and precious thing in our faith. The members of the bereaved family tares their clothing (edge of jacket or dress) and Shiva (7 days of mourning) begins, during which they pray and contemplate the life of the deceased. During Shiva they are visited by the entire community to sit, eat and pray together. It is customary to bring foods and snacks to the mourners’ house. Also, all the mirrors in the house where Shiva takes place are covered to help mourners avoid distraction of checking their appearance (among other reasons). Every person who joins Shiva approaches the family of mourners with the following words: “May God comfort you among the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem”, usually spoken in Hebrew. The most important prayer associated with death is, of course, Kaddish. Kaddish is recited after death, during Shiva, at Yorzeits (anniversaries of death) and also for the entire year after a death, for example, a parent or close relative. Although associated with death Kaddish does not mention it at all, but rather concentrates itself on sanctifying and magnifying God and Life.

Sikhism

Sikhism teaches that the soul reincarnates when the body dies. Sikhs do not believe in an afterlife that is either heaven or hell; they believe that good or bad actions in this life determine the life form into which a soul takes rebirth.

Many Sikhs believe that **Waheguru** or god lives inside everyone. Each reincarnation as human or animal is temporary. Only humans can decide between right and wrong. For this reason, many Sikhs see their human life as the only time when the cycle of death and rebirth can be broken. The escape from the cycle of death and rebirth is known as mukti.^v Sikhs believe that by leading a good life, making the right decisions this will help them achieve reunification with God and then the cycle of rebirth is broken. These teachings are contained within the Guru Granth Sahib.

Burial rituals

Sikhs have a belief in the cycle of life. Their teachings seek to show that one should not be subject to death. That death serves as the progression to the journey from God, through the universe, and back to God. Because they believe that the soul never dies, there is no mourning at the death of Sikhs. At the funeral, they pray that the soul is released from the bonds of reincarnation and become one with God again.

Sikhs are always cremated and before the cremation the body will be bathed in yogurt and dressed in new clothes. There are usually two services one at the Gurwara and prayers will be said to release the soul from the body and a second one before the body is cremated. The ashes of the deceased are usually scattered into moving water and no permanent memorial is kept as it is believed that the memories of the person are kept in the minds of the living. ^{vi}

Suggested readings and quotes

Please find below some suggested readings, quotes and links for some of the major religions and world views that will give further understanding and viewpoints related to death and bereavement.

Christianity

John chp 11 vs 25 – “Jesus said..”I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.” “

I Thessalonians chp 4 vss13ff – “we do not want you to be ignorant about those who have fallen asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men who have no hope... We will be with the Lord forever.”

Humanism

The value of life lies not in the length of days, but in the use we make of them. - Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592)

Your death is the order of things: it belongs to the life of the world. - Lucretius (99-55BC)

An individual human existence should be like a river – small at first, narrowly contained within its banks, and rushing passionately past boulders and over waterfalls. Gradually the river grows wider, the banks recede, the waters flow more quietly, and – in the end – without any visible break, they become merged in the sea, and painlessly lose their individual being. The man or woman who in old age, can see his or her life in this way, will not suffer from the fear of death, since the things they care for will continue.

Bertrand Russell (1872-1970)

Understanding Humanism has a good section on Life and Death. It includes a very short video of a humanist ceremonies including a funeral.

<https://understandinghumanism.org.uk/>

<https://understandinghumanism.org.uk/uhtHEME/life-and-death/>

Islam

Verses from the Holy Qur'an:

"Indeed, to Allah we belong and to Allah we shall return." (Surah 2: 156)

"Every person (nafs) will taste death," (Surah 3:185)

"... no one knows (where) in what land (or place) he will die". (Surah 31:34)

"Allah does not give any breather (or let up) to anyone for death when its fixed time comes." (Surah 63:11)

Death is seen as a crossing from this temporary worldly life to an everlasting permanent life in the Akhirah. Therefore, every human being will go through the experience of death. There is no known fixed time for death or how a person will die.

Heavens described in the Holy Qur'an:

But as to those who are careful of (their duty to) their Lord, they shall have gardens beneath which rivers flow, abiding in them; an entertainment from their Lord, and that which is with Allah is best for the righteous. (3:198)

Allah has promised to the believing men and the believing women gardens, beneath which rivers flow, to abide in them, and goodly dwellings in gardens of perpetual abode; and best of all is Allah's goodly pleasure- that is the grand achievement. (9:72)

The gardens of perpetuity, they shall enter them, rivers flowing beneath them; they shall have in them what they please. Thus does Allah reward those who guard (against evil). (16:31)

Surely (as for) those who believe and do good, We do not waste the reward of him who does a good work. These it is for whom are gardens of perpetuity beneath which rivers flow, ornaments shall be given to them therein of bracelets of gold, and they shall wear green robes of fine silk and thick silk brocade interwoven with gold, reclining therein on raised couches; excellent the recompense and goodly the resting place. (18:30-31)

Judaism

From page 314 of the Reform Judaism Siddur. Second paragraph: "We live our life yet hardly know its nature, for from a mystery we come and to this mystery we return. The death of those close to our hearts grieves and humbled us. It reminds us that we all

must die, like grass that grows in the morning that grows so fresh in the morning, and in the evening fades and dies. So we end our years like a sigh. Let us think of those who died at this time in years past. How can we accept the reality of death? By remembering the goodness of our loved ones, and by shaping our lives after their example. For the memory of the righteous is truly a blessing, and an inspiration for all our days. May our lives be always worthy of their memory. “ This is often said at the end of the burial service.

Sikhism

The follow link has some good quotes about interpreting death.

<https://www.sikhnet.com/news/concept-death-gurbani>

The following link has a good summary of the practical steps related to a funeral.

<https://www.funeralguide.co.uk/help-resources/arranging-a-funeral/religious-funerals/sikh-funerals>

The following link covers some hymns sung during the funeral process as an aid to the next stage if transformation.

<https://www.learnreligions.com/sikh-funeral-hymns-prayers-and-verses-2993470>

The following link covers grieving.

<https://simranisingh.wordpress.com/2015/04/18/sikh-ways-of-grieving/>

ⁱ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z6mhgk7/revision/3>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.funeralguide.co.uk/help-resources/arranging-a-funeral/religious-funerals/muslim-funerals>



iii <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z6mhgk7/revision/3>

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iv <https://www.funeralguide.co.uk/help-resources/arranging-a-funeral/religious-funerals/jewish-funerals>

v <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z77634j/revision/3>

vi <https://www.funeraldirect.co/sikh-funeral-traditions/>