

KS3 Lesson Plan 1 – Exploring Secularism

What is Secularism?

Background	<p>This lesson looks at the three main principles of secularism: separation of religious and state institutions, Freedom to practise your faith or beliefs without harming others and Equality, so that your religious beliefs or lack of them doesn't put others at an advantage or a disadvantage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students examine examples illustrating each area of secularism and classify them as issues of separation, freedom or equality.• They then try to classify viewpoints as secular or non-secular and identify the elements that make a viewpoint secularist.
Subjects	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Citizenship• RE
Curriculum Links	<p>From DfE Citizenship Statutory guidance - National curriculum in England: citizenship programmes of study for key stages 3</p> <p>Pupils should be taught about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the development of the political system of democratic government in the United Kingdom, including the roles of citizens, Parliament and the monarch• the precious liberties enjoyed by the citizens of the United Kingdom <p>From AQA RE GCSE specification:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• understand significant common and divergent views between and/or within religions and beliefs
Key Question	What is secularism?
Learning Outcomes	<p>Expected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand and explain the three principles of secularism• Understand the concerns and basic questions that secularism seeks to address. <p>Greater Depth:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• As above plus:• Offer opinions on the concerns and basic questions that secularism seeks to address, drawing on a range of examples.• Understand the relevance of secularism to key social debates.
Stimulus	<p>What is secularism?</p> <p>Secularism refers to a range of different ideas and practices which seek to balance freedom of and from religion with other rights.</p> <p><i>Share the 3 bullet points below (PowerPoint and/or handout) and talk through the definitions with students.</i></p>

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1. **Separation** of religious institutions from state institutions and a public sphere where religion may participate, but not dominate.
2. **Freedom** to practise your faith or beliefs without harming others, or to change it or not have one, according to your conscience.
3. **Equality**, so that your religious beliefs or lack of them doesn't put others at an advantage or a disadvantage.

Share and discuss the viewpoints below as a class or in small groups/pairs. Can students classify each statement as an issue of *separation, freedom or equality*?

- a) "I'm in Year 10 and I attend a faith school. I've recently told my teachers that I no longer believe in religion and they are really unhappy with me and say they are going to speak to my parents...I'm really worried about it..."
- b) "I'm a parent of a 5-year-old boy and I want him to attend the only school in our village as I don't have a car and want him to make friends on our area. However, the village school is a religious school, and they say I have to take my son to religious services and get a letter from the religious leader to be allowed to go there...why should I have to do that?"
- c) "I'm a religious leader and I'm really glad the government gives my religion representation in parliament. It means we get a say in everything the government does..."
- d) "My parents are very religious, but I just can't believe what they tell me is true. Also, they have some views that I think are really old fashioned – you know about homosexuality and marriage and things like that – but they say they will punish me if I disagree with them..."
- e) "Nothing will ever change the status quo in this county while religion runs schools, owns massive amounts of property and land and has so much representation in Parliament – there is just too much vested interest..."
- f) "It's great my local school is a faith school – we are religious and attend religious services every week – we are also great friends with the religious leader who happens to be governor at the school. This means my kids will definitely get a place and it's really difficult to get in..."

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	<p>Answers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Is an issue of freedomb) Is an issue of equalityc) Is an issue of separation and equalityd) Is an issue of freedome) Is an issue of separationf) Is an issue of equality <p>Discuss whether the students feel separation, equality and freedom are of equal importance or whether one is more important. Encourage them to back up their arguments with examples. Why might secularism be beneficial to a range of people in a modern, pluralist society?</p> <p>Ask students why they agree or disagree with the basic principles of secularism (you could start with a show of hands). Can they think of their own real-life examples that fit into one or more of the principles?</p>
Exercise	<p>Share and discuss the following viewpoints. Which of the views are secularist? Can you offer <i>evidence</i> to explain why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. "I'm not religious, but I think it's good to have an established church with strong links to the state because we're a Christian country. Whether or not you are Christian, having a Christian state preserves our culture, provides a strong moral compass and helps protect against foreign ideas."b. "My Islamic religion is very important to me, but I think people need to be able to form their own beliefs. Too often religious arguments are used to impose conservative views on others. That's not my version of Islam and I don't think it should be the basis for laws."c. "Belief in gods is ridiculous. That's why I'm an atheist. Religion is harmful and we should restrict its spread, by promoting atheism in schools, closing churches and banning all religious books or preaching."d. "I'm an evangelical Christian and I don't believe that same-sex relationships are as valid as straight ones. My blog explains why I don't think people should have any sexual relationships outside of heterosexual marriage. But it's up to the Church to preach morality, not for the police to enforce it. What people choose for themselves is their business, and I don't think my opinions should be forced on anybody."e. "I'm an atheist and think believing in gods is silly. I'd like to spread atheism and discourage religion through my YouTube channel and social pressure. People who want to be religious should have that right

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and not be discriminated against, so the government shouldn't push atheism."

f. "I'm a Christian and I think it is very important that my values are promoted in schools. Unless you have a Christian basis and values in education, that education will impose atheism. Most people realise there is no other truth but God, and the government should acknowledge this. It's fine if you're not religious, but you should keep quiet about that or expect to be ostracised for attacking our religious values."

Share the explanation below with the students and discuss/compare their responses in relation to the answers.

Are the viewpoints secularist?

The clearest secularist answer here is b, but both d and e are also secularist. Two of these statements come from people who are religious believers. But for a secularist that is up to them. All that matters is whether religion (or irreligion) is forced on others by the government.

Viewpoint a, though it comes from a non-religious person, is not secularist, because they think the church and the state should have strong links. They might have all sorts of reasons why they think religion (Christianity in particular) should be privileged.

Viewpoint b, from a Muslim, is secularist, because they don't think any version of religion (or religion in general) should be imposed on anybody else.

Viewpoint c comes from an atheist. But this person would impose their views on everybody else and would restrict religious freedom. Secularists would strongly oppose this.

Viewpoint d is similar to the second – and largely secularist. They are a deeply religious person who respects the rights of others not to be religious and they don't think religion should be legally privileged, so they are a secularist.

Viewpoint e is similar to the fourth and largely secularist. They are non-religious with strongly anti-religious views, but they don't want them imposed on others. For both viewpoints #d and #e some secularists could have concerns over "social pressure". Many forms of social pressure are part of promoting your views and changing people's minds in a pluralistic society. But other forms of social pressure could lead to privilege or discrimination.

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	<p>Viewpoint f is definitely not from a secularist. They are deeply religious (not a problem) but they want to impose that on everybody else and use the power of the state and the education system to make everybody else share their views (a big problem for secularists).</p> <p>So, you can be a religious secularist (e.g., b or d), or anti-secularist (e.g. f). You can also be a non-religious secularist, which is very common (e.g., e), or a nonreligious anti-secularist; this is less common, but not unheard of (e.g., a or c).</p>
Take it Further	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Script or act out a roleplay involving people holding two of the example viewpoints. They could be discussing a social issue or could both be being interviewed about the role of religion in society.