Strand: World Religions with links to Philosophy of Religion and Meditation Prayer and Worship.

Topic: Buddhism and Suffering

Stage of Development: Middle Adolescence, Late Adolescence

Rationale: “The purpose of studying Buddhism is not to study Buddhism but to study ourselves” (Suzuki Roshi, *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*).

“Buddhism isn’t really in a book or on a website...Rather, it’s intimacy with your own life: experiencing life genuinely, completely, just as it is.” (Gary Gach, *Just the FAQs on Buddhism*)

Buddhism is something to be experienced. It is important to communicate to students from the outset that the Buddha did not claim to be God and neither do Buddhists claim that he is God. He is seen as a guide who can lead people to Enlightenment. The image of the Buddha is not an object of worship; it is a reminder of what is experienced. There is no prescriptive teaching which instructs followers of the Buddha Dharma to do certain things act in certain ways; there is nothing ‘out there’ which can be pointed to, categorised or contained and be labelled as ‘Buddhism’. The Buddha taught that the truth is discovered through mindful observation of what is – it is something that can be experienced by anyone.

For students to engage with Buddhism, a purely phenomenological approach should be avoided and an holistic approach used. This recognises that religions are whole systems which are underpinned by core beliefs. To focus on the phenomena of the religion ignores the complex systems which create those phenomena and which provide students with context and meaning. Without context, religious practices will seem strange, irrelevant and meaningless to students. They need to understand why Buddhism is studied and why it is relevant to them. Focusing on practices, food, dress, festivals and holy places will not do this. Using Trevor Cooling’s ‘Concept Cracking’ method is a practical, clear and effective. See PowerPoint ‘Concept Cracking’ and the section on concept cracking in the ‘Teaching and Learning’ section of the Religious Studies Curriculum document.

Engaging with Buddhism comes through a careful balance of student learning using ‘information about’, or Buddhist concepts, and then experiencing it for themselves. They need to know what the story of Siddhartha is before they can build the bridge between Siddhartha’s life and their own and then experience it for themselves. They need to know what the Four Noble Truths are before they can build the bridge and experience it for themselves. Beginning each lesson with a meditation is beneficial. A simple mindful breath meditation is the most effective way of introducing students to the experience of ‘being here now’. More information on meditation can be found in the ‘Teaching and Learning’ Section of the Religious Studies Curriculum document. An excellent book for lesson ideas, meditations and teacher subject knowledge is ‘A Path with Heart’ by Jack Kornfield. ‘The Complete idiot’s Guide to Buddhism’ by Gary Gach is accessible and informative. ‘Wide Awake’ by Diana Winston is a great resource for teachers and older students.
# Buddhism

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<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Key Questions</th>
<th>Lesson Structure</th>
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| 1      | The Life of Siddhartha | **Who was Siddhartha?**  
What circumstances was Siddhartha born into?  
How did this influence his decision to leave the palace?  
What did he learn on his journey?  
How can we learn from the Buddha’s experience?  
\- Watch ‘The Life of the Buddha’ DVD and answer questions on the worksheet ‘The Life of the Buddha’.  
\- Read Chapter 1 of ‘Wide Awake’ and re-tell the story of the Buddha in terms of a young person’s life. Can they relate to the Buddha’s life story? Have they felt the burden of expectation or suddenly felt aware that life involves suffering, sickness and old age? | ‘The Life of the Buddha’ (Animated World Faiths DVD)  
‘The Life of the Buddha’ question sheet to accompany the DVD.  
Chapter 1 (Who was the Buddha?) of ‘Wide Awake: a Buddhist Guide for Teens’ by Diana Winston |  |
| 2      | The Four Noble Truths: Dukkha | **What are the Four Noble Truths?**  
How did the Four Sights inform the Four Noble Truths?  
What is the First Noble Truth?  
\- Students write down what they think the following are:- SUFFERING CONTENTMENT/HAPPINESS  
\- PowerPoint ‘The Four Noble Truths’.  
\- Complete the exercise on the First Noble Truth.  
\- Read the extract from Jack Kornfield and reflect on whether it resonates.  
\- Think of more examples of ways in which we live not really accepting that, because we are alive and have a mind and a body, | PowerPoint ‘The Four Noble Truths’.  
Worksheet ‘The Four Noble Truths’. | The Four Noble Truths are at the centre of the Buddha’s teaching on suffering. At least four lessons need to be dedicated to the Four Noble Truths so that students can learn about them, relate to the Buddha’s experience and experience it for themselves. |
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<th>What do we spend our lives avoiding (and therefore not accepting?)</th>
<th>suffering is inevitable.</th>
<th>themselves. The Buddha’s world needs to be brought into their world. Cooling’s ‘Concept Cracking’ method will be useful here.</th>
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<td>3</td>
<td>The Four Noble Truths: Tanha and Nirodha</td>
<td>Why do we suffer? How is this generated by the mind? What is the difference between pain and suffering? How is the Buddha’s understanding of the cause of suffering different to your own?</td>
<td>• Complete the worksheet ‘The Four Noble Truths, focussing on the second and third Noble Truth. • Use the PowerPoint, with its tasks, to illustrate them and to build the bridge between the Buddha’s experience and their experience. PowerPoint ‘The Four Noble Truths’. Worksheet ‘The Four Noble Truths’.</td>
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<td>4 and 5</td>
<td>The Three Characteristics of all Things.</td>
<td>Is there anything that is permanent? How is impermanence related to suffering? Can it be true that people have no real fixed identity or ‘selves’?</td>
<td>• Read through and discuss ‘The Three Characteristics’ sheet. o You might point out the endorsement of the first and third characteristics by modern physics. • Use the PowerPoint ‘The Three Characteristics of all Things and Interbeing’ to illustrate the ideas of Anicca, Dukka and Anatta. • Ensure that you link this back to the first three of the Four Noble Truths. Worksheet ‘The Three Characteristics of all Things’ PowerPoint ‘The Three Characteristics of all Things and Interbeing’ ‘Anatta’ is conceptually quite complex and runs counter to what so many of us feel – that we have a fixed self, that there is something unchanging that makes ‘me me’. It is important to stress that Buddhist teaching is not doctrinal – it is an invitation to look deeply and reflect.</td>
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<td>6 and 7</td>
<td>Interbeing</td>
<td>How are all things interconnected? How can recognising, and acknowledging, interbeing help people to forgive?</td>
<td>• Continue to use the PowerPoint from previous lesson to help illustrate Interbeing. • Choose one, two or all three of the texts written by Thich Nhat Hanh and complete the exercises below. • Explore the relationship between interbeing and forgiveness.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Karma</td>
<td>What does ‘karma’ mean? How is karma a necessary consequence of interbeing?</td>
<td>• Re-cap interbeing. This is important as an understanding of karma rests on an understanding of interbeing. • Brainstorm the meaning of Karma. This is a good way to clear up any common misconceptions. • Read through and complete the worksheet ‘Karma’.</td>
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|   | **9** | ‘The Metta Sutta’  
‘The Noble Eightfold Path’ | How do Buddhists believe that we can achieve a ‘Middle Way’?  
Why are extremes not going to allow us to find lasting contentment? | • Begin by asking students what guidelines they might suggest for a ‘Path to Enlightenment’.  
• PowerPoint and worksheet ‘The Noble Eightfold Path’.  
• Continue to make links between the recognition of Interbeing and Karma and how this informs the Noble Eightfold Path. | PowerPoint ‘The Noble Eightfold Path’.  
‘The Buddha’s Noble Eightfold Path’ by Ajahn Sucitto  
Worksheet ‘The Noble Eightfold Path’. | There is a good section on the Eightfold Path in ‘God knows who I am’ by Robert Kirkwood. This is simple and accessible for younger or less able students.  
A more advanced, but still very accessible, resource is ‘The Buddha’s Noble Eightfold Path’ by Ajahn Sucitto, originally broadcast on BBC radio 4 on 2/2/2003. It provides excellent examples of what it means to live the Eightfold Path. |
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|   | **10** | Meditation  
Visit to Buddhist Centre  
Community of Inquiry | You may wish to finish the unit with a community of inquiry, a lesson-long meditation or a visit to a Buddhist Centre. The Dharmapala Buddhist Centre in Fremantle welcomes school visits.  
[http://www.meditationinperth.org/school-visits](http://www.meditationinperth.org/school-visits) | | | |