

## **GOSPEL** Why do Christians communicate the Gospel through the Arts?

**This RE Enquiry Pack is written to compliment the GOSPEL unit of Understanding Christianity. It provides a wide range of activities which Teachers can use either as a whole unit of work or as a series of individual learning activities.**

Productions such as Wintershall's 'The Life of Christ' show how the dramatic arts can be used to communicate the Gospel in a powerful and accessible way. 'The Life of Christ' is a contemporary example, but looking back through the centuries there are many examples of community-based Biblical drama presented through Passion or mystery plays. For more background information, see 'Essential Information for Teachers' at the end of this unit.

### **This unit:**

- Looks at ways in which Christians use different art forms, particularly drama, to communicate the Gospel;
- Examines the purpose and impact of the contemporary biblical drama using 'The Life of Christ'
- Considers what text and role models there are in the Bible for creative approaches to communicating the Gospel, including those of Jesus.

A portfolio of rich source material from Wintershall's outdoor production 'The Life of Christ' is integrated within this unit for use as evidence in making this RE Enquiry. For ease of use, the RE Enquiry learning activities are grouped around the TEXT, IMPACT and CONNECTIONS structure used in the [Understanding Christianity resource](#).

### **Source material from 'The Life of Christ' includes:**

- **Photos from different Gospel scenes in the production and backstage aspects**
- **Interviews with the script writer, producer and volunteer cast members**
- **Interviews with professional actors specialising in Biblical drama**
- **Feedback from audience members including teachers and pupils**



**All the source material used within the unit  
and a wealth of other material can be accessed from [www.wintershall.org.uk](http://www.wintershall.org.uk)**

**OUTCOMES** - By the end of this unit, pupils are expected to:

**TEXT:** make links between biblical texts about creativity, making and using artwork with the concept of Gospel, and its communication.

**IMPACT:** make links between the accounts of God creating the earth, the Holy spirit inspiring Bezalel, the craftsman in building the temple of Solomon and ways in which some Christians interpret biblical texts through drama and sculpture, showing awareness of different interpretations.

**CONNECTIONS:** make links between ideas about being inspired to use creativity to communicate the Gospel and the impact it can have on people in the world today, expressing some of their own ideas;  
**and**  
weigh up how biblical ideas, teachings or beliefs relate to issues, problems and opportunities in their own lives and world today, developing insights of their own. For example, identify ways people are impacted by the Gospel message through the arts and respond to it.

**KNOWLEDGE BUILDING BLOCKS** - Pupils will know that:

- Christians try to understand God better and communicate this by trying to describe God using symbols, similes, metaphors, in song, story, poetry and art.
- Many Christians believe Jesus' teachings make people think hard about how to live and show them the right way.
- Many Christians believe that Jesus' life shows what it means to love God (his Father) and love your neighbour.
- Many Christians believe that they should bring this good news to life in the world in different ways, within their church family, in their personal lives, with family, with their neighbours, in the local, national and global community.

**KEY CONCEPTS AND SKILLS** – that can be covered using this material within any Key Stage, include:

- why the arts are used to communicate the Gospel
- how faith can inspire art and be reflected through different art forms
- evaluating interpretations of Bible texts in relation to the creation
- the use of the dramatic arts and visual art
- considering the impact of selected contemporary examples of art forms being used to communicate the Gospel
- applying knowledge and understanding by using the arts as a way to communicate a Gospel-related message

## Considerations for the Teacher

It can be argued that children are more visually literate because of the impact of digital media. However, for many, their experience of the Arts beyond participating in, and watching school plays and enjoying occasional visits to the cinema or theatre, is predominantly consumerist. Consequently, they remain largely disconnected from the creative process and motivations of the artist behind it. For example, they might see paintings in a book, on television or watch a film, but rarely know anything about the context, production process or purpose that it was originally intended for.

The focus of this unit 'Why do Christians communicate the gospel through the Arts' demands exploration of the powerful connections there are between what inspires and motivates people to create works of art, their choice of media, techniques.

Take care that pupils understand that many Christians believe that Jesus is alive today and related reasons inspire some Christians to communicate the Gospel. Consolidate knowledge and understanding with reference to prior learning within the following concepts: God; People of God; Incarnation; Salvation; and Kingdom of God.

---

## YOU MIGHT LIKE TO START WITH...

### Key Question: *Why do we create artwork or perform plays?*

- *Do you like creating things to communicate ideas, emotions, beliefs, experiences?*
- *What art forms have you enjoyed using?*
- *How can different art forms help you express yourself?*

Consider together how important messages are communicated e.g. at home, at school, in the community, by government, in places of worship. *What role do the arts play in this?*



In groups identify and list examples of different art forms they have experienced either as a participator or consumer, why the artforms were used and what messages were being communicated through them and their impact.

Gather as diverse a range of examples as possible, e.g. visual art, poetry, music, song, dance, drama, mime and storytelling etc.

- *What different art forms are used by friends and family to communicate important messages and beliefs for example greetings cards, songs, visual art, stories in books, theatre and film?*
- *What art forms are used by communities to communicate beliefs, values, hopes, dreams?*
- *How does advertising or journalism use different artforms to communicate their messages or stories?*

### Key Question: *How do you communicate important messages? What role can the arts play?*

Pairs of pupils have a card each with either a virtue or the opposite, a vice, for example 'love' or 'hate' and are asked to think about how they could communicate the significance of the theme to others using a different artform for example, visual art, dance, poetry, song, music, drama. Ideas are shared with the group.

Love	Hate
Humility	Pride
Kindness	Envy
Abstinence	Greed
Patience	Anger
Diligence, hard working	Laziness

- *Which art forms worked most effectively to communicate the message about the virtue or the vice?*
- *What differences might there be between simply describing the significance of the virtue or vice in words to someone and using different artforms to do so?*
- *If many Christians believe Jesus is the most important person in history and in their lives, why and how might they use the arts to communicate about him and impact of his life on people?*
- *What art forms other than the written word might Christians use to communicate beliefs and teachings that they think are important?*

#### Useful definitions:

**Virtue:** a firm attitude to do what is right.

**Vice:** It's direct opposite. A vice is a habit to do what is wrong.

Virtues forge our human character. Moral virtues grow, with God's help, through education, deliberate actions and perseverance.

## MAKING SENSE OF THE TEXT

### *Why do Christians communicate the Gospel through the Arts?*

#### **TEXT**      **Activity 1a How can God be creative?**

Ask pupils... What evidence is there in the Bible about being creative regarding both God and people?

For example;



[Genesis 1](#) and [Genesis 2](#) Creation story and the creation of humankind

[Exodus 35](#) Moses instructing the people of Israel with God's Commandments about the Temple

[Exodus 35](#) Bezalel and his craftsmen inspired by the Holy Spirit

[Psalm 104](#) David as a songwriter, poet and musician

**Read or mime** part of the Christian Creation story from the Book of Genesis Chapters 1 and 2 about how God made the world, creating the earth, light and day, plants and animals.

Whether this is interpreted literally or metaphorically, the first few chapters in Genesis document an inspiring creative process involved in bringing things into being. Judaism and Islam have a similar 'Creation' story and many other religions and belief systems have their own stories and theories about how the world began.

*How does this account help us understand something of what many Christians believe about God's creative nature?*

#### **TEXT**      **Activity 1b Humankind made in the image of God to create**

In the Christian Creation story, God was 'creating man and in his own image'.

**Read** the account in [Genesis 1v27](#) of God creating man out of dust and woman from the rib of Adam.

**Discuss** what the phrase 'made in God's image' might mean. How could this relate to people's ability to create?



For example, people down the ages, throughout the world, have both survived and developed technologically through human resourcefulness and creativity used practically in creating tools, vessels, methods to source and prepare food, design and build shelters and clothing from materials of the earth.

Alongside this since the earliest times human beings have been making art and using it to communicate about facts, faith and feelings alongside other art forms such as drama and storytelling. (see Essential Information)

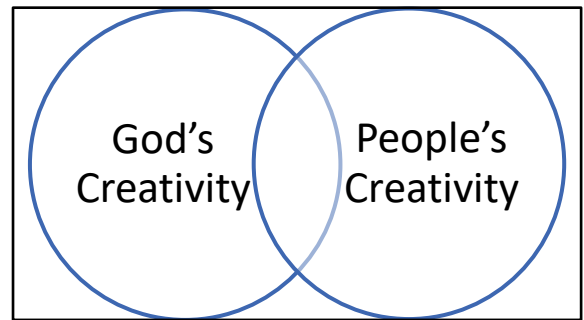
**Connect** pupil's understanding of Christian beliefs about God as Creator and how people are inspired and able to create. (see Essential Information)

## TEXT

### Activity 2a Connecting between God's creativity and people

*What connections are there, from a believer's perspective, between God's ability to create the world and an individual's ability to be creative in different ways?*

**Draw** a giant Venn diagram with two overlapping circles. In the left-hand circle discuss and write down ideas about Christian beliefs about God's creativity and evidence from the Genesis text. In the right-hand circle write down examples of the different ways people use their creativity. For example, create relationships, art, homes, cities, nations and many more things including inventions even yet to be known!



## TEXT

### Activity 2b What do Christians believe about Salvation?



**Look** at the images illustrating the concept of Salvation in the UC resource e.g. the lifesaving ring with the cross.

**Discuss** what Christians believe about Salvation, for example Jesus rebuilding a bridge between God and humans.

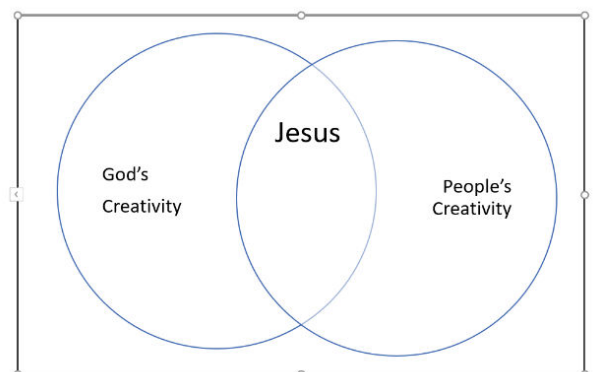
You could include:

- Many Christians believe that Jesus calls them to sacrifice their own needs to the needs of others.
- The Kingdom of God, for example that Jesus is still alive, rules in their hearts and lives through the Holy Spirit, if they let him. (Connect with pupils learning about Salvation and Kingdom of God)

**Write down** the outcomes of this discussion that help explain this connection in the section of the Venn diagram where the two circles overlap. This section could be labelled 'the impact of salvation and relationship with God'.

*What difference does belief in Jesus and Salvation make to believers about the purpose of creativity?*

Place these ideas in the middle section of the Venn diagram.



## TEXT

### Activity 3 What does the Bible say about creating and using artwork?



Introduce pupils to examples in the Bible where people are using their creativity according to God's instructions, to make artwork inspired by the Holy Spirit that communicate ideas, feelings and worship – songs, music, visual art, architecture, dance,

Set the scene for pupils about the temple of God in the Old Testament, what it was, why it was so important to God and to the Israelites.

## TEXT

### Activity 3 How might Exodus 35 v4 to 29 inspire and teach Christians about their own creativity and its purpose?

[Psalm 104](#) is an example of how David was inspired by God and his creation to use his creativity to write songs of worship. Play pupils an audio clip of a contemporary worship song e.g. [Matt Redman 'The Heart of Worship'](#) where Matt has expressed his understanding of Jesus being central to his life and worship.



Invite pupils to consider how they might use their creativity to communicate something important to or about God, from the viewpoint of a Christian believer.

*What does it mean to be enabled and inspired by God to create things for worship and communicating the Gospel? Which people in the bible show evidence of this?*

Read [Exodus 35 v 30 to 35](#) Bezalel is considered by many to be the first artist/craftsperson in the Bible to be described as being inspired by the Holy Spirit in having skills and knowledge for creating all kinds of artworks and fittings for the temple. This text describes a community of artists and craftspeople under Bezalel's leadership who were themselves inspired by God to create and work together in building the God's Holy temple for his Glory.

*Write a job description for an old testament craftsman, needed to build the Temple. Refer to Biblical Texts about qualities and skills needed. e.g. [Exodus 35.4-29](#) and [Exodus 35:30 -35](#)*



## Christian Iconoclasm (see Essential Information for Teachers at the end of this unit)

Throughout Christian history, the worldwide Church has interpreted the Bible's guidelines about making artwork, in opposing ways. These viewpoints and reactions still influence strong differences of opinion across the worldwide church, determining diverse ways that works of art are used or not used to communicate the Gospel through worship, teaching, evangelism etc. In some traditions the arts and creativity are celebrated as sacred ways to communicate to and about God and his Kingdom. In other traditions the arts are unwelcome and drawn upon in very limited and pragmatic ways. But still artists who hold to Christian beliefs are inspired to use their skills and ideas to communicate the Gospel through their different artforms.

### TEXT Activity 4 In the shoes of Christian artists

Imagine these scenarios...

**TEXT Activity 4a. Put yourself in the shoes of...**  
a Christian artist or craftsperson whose work was destroyed during the Reformation and artworks in church buildings were made illegal.

*How might you feel if you were that person? What would you do about challenging these viewpoints so that you could be yourself and use your creativity to play your part?*



Altarpiece, dated 15th century, defaced during Protestant Reformation riots.

**TEXT Activity 4b. Put yourself in the shoes of...**  
a Christian artist who felt called by God to use their skill to share the good news of the Gospel. This person wasn't welcome in a particular church because the church didn't believe that making artworks was pleasing to God.

*How might you feel if you were that person? What would you do about challenging these viewpoints so that you could be yourself and play your part, and encourage others to use their creative skills?*



**TEXT Activity 4c. Set up a debate to argue for and against** different interpretations of [Exodus 20 v 4](#) to help pupils engage with the differences of opinion that have impacted attitudes towards the use of the arts by Christians from different traditions.

**TEXT Activity 4d. Put yourself in the shoes of a church community** where all the different artforms were actively welcomed and encouraged.

*What would the church gatherings be like?*

*How might this impact the church community and beyond? What difference could the arts make to this community and ways they could serve their wider community?*



## UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT

### ***Why do some Christians show their beliefs through biblical drama?***

Many Christians believe that God's Holy Spirit (the same spirit of God that is recorded in Genesis as hovering over creation), moves and motivates people to use their creative gifts for serving God through communicating the Gospel and building God's Kingdom. Some Christians also believe that artwork inspired by the Holy Spirit touches and transforms individual lives and whole communities.

#### **CASE STUDY: BEHIND THE SCENES OF WINTERSHALL'S 'THE LIFE OF CHRIST' PRODUCTION.**

Explore the portfolio of source material about Wintershall's productions. Use this to think about how the impact of the Gospels motivates people to invest their time and skills in using the Dramatic Arts to communicate the Gospel



### **YOU MIGHT LIKE TO START WITH...**

**Introduce 'The Life of Christ' Wintershall** production being set in 'Israel about 2000 years ago, centred on Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Galilee' (significant places in Jesus's life). It follows the birth, ministry of teaching and miracles through to the passion of Jesus on earth, his death, resurrection and ascension. Explain that the script has been directly inspired by biblical accounts and retells the story of Christ's life on earth, representing as accurately as possible the dialogue and narrative in the Gospels.

However artistic license has been used to dramatise the scriptures, to enable the story and its message to be experienced as a whole. Hundreds of volunteers, of all ages and beliefs, give hours of their time each year to be involved with the productions in different ways, both as cast, production administration or education team members

**Create an 'Enquiry Working Wall'** with pupils where evidence can be recorded as activities are completed: for example, contributing notes on 'Post-its'. Use video to record responses.

## IMPACT

### Activity 1: Be a Biblical Drama Detective

#### WATCH...

a video clip from 'The Life of Christ' to familiarise pupils with the production as an example of Biblical drama being used as a tool for communicating the Gospel.

Encourage pupils to share their first impressions, feelings and thoughts in response to watching the video clips of the production.



*What did you like about the clip? What did you think was missing? How did it impact you?*  
Capture these reflections on the working wall or as a video clip.

**EVALUATE...** the selection of video clips from the Life of Christ to enquire more deeply about why Christians use the dramatic arts to communicate the Gospel.



You might like to use the scripture and video clips as inspiration and set up a series of mini enquiries for groups of pupils to carry out whilst watching the clips to help them gain a rounded understanding. Pupils need to refer to the bible texts alongside watching the video clips in order to explore these questions.

N.B. Direct links to the relevant Bible texts that inspired each scene are available with each online clip.

- Group 1 *What evidence is there of the Gospel message being communicated in this scene?*
- Group 2 *How does the actor playing Jesus help you understand the kind of personal qualities Jesus might have had?*
- Group 3 *What parts of the script come directly from scripture and what has been added for dramatic effect?*
- Group 4 *How might dramatising scripture inspire and help people understand the Gospel?*
- Group 5 *How many different art forms contribute to the performance?*
- Group 6 *What different kinds of skills and tasks might be involved in putting on this performance?*

## IMPACT

### Activity 2: Behind the scenes – what do people do and why? Exploring motivations for Biblical drama and the different kind of creative processes involved

Encourage pupils to investigate the motivations and creative processes behind the production using source material available on the website.

For each of the following people, ask pupils to:

- identify the key points from the account which help to explain why they started being involved
- consider how the choice to be involved in the play serve as an example of a believer following Jesus's teaching and commandments to share the Good news and to love your neighbour?
- explore the impact this one person's act of obedience to a sense of God's call to write, direct, produce or act in the production, has on all those around them, including the audience.



## IMPACT

### Activity 2a: The Script Writer



**WATCH...**the 'Wintershall Vision' video to hear the producer, director and actors talking about the production and its impact.

Pupils make notes while watching the video about the motivations of the people speaking about why they are involved. Share these notes and consider how their explanations help to answer the enquiry.

### **READ...**

an excerpt from 'Our story', where Peter and Ann Hutley explain how they started the outdoor productions.

*In what ways does this help us understand Wintershall's vision?*

## IMPACT

### Activity 2b: The Directors and Producer

### **READ...**

**interviews with the Directors and Producer** describing why they are involved in biblical drama

*Has being involved in Wintershall made a difference to these people?*

## IMPACT

### Activity 2c: Actors

#### READ ...

**Interview with the Professional Actor** who plays Jesus describing why they specialised in Biblical drama

Encourage pupils to listen carefully to hear how the actor describes his understanding of the person of Jesus, his life and impact gained from specialising in biblical drama.

*What difference has playing Jesus made to this person's life?*



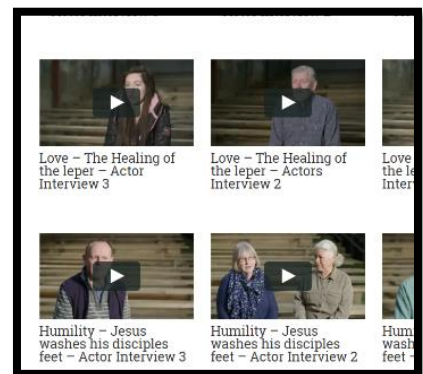
#### WATCH

**Actor Interview Clips** with Wintershall cast members describe the impact of acting in particular scenes.

*How has performing effected these actors' life?*

Present your thoughts in the form of a flow diagram titled:  
Dramatising the Gospel:

- impacts people by...
- in their everyday life, Christians might be inspired to...



For further ideas on the impact of biblical drama on everyday life, see Wintershall Education '[Virtues Enquiry through Drama](#)' resource referenced in DIGGING DEEPER

## IMPACT

### Activity 2d: EXPLORE MORE...

**LOOK...**at the collection of photographs from behind the scenes on the website.

Discuss how many different roles and skills are needed to create a performance like Wintershall's 'The Life of Christ.'

- Volunteer actors
- Lighting engineers
- Stage managers
- Costume designers and makers
- Make up
- Prop makers
- Animals and their handlers



## IMPACT

### Activity 3 How audiences respond



Many schools visit Wintershall to see The Life of Christ Production in June each year

Many people from all over the world, Christian believers, believers from other world religions and non-believers come to The Life of Christ, The Passion of Jesus and The Nativity productions. Wintershall advertises the productions locally and nationally because they would like as many people as possible to come to the productions to 'experience the story'.

Feedback has been gathered from teachers, pupils, families, community groups and individuals about their experience and this serves as useful evidence for how biblical drama impacts their lives.

**IMPACT**     **Activity 3a *How effective is this artform in communicating the Gospel?***

*What impact is it having on people, both audience members and those involved in the production?*

**READ** the feedback online

Choose some statements from audience members which best explain how people are being impacted. Group share about what difference the experience has to the audience members

**IMPACT**     **Activity 3b Explore Interviews and Social Media from Wintershall productions.**



People who are impacted by seeing the production or participating in it, describe their experience to others and encourage them to book tickets. Christian journalists write articles about the productions.

Examples of these can be accessed from the following sources:

- [newspaper and magazine articles](#)
- social media

*Who do these articles and messages reach and what inspires them to be written?*

## MAKING CONNECTIONS

### CONNECTIONS

#### Activity 1 The power of an image

LOOK at selected series of photographic images from 'The Life of Christ' Gallery. Invite pupils to choose which images they think most powerfully communicate the Gospel message.

Compare these still images of Gospel accounts with other examples of religious art on the same theme, for example stained glass, painting or stone carving. Sources [www.textweek.com](http://www.textweek.com) provides online links to works of art for each OT and NT account. (NB some links are not updated) Also [National Gallery London](http://National Gallery London) Paintings collection – use the search button to explore



*Invite people to choose which images are most powerful and explain why?*

### CONNECTIONS

#### Activity 2 Dramatising scripture using bible text as script



Look at selected biblical accounts from the Gospels for example:

- [The angel visits Mary, The baptism of Jesus, Jesus' parables,](#)
- Jesus miracles: [Feeding 5000, Jesus turns water into wine, Lazarus tomb](#)

### CONNECTIONS

#### Activity 2a How could you use your creative gifts in the arts, alongside others, to communicate the biblical account?

Imagine you are in a team of actors, artists, dancers, poets and you wanted to use your gifts to present the story of Jesus's life or an aspect of his teaching.

Consider together how best to communicate the essence of the account and its significance, using the dramatic arts

### CONNECTIONS

#### Activity 2b Improvising from Scripture

Invite pupils in groups to improvise a drama using the scripture as the script.

Consider how scripture might need to be adapted to support engaging drama.

What other props or costumes might be needed to make the drama more effective?

- [Bible drama guidelines](#)
- [Script samples](#)
- [Costume and prop inspiration](#)

## CONNECTIONS

### Activity 2c: Interpreting Scripture

**WATCH** the Wintershall video clips of your chosen scene and compare their interpretation of scripture with yours.

*What impact could creating or seeing performances or works of art have on the everyday, ordinary life of a Christian?*



## CONNECTIONS

### Activity 3 How has this RE enquiry impacted your understanding of the use of the arts to communicate the Gospel?

In John [14: 7](#), Jesus talked about how seeing him meant people could know God.

“If you really knew me, then you would know my Father, too. But now you do know him, and you have seen him.”

*How does what you’ve found out about in this unit help you understand more about the Gospel, how it is interpreted and communicated by Christians and the impact of the production on participants and audience?*

## CONNECTIONS

### Activity 3a. Communicating about your experience

[Choose a clip](#) from The Life of Christ to watch again. Consider, in the light of your learning, your own responses to interpreting biblical text through drama.

*Explain why you have you chosen this clip?*



## CONNECTIONS

### Activity 3b. Email Wintershall with class feedback

Share your experience of exploring Wintershall productions and how it has impacted you.



## DIGGING DEEPER

(link with SALVATION units e.g. UPPER KEY STAGE 2/ Unit 2B.6 Year 5 Digging Deeper)

- **TEXT:** Explain connections between Isaiah's prophecy about Jesus in Isaiah 61 sharing the Good News and why Christians use different approaches to Biblical drama to do the same
- **TEXT:** Suggest meaning for biblical text studied, and compare their ideas with ways in which Christians have been inspired past and present by Jesus's example to use creative ways to communicate of the Gospel, showing awareness of the impact of different interpretations
- **IMPACT:** Show how Christians put their beliefs about sharing the Gospel into practice in different ways: for example, why some use biblical drama to communicate the Gospel
- **CONNECTIONS:** Weigh up how effectively biblical ideas, teachings or beliefs relate to issues, problems and opportunities in their own lives and world today can be communicated through drama as opposed to other artforms.

## KNOWLEDGE BUILDING BLOCKS from Understanding Christianity

### PUPILS WILL KNOW THAT:

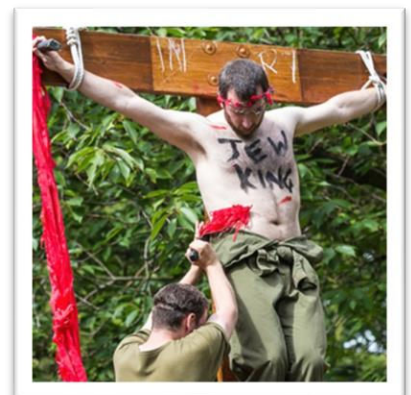
- Many Christians believe Jesus' teachings make people think hard about how to live and show them the right way.
- Many Christians believe that Jesus' life shows what it means to love God (his Father) and love your neighbour.
- Many Christians believe that they should bring this good news to life in the world in different ways, within their church family, in their personal lives, with family, with their neighbours, in the local, national and global community

### YOU MIGHT LIKE TO START WITH...

**Passion and Mystery Plays** were popular ways for the Gospel to be communicated to the wider public when most people were illiterate and couldn't read the Bible during the medieval period. It's not clear who wrote the plays, but there is some evidence to suggest that many were written by the same author, perhaps a member of one of the Guilds.

**EXPLORE** the [York Mystery plays website](#) to find out more about the contemporary mystery plays and their impact on members of the public who see them.

**READ** [comments](#) in a blog from Pocklington School about why they are involved.



## DIGGING DEEPER - INVESTIGATING THE TEXT

### TEXT

#### Activity 1: Christians inspired to tell the story of Jesus



Use some of the suggested text below to explore why medieval craftspeople wrote and performed these plays.

*Who were these plays for and what impact do you think they had on people at the time?*

[Matthew 28](#)

‘So go and make followers of all people in the world’

[Mark 21:29-31](#)

‘Love your neighbour as you love yourself’

[Matthew 6:9-13](#)

‘Your kingdom come, your will be done here on earth as it is in heaven’

### TEXT

#### Activity 2: Jesus the storyteller

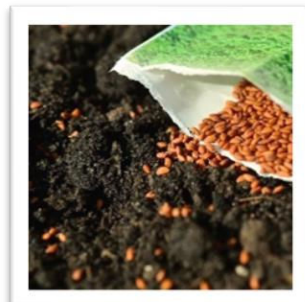
*(see background info for teachers on Jesus as creative communicator)*

Read [Luke 4 v 18-20](#) where Jesus explains his purpose whilst on earth referring to the Old Testament Book of [Isaiah chapter 61 v 2](#). Think about how Jesus ‘told the Good News to the poor’?

In groups, look at how Jesus used parables with everyday objects and activities in his story telling. Use the images and scripture links below to help.



The Lost Coin [Luke 15:8-9](#)



The Sower  
[Matthew 13:1-8](#)



The Lost Sheep  
[Luke 15:1-7](#)



Salt of the Earth [Matthew 5:13-16](#)



The Fig Tree [Luke 13:6-9](#)



*How might Jesus’ storytelling impact a believer who wants to follow Jesus’ example in communicating the Gospel to others?*

## DIGGING DEEPER - UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT

With the revival of the tradition in medieval mystery ways many communities across the UK and beyond have scripted and performed their own versions of accounts from the Gospels.

### IMPACT

#### Activity 1 Investigate how theatre companies have interpreted scripture

Consider how effectively theatre companies have taken both Gospel accounts, current values and issues, as inspiration for producing powerful theatre.

### Case Study:

Riding Lights Theatre Company, formed forty years ago, is based in York.

Their aim as a company is *“to create unforgettable, entertaining theatre in response to current issues and the hopes and fears of the world we share. While the company’s roots are in a Christian ethos, our work is open to everyone, using faith as a springboard to explore all aspects of life” ...*



### Read:

- <https://ridinglights.org/about-us/>
- [An interview with Bridget Foreman, play write for Riding Lights](#)

### IMPACT

#### Activity 2 Explore the impact of passion plays in prisons internationally

**LISTEN** to an interview with Suzanne Loftus, who has worked with passion plays in prisons: <https://passiontrust.org/2017/passion-plays-in-prisons-bbc-interview-2017/>

## DIGGING DEEPER - MAKING CONNECTIONS

### CONNECTIONS Activity 1 *How effective are the Arts as communication tools?*



Invite pupils to consider their discoveries about how the arts can be used to explore and communicate beliefs and ideas.

Consider how school Collective Worship is an opportunity for different artforms to be used to communicate about important issues, school values and ethos.

*Can pupils think of examples where this has been done?*

*How could the dramatic arts be used effectively to enrich these aspects of learning and school community life?*

Many organisations use the arts and theatre in education to support schools with Collective Worship, Character Education and RE. Some examples include:

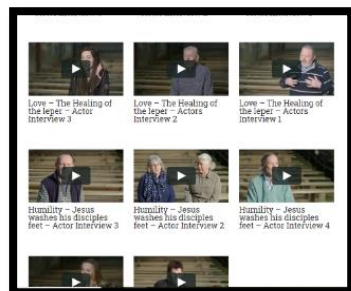
- [Barnabas in Schools](#) – exploring Christianity creatively
- [Wintershall Education](#) Collective Worship Assemblies
- [Open the Book](#) – Bible storytelling in Primary Schools

### CONNECTIONS Activity 2 *Be a Virtues/Values Detective*



**WATCH** Divide pupils into groups and look at the series of video clips about exploring Values from The Life of Christ. Ask pupils to identify either dialogue or actions that are evidence for values or virtues being expressed.

### CONNECTIONS Activity 3a *Using Biblical drama to communicate virtues and values*



**WATCH** interviews with members of the Wintershall cast talking about the production and how it helps them understand more about the virtues that Jesus and his followers modelled. Recognise the impact of biblical drama in their own lives.

### CONNECTIONS Activity 3b *Explore a school value through the arts*

Give each group a school value and related scripture to explore using the Arts. Pupils could create a workshop for a school or youth assembly that could help other people use drama to explore the values.

See also: [Virtues Enquiry Through Drama](#) (Character Education) resources and workshops online

Wintershall's 'Virtues Enquiry through Drama' (Character Education) resources include Bible Drama workshop material. This material offers creative ideas and methodology to explore Christian virtues as an aspect of Character/Values Education. This material has been successfully piloted in C of E and Community schools in Surrey. See the Virtues Enquiry through Drama link above for more details.



# ESSENTIAL INFORMATION for Teachers

## Humankind made in the image of God to create

*Where can we find the earliest evidence of the Arts being used to communicate beliefs and experiences?*

The earliest evidence we have for visual art is found in the remarkable survival of pre-historic cave paintings located in many parts of the world. The full understanding of the meaning and purpose of these early artworks remains a focus of universal exploration and wonder.

However, since then visual art has continued to be used by most societies as a powerful communicator of religious and political beliefs, of cultural values, and about man's relationship with the natural environment, the wider universe and God. Storytelling as a way of sharing important information, beliefs, ideas within communities, as well as passing these between generations has been and continues to be integral to human life. Biblical drama sits within this longstanding oral tradition of communicating ideas and beliefs in creative ways.

## Christian interpretations of God's guidelines about creating and using artwork

Biblical texts about creativity and making artwork has been interpreted at different times in human history

### God's commandments about creativity

[Exodus 20 v4](#) gives specific instructions about making and worshipping idols

*"You must not make for yourselves any idols. Don't make something that looks like anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the water below the land. <sup>5</sup> You must not worship or serve any idol. This is because I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God. A person may sin against me and hate me. I will punish his children, even his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. <sup>6</sup> But I will be very kind to thousands who love me and obey my commands."*

Throughout Christian history, the church collectively, both different denominations and individuals have interpreted the Bible's guidelines about making artwork, in opposing ways. This has led to divisions between church traditions to the point where church communities were divided and aggression was used by one strand of the church against the other, led by the ruling powers. This period was called The Reformation.

### Christian Iconoclasm

There have been periods in history when art was the most common vehicle for religious communication. In Christian History some of the central accounts in the Bible, for example of Creation, Adam and Eve, King David, or Jesus' birth, miracles, death and resurrection, have inspired paintings, sculptures, choral works and great architecture amongst many others. Some of our greatest buildings are historically places of worship, elaborately and beautifully designed in order to glorify or celebrate God.

By contrast there have also been periods in Christian history for example in the period of Iconoclasm (8<sup>th</sup> century) and Protestant reform (16<sup>th</sup> century) when visual art was considered inappropriate because it distracted from God Himself. A minority of Christians still consider it inappropriate to use the arts to express faith or as part of worship. In Islamic beliefs there are rules restricting some subjects and ways of using art in religious practices.

## Jesus as a creative communicator

Jesus was probably the most creative and effective communicator of the Gospel that every lived. He demonstrated that he was alive to his creativity, using different artforms to communicate about the Kingdom of God. Jesus did not depend on the spoken word to get his message across. Instead he adapted the tools and vehicles of communication to suit each situation that he was called to.

Jesus used story-telling drama, symbol, objects, drawing, metaphor to communicate, drawing upon everyday objects in creative ways as illustrations to get his Gospel message across.

God invites believers to experience the 'Word' made flesh led by the spirit, using all our senses. Jesus is the 'Word' made flesh – expressed himself and communicated his message with the fullness of creativity. Jesus used all his senses to teach: storytelling, drama, metaphor, spoken word, drawing, poetry, prophecy, miracles, signs and wonders.

Christian believe that through belief in God through Christ as Saviour, that God-given identity, including creativity inherent in every person to be used to fulfil its original God-given purpose. This God given purpose is for humankind to choose to use their creativity to build the kingdom of God, love others and communicate the Gospel, enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit.

## Mystery and Passion Plays

Traditionally, plays were performed on decorated waggons that moved about the city to allow different crowds to watch each play. In the York Mystery Plays originally, 48 plays were performed by 48 different guilds, making one 'cycle' of Mystery Plays. The entire cycle could take up to 20 hours to perform and could be spread over a number of days. Guilds would perform stories relevant to their work; for example, the Shipwrights performed the Building of the Ark, butchers played the Death of Christ or Crucifixion. For more information visit <https://www.yorkmysteryplays.co.uk/the-plays/>

The famous historic York Mystery Plays and others had their scripts confiscated during the Reformation in 1569 and were dormant for the next four hundred years. "In 1951, the York Mystery Plays were revived in a performance on a fixed stage in the Museum Gardens, a tradition which lasted until 1988. These were followed by performances in York Theatre Royal in 1992 and 1996. Other fixed stage performances have taken place in 2000 and 2016 at York Minster and in 2012 the plays were presented in the Museum Gardens."

For more information on Passion Play traditions visit [www.passiontrust.org](http://www.passiontrust.org)

## Global traditions of re-enacting the Gospel

Catholic pageants are performed all over the world, particularly during Easter week, and are often an integral part of many Catholic communities across the globe.

You can use some of the following examples:

- The predominantly Catholic Philippines have Passion Plays called *Senakulo* (upper room), that are performed by theatre and community groups every Holy Week.
- Oberammergau in Germany, performs an incredibly popular passion play every 10 years. It was first performed in 1634 and today includes 2000 actors, singers, instrumentalists and technicians, all residents of the village. Find out more [www.passionplaytours.com](http://www.passionplaytours.com)