

TOLERANCE AND MULTICULTURALISM

BACKGROUND

More than a thousand years ago, Muslims from Africa conquered Spain and Portugal. They created their own country and forced the Christian kings out. Islam became the country's religion. However, there were still many Jews and Christians living there. (2) They were not treated equally to Muslims, but they were tolerated by the government. (3)

Centuries later, in 1492, a new Christian king called Ferdinand invaded the country and changed the religion back to Christianity. The Christian king did not tolerate the Jewish and Muslim religions at all. (Revisit 2) The Jews and Muslims were told they had 3 choices:

1. Change their religion to Christianity
2. Leave the country
3. Die

Some chose to change religion, some left the country and some were killed. One of the Jews whose family fled was Baruch Spinoza. They went to live in Amsterdam, in Holland, which was one of the most tolerant places in Europe. Jews still had to be very careful there, but they could follow their religion, work, and make money. A hundred years later, Spinoza was born. He worked making lenses for telescopes and glasses, but was also a writer and philosopher. However, at the age of 23, this curse was written about him...

STIMULUS

Cursed be Spinoza by day and cursed be he by night; cursed be he when he lies down, and cursed be he when he rises up; cursed be he when he goes out, and cursed be he when he comes in. The Lord will not spare him; the anger and wrath of the Lord will rage against this man. We order that no one should communicate with him in speaking or writing, or show him any favour, or stay with him under the same roof, or within four metres of him, or read anything composed or written by him. (4)

This curse was written not by the Christians who ruled Amsterdam, but by other Jews. (Revisit 4)

The curse was given to Spinoza because of what he said about God and religion. Here are some of the things that both Jews and Christians believed:

Our souls live on after we die

God looks after us

The laws of our religion were given by God

Spinoza did not believe these things were true and told people so. (5)

Task Questions

- ✓ 1. Why do maps change? Can there be different maps of the same place that are both correct? Borders and names are changed because of wars or governments.
- ✓ If the government changes the name (or religion or border) of the country, are we wrong to use the old name? Sometimes people don't like the changes and try to change things back. Maps can show different things: types of people, shape of land, roads etc.
- ✓ What makes a country Muslim? Or Christian?
- ✓ Is it the religion of the government? Or king? If some people don't follow the country's religion is it still the country's religion?
- ✓ 3. What is tolerance? What is the difference between tolerance and equality?
- ✓ Is equality fair?
- ✓ Is tolerance fair?
- ✓ What is the opposite of tolerance?
- ✓ What kind of behaviour should we tolerate?
- ✓ What kind of behaviour shouldn't we tolerate?
- ✓ If I believe my religion is right, why should I tolerate someone else's?

- ✓ Do you think the people writing were tolerant of Spinoza?
- ✓ Why do you think they felt so negative? What could he have done to make them feel that?
- ✓ Should the Jews have tolerated Spinoza's beliefs? And should the Christians have minded?
- ✓ Does God want us to stop people from disagreeing with our religion? What should we do to people who leave our religion?
- ✓ If someone doesn't believe in God, should they tolerate people who do?

LESSON COMMENTS

All the questions here lead directly into the problem of tolerance. Is it possible to tolerate everything? For example, should we tolerate other people being intolerant? There is a strong acceptance of intolerance in the New Testament – Christians are invited to accept the unfairness and cruelty of Jesus's treatment, not to fight it. Of course, real Christians and Christian countries haven't always gone along with this. In the same way, there is a long history of passiveness and patience among Jewish people – maybe there was no alternative. Modern Israel, however, has not been at all passive, though its representatives have argued they have shown patience – there are fiercely competing views on this issue.

What does this mean for your class? Well, obviously this is a political minefield. But we won't serve our children best by creating the impression that certain things can't be discussed. Much more important is to show them how any subject can be discussed without giving cause for offence.

Secondly, putting aside the political issues, there is a genuine moral problem here - which is good! After all, if we want to be tolerant people and so tolerate whatever other people believe or do, no matter how threatened we are by it, do we do that right up until we are tolerating our own destruction? If we go back to the time of the Nazis, should they have been tolerated, when their aim was to destroy tolerance itself? There are versions of Christian and Buddhist belief that would say yes.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

MATHS – Look at numbers and percentages of minorities in different places at different times (London, New York & Istanbul are places that have seen changes)

HISTORY/GEOGRAPHY – Compare maps of the same place (or the whole world) at different times and find out why they have changed

SCIENCE – What is a lens? What does it do, and how? What kind of things have them?

LITERACY – The opposite of a curse is a blessing. Here are two examples:

Traditional Irish Blessing:

May the road rise up to meet you.

May the wind be always at your back.

May the sun shine warm upon your face;

the rains fall soft upon your fields

and until we meet again,

may God hold you in the palm of His hand.

Jewish Blessing From Parents To Children:

May God bless you and guard you.

יְבָרְכֶךָּ יְהוָה וְיִשְׁמְרֶכָּ

May God show you favour and be gracious to you.

יְאֵר יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיַחֲנֹךְ

May God show you kindness and grant you peace.

יֵשָׂא יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיַשֵּׁם לָךְ שְׁלוֹם

What do both these blessings have in common? Which words can you find in both? Could you write your own blessing? Think of who it is for and what you wish for them.