

Unit 1F What can we learn from visiting a church?

ABOUT THE UNIT

This unit builds on the visit to a church in unit 1B 'What does it mean to belong in Christianity?' It introduces children to the church as a special place where Christians worship. Children are given an opportunity to experience and reflect on the atmosphere in a church, and to explore the purpose of the building.

WHERE THE UNIT FITS IN

This unit is a natural extension of unit 1B 'What does it mean to belong in Christianity' and unit 1C 'Celebrations: why do Christians give gifts at Christmas?'

Opportunities for children to visit places of worship are provided across the key stages. The principles for planning and managing visits are set out in detail in unit 2D 'Visiting a place of worship: generic'.

PRIOR LEARNING

It is helpful if children have:

- made visits outside school
- talked about special places in general
- discussed expectations about behaviour when they are inside and outside school

VOCABULARY

In this unit children will have an opportunity to use words and phrases related to:

- the church building and the artefacts and people who use the building
- Christianity, *eg God, worship, altar, font, Bible, pulpit, lectern, cross, crucifix, candles*
- the atmosphere of the building, *eg calm, peaceful, dark, light*

RESOURCES

- Christian artefacts, *eg candles, cross, crucifix*
- the Bible
- videos showing a range of Christian places of worship
- pictures and posters showing different types of churches – inside and outside
- 3D jigsaw and models of church buildings

EXPECTATIONS

At the end of this unit

most children will:

know that a church is a special place for many Christians and consider the reasons why; recognise some of the artefacts and symbols found in a church and know the purpose of some of them; reflect on their own feelings and responses to the atmosphere in the building

some children will not have made so much progress and will:

know that a church is a special place for many Christians; consider their experience of the atmosphere in a church and reflect on their own feelings in a church; recognise and describe some Christian symbols

some children will have progressed further and will:

know some of the key features of a church and understand their significance for many Christians in worship; understand how the atmosphere in the church contributes to Christian worship

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

POSSIBLE TEACHING ACTIVITIES

LEARNING OUTCOMES

POINTS TO NOTE

CHILDREN SHOULD LEARN

CHILDREN

PREPARING FOR THE VISIT: WHAT IS A CHURCH? WHAT IS IT FOR?

- that the church is a special place for Christians
 - about some of the important features of the church building
 - about some of the activities that take place in a church
 - about the importance of showing respect for other people and their special places and things
- Look at photographs of church buildings – inside and outside. Talk about what the children can see. *What is happening? Who are the people?* Remind children that the people who go to church are Christians.
 - Discuss the plans for the visit. Encourage the children to talk about what they expect to see, and remind them of any previous visits. *What do you remember? Have you been to a church for other reasons, such as weddings, baptisms, services? What can you remember?*
 - Build up a sense of anticipation and the feeling that they are going to visit a special place. Explain that the church is special for Christians.
 - Discuss how they think they should behave in a church and why. *How would you expect visitors to behave in your home?* Agree a simple 'code of behaviour'.
 - Look at further photographs or videos of the inside of churches and identify some of the artefacts and furniture. *What does the cross stand for? What are the hassocks for? Why are there hymn books and a Bible?* Talk about how they are used and where they can be found in a church.

- recognise and identify some features of a church
- identify some of the artefacts in the church
- make connections between the features of the building and the artefacts and the way they are used by Christians
- understand the need to show, by their behaviour, respect for other people and places of worship

- Plan the visit with leaders and members of the church beforehand. Brief them sensitively if they are going to speak to the children or answer questions, so they are aware of the purpose and focus of the visit and the age and likely concentration span of the children.
- Check whether there are areas where the children shouldn't go, eg *parts of the churchyard or behind the altar rail.*
- Be prepared for questions about death that may be prompted by seeing graves and monuments inside and outside the church.
- The churchyard can provide a good focus for exploring these questions but it may be more appropriate as a separate visit, possibly at a later stage.

VISITING A CHURCH

- about what a church feels like and looks like
 - about why Christians come to the church, what they do there and how they care for it
 - why many Christians want their church to be beautiful
- Ask the children to sit quietly and use all their senses to experience the atmosphere of the building. Ask them how they feel when they come into the church. Encourage them to talk about smells and the different textures of things they touch, eg *smooth, polished wood, cold stone, shining metal.* Identify colours in windows, carpets, flowers, hassocks and banners. Record their responses for later use in school.
 - Ask the children what they think the church is for. Talk about the people who use the church. *When do they come? Why do they come?* If possible, invite a priest, minister or a member of the church to discuss this with the children.
 - *Who looks after the church, keeps it clean and polished? Who arranges the flowers? Why do you think they do these things?* Explore why Christians might want the church to be beautiful and well cared for. If possible, ask a member of the church to answer these questions.
 - *What is the most important part of the church and why?* Provide an opportunity for them to ask questions to the teachers or members of the church who may be present. Note down any questions that cannot be answered for further research.
 - Allow time for children to make a close observational drawing of something they like in the church, or make a stone, wood or brass rubbing.
 - Take photographs to remind children of the visit when they are back in school (possibly using a digital camera).

- experience and describe the atmosphere of the church
- devise questions about how the church is used
- make connections between the people they meet and how the church is cared for and how it is used
- identify the parts of the church that they think are important and begin to consider why

- This unit suggests a general focus for the visit, allowing the children to experience the building using all their senses and to explore their responses.
- You may choose to have music playing when the children enter, perhaps someone playing the organ, or you may want them to experience being still and 'feeling' the silence.
- There are many other possibilities as a focus for visits, eg *the different furniture in the church – its meanings and uses; how the building is used in a celebration such as a baptism or a wedding.*
- Not all churches are old and the nearest church may be a modern building.
- The atmosphere inside a church is not only related to the age of the building; it is conveyed by the things that are in it, the way it is looked after, the colours, light, flowers, furnishings, and the things that happen there.
- Christian groups sometimes use buildings such as school halls for worship. This could prompt a discussion with the children about what they think might change a room into a church.
- Some churches are plainer than others. Try to get the children to see this positively – lots of space, simple, no clutter – rather than the absence of anything interesting.

FOLLOW-UP TO THE VISIT: WHAT MAKES A CHURCH SPECIAL?

- to identify some of the features of a church that make it a special place for Christians
 - to evaluate what they have learnt and present the information in a variety of forms
- Many aspects of the visit can be developed further in the classroom.
 - Follow-up activities focusing on what the children have learnt may extend over several lessons.
 - Tasks could include: making a class book, a display, a model or diagram labelling important parts of the church; using a bank of words available in the classroom, adding simple explanations about how the building is special for Christians; designing a hassock or banner using a picture or symbol seen in the church; role play baptisms and weddings; presenting what they learnt on their visit to another class or in assembly; writing thank you letters to the people who helped with the visit, saying what they think they learnt from the visit; inviting a member of the church to come into school to talk and answer their questions.

- communicate using writing, pictures and speaking, about the church building and the artefacts
- give simple explanations about why and how the building is special for Christians

- The visit has the potential to contribute significantly to children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

FUTURE LEARNING

Children could go on to:

- make further visits to churches and other places of worship throughout key stages 1 and 2; each time with a different focus and always building on their previous knowledge, understanding and experience
- visit churches of different denominations and explore some of the similarities and differences

OUT-OF-SCHOOL LEARNING

Children could:

- find out about a nearby church
- have visited a cathedral or place of pilgrimage while on holiday
- look out for pictures of churches, *eg calendars, Christmas cards, postcards, the internet*