

Understanding Interfaith Teacher Guidance



Who is this lesson for?

This activity is designed primarily for KS4 and KS5 students and can be used in youth settings. It can also be adapted and used for younger students.

Objectives

1. Provide participants with knowledge about interfaith activities.
2. Equip individuals with the tools to initiate and facilitate interfaith dialogue.
3. Create spaces for participants to share personal experiences and perspectives on faith and belief.
4. Build relationships among diverse groups to promote inclusivity and peace.

Outcome:

- ✓ Deeper understanding of different faith traditions and their core values.
- ✓ Active listening and constructive dialogue techniques for interfaith discussions.
- ✓ Ongoing relationships emerge fostering long-term cooperation.

Lesson Structure

This lesson has been designed to be delivered either as a one-hour session, or as four 15-minute activities (for use in form time, etc.).

Teachers are welcome to make any reasonable changes to the content in order for it to meet their students' needs.

Creating a Safe Space for Activities

In order to deal with sensitive topics, safe, brave, trusting and respectful environments are key. These need to be developed & practised over time and so it is worth revisiting your group expectations before these workshops. For more guidance on creating a 'Framework for Encounter' visit <https://faithbeliefforum.org/resources/>.

Possible Next Steps

Extension Activities:

There is an extension activity at the end of this lesson plan. This could be used to extend learning for those students that are interested in knowing more.

Further resources, guidance, and lesson plans on developing skills for dialogue; creating safe spaces; and facilitating dialogue on controversial issues can also be found on the Faith & Belief Forum webpage <https://faithbeliefforum.org/resources/>.



Slide	Timings	Content Guidance
1	Title Slide	Understanding Interfaith -= What? Why? How?
2	Contents	
3		Part 1: What is Interfaith & Why Interfaith?
4	8 minutes	<p>Step 1: Look at the four definitions below of interfaith. Ask for three volunteers to read out each one of the statements / resources below.</p> <p>Statements:</p> <p>A.</p> <div data-bbox="504 584 1315 1160" data-label="Figure"> <p>A summary of perceptions from our attendees at our 'Youth Conference on the Future of Interfaith' January 2021. The size of the word or phrase is indicative of the frequency of use.</p> </div> <p>'Interfaith Beyond the Pandemic: from London Communities to Global Identities', The London School of Economics & Political Science, 2021, Bhambra, Tiffany, Walters</p> <p>https://www.lse.ac.uk/rgs/assets/RGS-Interfaith-Beyond-the-Pandemic-Public.pdf</p> <p>B. <i>Cooperative, constructive, and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions (i.e. "faiths") and / or spiritual or humanistic beliefs, at both the individual and institutional levels.</i></p> <p>https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interfaith_dialogue</p> <p>C. <i>Interactions between people of different faiths, and in some cases between those of religious and non- religious beliefs. Some prefer to speak of 'inter faith and belief' or 'inter belief' where people of non-religious beliefs are involved in dialogue.</i></p> <p>https://www.interfaith.org.uk/activity/why-inter-faith</p> <p>Step 2: Spend 3 minutes as a whole group, asking students to look at each statement / word cloud and ask them to shout out the common themes / descriptors that they see through them all</p> <p>Step 3: As a whole group discuss which themes / descriptors feel the most important and spend 3 minutes trying to rank the themes.</p>

5	2 minutes	<p>Why Interfaith?</p> <p>Interfaith can Promote Unity and Understanding, it helps combat discrimination and encourage social cohesion in diverse society.</p> <p>The science behind it – Allport’s 1954 SOCIAL CONTACT THEORY</p> <p>Imagine you have a new classmate who seems very different from you. At first, you might not understand them, but if you spend time together—playing a game, talking, and working on projects—you start to see how much you have in common.</p> <p>Allport’s Social Contact Theory says that when people from different groups meet and work together in a positive way, they are more likely to become friends, understand each other better, and be less unfair or unkind to one another. Below are some of the things that should happen for it to be a ‘good’ or positive experience.</p>
6	5 mins	<p>Put students into small groups and ask them to use the information on the slide to decide as a group which phrase matches which principle.</p> <p>Principles for effective intergroup contact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equity - Safe but challenging - Meaningful encounters - Time and space for reflection - Recognition & respect for difference - Creative approaches to learning from each other <p>Facilitator to circulate around groups and support with quick decisions and clarifying meaning of words if needed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Treating everyone fairly and making sure everyone is treated the same. ● Making sure everyone has the same chances and is included, no matter what. ● A place where people help each other and also learn exciting new things. ● Feeling safe while also being encouraged to think and ask questions. ● A place that feels good but also helps you grow and learn new things. ● Building strong friendships and talking about things that matter. ● Doing things that are important and help you learn and grow. ● Moments that make you feel happy, proud, and ready to do amazing things. ● Times when you can think carefully and figure things out. ● A place where you can take your time to understand and think about things. ● Loving and appreciating how everyone is different and special. ● Respecting what makes each person unique and special. ● Sharing new, fun ideas and learning from each other. ● Learning in fun, exciting ways that make you think and do things together.
7	Part 2: Examples of Interfaith in a different time	

	3 minutes	The Cairo Genizah - Interfaith in Medieval society in the Middle East
8		<p>Introduction: In the Middle Ages, most Jewish people lived in Islamic lands, including Egypt. Instead of being separated, they lived in mixed neighborhoods alongside Muslims and Christians. Arabic was the common language, though Jews often wrote it using the Hebrew alphabet. Under Islamic law, Jews and Christians were considered "dhimmi" (protected people), meaning they could freely practice their religion as long as they followed certain rules, such as accepting Islamic rule and paying a tax.</p> <p>We know a lot about Jewish life in medieval Egypt thanks to the Cairo Genizah. A Genizah (ghen-ee-zah) is a special storage room in a synagogue where old religious writings are kept. In an 11th-century synagogue in Cairo, a Genizah was filled not only with old prayer books but also letters, legal papers, business records, poetry, and even shopping lists!</p> <p>Thanks to these documents, we can learn how Jews, Muslims, and Christians lived, worked, and interacted in medieval Egypt.</p>
9	10 mins	<p>Activity: In small groups, explore one of the fragments (ensure that all 4 are distributed to at least one group), thinking about the following question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What can we infer from this example about how people of different faiths lived together? <p>e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - language & culture / tradition exchange or sharing - Interfaith interaction / communication / exchange - Cross faith friendship - coexistence / living together - Community - networking - Respect for others - Sharing - cooperation <p>Fragments:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bible in Arabic script (T-S Ar.52.242) This Bible is written in the Hebrew language but using the Arabic alphabet. Some Jews chose to write using Arabic script because they believed Arabic's bigger alphabet presented a more correct way to pronounce the original Hebrew text (Arabic has 28 letters and Hebrew has 22). 2. Quran in Hebrew script (T-S Ar.51.62) This fragment from the Quran, written in the Arabic language but using the Hebrew alphabet. Some Jews were interested in learning about Islamic theology, but the person who wrote this text probably had other plans. After the Quran text there are some omens (fortune telling) for travelling – this was written by a Jewish magician who used portions of the Quran as part of the magical forecast. 3. Letter on behalf of a Muslim friend (T-S 13J14.5) Solomon son of Judah was the head of Egypt's Jews in the mid 11th century. He wrote this letter to his friend Abraham who was an important figure in the court, asking Abraham to use his influence with the governor and intercede for Solomon's Muslim friend Qayn ibn 'Abd Qadir. Qayn is currently in hiding, trying to avoid arrest for his political loyalties. Solomon writes 'speak to the ruler so that he does not harm him... whatever he does to this man Qayn he also does to me.' 4. A mixed neighbourhood (T-S K25.284)

This parchment was used by the court scribe to make notes for the sale of part of a compound. The boundary of the property and the abutting houses are carefully described, revealing details of the mixed nature of this neighbourhood in old Cairo. The neighbouring houses are inhabited by a scribe, a man with a 'long neck', a Jewish woman, a Christian man, and a Muslim man. Shares in the compound.

Teacher notes & tips (below are some points that you can use as examples if students get stuck or need more help)

- **Linguistic and Cultural Exchange** – The use of Arabic script for Hebrew texts and Hebrew script for Arabic texts shows how different communities adapted linguistic tools for their own needs.
- **Multiculturalism** – The mixed neighborhood and the letter advocating for a Muslim friend show how different religious and ethnic groups lived together and supported one another.
- **Adaptation and Innovation** – The use of different scripts and repurposing religious texts for new functions (e.g., magic, fortune telling) reflect creativity in navigating linguistic and cultural boundaries.
- **Community and Social Networks** – The letter and property sale document emphasize the importance of personal and professional relationships in medieval society.

Interfaith Interactions

- **Religious Texts Across Faiths**
 - The **Bible in Arabic script** and the **Quran in Hebrew script** show that Jewish and Muslim communities were not isolated but were engaging with each other's sacred texts.
 - Some Jews preferred writing Hebrew in Arabic script because they believed it better represented Hebrew pronunciation. This suggests **linguistic adaptation and a shared cultural space** where Arabic was a dominant language, even among non-Muslims.
 - The Jewish magician who wrote Quranic verses for **fortune-telling** reflects how religious texts were sometimes used beyond their original theological purposes, incorporating Islamic elements into Jewish mystical practices.
- **Personal and Political Relationships**
 - The **letter on behalf of a Muslim friend** demonstrates a strong interfaith friendship. Solomon, a Jewish leader, advocated for a Muslim acquaintance, showing that Jews and Muslims built close ties and supported each other, even in political matters.
 - Solomon's appeal suggests that **trust and loyalty** between individuals could sometimes outweigh religious differences.

Coexistence in Daily Life

- **Living Together in a Mixed Neighbourhood**
 - The property sale document describes a **multireligious neighbourhood** in Fustat, where Jews, Christians, and Muslims lived side by side.
 - This suggests that different communities **shared urban spaces** rather than living in isolated quarters, reflecting a high level of social integration.
- **Economic and Social Ties**
 - The sale of property involved people of different faiths, indicating that **business transactions crossed religious lines**.
 - The description of the property, including common features like **a fountain and marble columns**, suggests that people of different religions enjoyed similar living standards and architectural styles.

	2 minutes	<p>Conclusion</p> <p>These documents paint a picture of a deeply interconnected society, where Jews, Muslims, and Christians not only coexisted but also shared languages, religious knowledge, friendships, business ties, and neighborhoods. While religious differences existed, there was also cooperation, mutual support, and cultural blending, showing that medieval Fustat was a place of dynamic interfaith relationships rather than strict separation.</p> <p>These fragments have been kindly shared by The University of Cambridge where a large number of the Cairo Genizah Fragments are stored.</p>
10	Part 3: Interfaith in recent times	
11	10 minutes	<p>In small groups, read through one example of the three (hand out one example to each group for exploration but ensure that each one is being looked at by at least one group). In your groups come up with answers to the following two questions.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What impact can / have these examples had? (on individuals / communities / societies / issues) 2. What can we learn from them? <p>As the facilitator, whilst discussions are taking place in groups, spend time with each group and record one or two reflections that you can share with the whole group as a summary of the conversations that were taking place.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>A.</p> <p><u>Interreligious dialogue is as imperative today as it ever has been – The Irish Times, Sr Kathleen McGarvey, Tue Nov 16, 2021</u></p> <p>My own story can attest to that. I was a missionary in Kaduna in northern Nigeria. Nigeria is a great country with a booming population, now nearly 200 million, about half Christian and half Muslim; the north, where I was based, is majority Muslim.</p> <p>Conflict too often erupts, primarily due to poverty, insecurity and bad governance, and issues are framed along the lines of religious identity.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>This violence is extremely destructive, with many lives lost and properties and livelihoods destroyed. As in most cases throughout the world, women suffer the brunt of poverty and are too often voiceless.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Thus, we established the Interfaith Forum of Muslim and Christian Women’s Association which is commonly known as the Women’s Interfaith Council (WIC). This organisation has grown and developed primarily due to the work of committed and convinced Muslim and Christian women of faith.</p> <p>...</p> <p>It is through meeting each other as human beings, and not as ‘Muslims’ and ‘Christians’, that we can begin to overcome our prejudices about each other, learn to appreciate each other in our needs and beliefs, and learn to coexist and build a peaceful and just world.</p>

B.

[35,000 unite for Mitzvah Day: UK's biggest day of interfaith social action - Jewish News, Michelle Rosenberg November 27, 2024](#)

More than 35,000 people from all backgrounds came together last weekend for Mitzvah Day, Britain's biggest interfaith day of social action.

[...]

A total of 2,500+ projects were undertaken, encompassing care home visits, cooking for those in need, litter picks, card-writing, park clean-ups, and food bank and winter clothing collections.

All embodied Mitzvah Day's 2024 theme of 'Stronger Together', defying the forces that threaten to tear us apart and uniting to support local charities and build bridges of commonality.

[...]

Rabbi Baginsky said: "This was a heartwarming event on a very special day. Mitzvah Day provides us all with an incredible opportunity to take part in making the world a little bit better and remind ourselves how much stronger we are when we work together."

Imam Hafiz said: "Whether through zakat in Islam or tzedakah in Judaism, our shared traditions remind us that caring for others is not just an act of kindness but a sacred duty. Mitzvah Day beautifully reflects these shared values, bringing us together to strengthen our communities and make a meaningful difference."

C.

<https://www.corrymeela.org/cmsfiles/The-Corrymeela-Community-Charter-2024.pdf>

Corrymeela: Together is better

Corrymeela officially started in 1965 in Northern Ireland. 'Corrymeela' means 'harmony hill'. Corrymeela began with the idea of 'community'. The aim was to start a Christian community that could act as a bridge between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland where tensions and conflict had created a divided society. They offered spaces for people 'to meet safely, have difficult conversations well and support one another. As we did so, we built a network of relationships based on trust and reconciliation.'

Today Corrymeela works with people from around the world, from many different communities, cultures, faiths and beliefs. "In our increasingly divided world, we support thousands of people from different backgrounds to live well together."

How do they do what they do?

- Open invitations to meetings with people from all religious and non-religious beliefs on social, cultural, political and religious themes
- Events such as festivals and celebrations open to all, allowing people across different faiths and beliefs to come together and celebrate in a safe and peaceful environment
- Opportunities for young people to meet across difference and ask questions of each other
- Supporting Catholic, Protestant and mixed faith schools to work with each other on projects

	5 minutes	As the facilitator, give a brief insight into the three examples and summarise your reflections on the conversations that were taking place.
12	Part 4: How to Interfaith? Preparing for 'good' Interfaith Encounters	
13	3 minutes	<p>'Good' Interfaith activities need to start with some reflection and recognition of where we stand; where others may stand; and how we can come together.</p> <p>Watch video 'Nobody Stands Nowhere' Theos (2mins 35s)</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AFRxBKF-Jdos</p> <p>The video highlights that we all have a worldview whether we follow a faith or religion or not. We all see the world through a particular lens that impacts how we engage and live.</p> <p>In order to go into interfaith spaces and engage fully, we need to turn up to interfaith spaces with a learning mindset and lots of curiosity... with the mindset to learn more about ourselves and others.</p>
14	7 minutes	<div data-bbox="512 846 1182 1234" data-label="Diagram"> </div> <p>Individual activity: Present the list of 'HOT' topics on screen, ask students to pick one that they feel passionate about and think about the following questions with regards to their chosen topic.</p> <p>Social media: Cyberbullying, privacy concerns, addiction, impact on self-esteem, misinformation spread</p> <p>Environmental issues: Climate change action, sustainable living, plastic pollution, animal welfare</p> <p>Politics and society: Racial justice, LGBTQ+ rights, immigration policies, political polarization</p> <p>Technology: AI ethics, data collection, digital surveillance, online censorship</p> <p>Education: Standardized testing, school curriculum, access to quality education, homeschooling</p> <p>Start with the I – self-reflection (3 minutes)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I / ME: Where do I stand? What influences my views / values? Why do I feel the way that I do? How might that make me act or behave in certain situations?

		<p>Move onto the YOU (3 mins) imagining what others (people who have a different view to you) may say,</p> <p>2. YOU: Where might others stand? What experiences & values & views might influence them? How may they be feeling? Why might they be feeling this way? How might this make them act or behave in certain situations?</p>
15	5 minutes	<p>Whole Group:</p> <p>How might we come together in joint spaces and places to interact. Keep the social contact theory principles in mind (slide with these on as reminder). Present point 3 below and If there is time discuss this as a whole group:</p> <p>3. WE: Safe and equitable spaces that are respectful, focused on dialogue and not debate, on understanding one another, learning and sharing and curiosity.</p>

Extension Activity		
17	15 minutes	<p>Interfaith in the UK</p> <p>Levels of Interfaith across communities (the below often overlap).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. State-Led Interfaith – Government-driven, outcome-focused representation of faith communities, e.g., the COVID-19 Taskforce. TOP - DOWN 2. Formal Civil Society Interfaith – Structured networks coordinating interfaith activities, fostering long-term social cohesion. NATIONAL AND MORE LOCAL 3. Informal Civil Society Interfaith – Flexible, grassroots efforts tied to local causes, with less institutional oversight but dynamic engagement. HYPER LOCAL & OFTEN MORE SHORT-TERM <p>Types of Interfaith Engagement</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Informal Interaction – Casual encounters fostering awareness and respect (e.g. sharing a meal, sports, arts or cultural activities) 2. Dialogue – Structured discussions to understand beliefs and values (e.g. round table discussions, panels, workshops) 3. Cooperation – Joint efforts on social issues like charity, environmental work, or working together to meet a practical need in the local community 4. Deep Engagement – Long-term relationships promoting shared learning and unity (all of the above over a continued period of time) <p>Interfaith in the UK – Key Aspects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Building Bridges: Encourages learning about each other’s beliefs and practices leading to better understanding between faiths. ● Promoting Tolerance: Reduces prejudice and discrimination by encouraging mutual respect and acceptance of diverse viewpoints. ● Social Action: Coming together to address shared issues like poverty and the environment. ● Community Building: Fosters a sense of belonging and strengthened connections across diverse groups. ● Personal Growth: Enhances self-awareness by deepening

understanding of the self in relation to others.

Activity:

Present the information above, ask students to work in pairs to create a visual and fun information poster / leaflet that explains the interfaith landscape in the UK (structures that help and how it works). If time allows, you can ask them to research examples of Interfaith activities in the UK to add to their poster / leaflet. The Faith & Belief Forum webpage is a great place to start!

<https://faithbeliefforum.org/>

