

KS3 Lesson Plan 2 – Exploring Secularism

Who is a secularist?

Background	<p>Who is a secularist?</p> <p>Many people hold secularist viewpoints. If a person believes that religion should not be given an advantage in government, that people should be free to believe whatever they want to and that everyone, religious or nonreligious, should be treated the same, then they are a secularist.</p> <p>The key principles of secularism are summarised below.</p> <p>The principles of secularism which protect and underpin many of the freedoms we enjoy are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Separation of religious institutions from state institutions and a public sphere where religion may participate, but not dominate.2. Freedom to practice one's faith or belief without harming others, or to change it or not have one, according to one's own conscience.3. Equality so that our religious beliefs or lack of them doesn't put any of us at an advantage or a disadvantage. <p>Separation of religion from state</p> <p>The separation of religion and state is the foundation of secularism. It ensures religious groups don't interfere in affairs of state, and the state doesn't interfere in religious affairs.</p> <p>Secularism protects both believers and non-believers</p> <p>Secularism seeks to ensure and protect freedom of religious belief and practice for all citizens. Secularists want freedoms of thought and conscience to apply equally to all – believers and non-believers alike. They do not wish to curtail religious freedoms.</p> <p>Religious Freedom</p> <p>Secularism seeks to defend the absolute freedom of religious and other belief and protect the right to manifest religious belief insofar as it does not impinge on the rights and freedoms of others.</p> <p>Secularism is about democracy and fairness</p> <p>In a secular democracy all citizens are equal before the law and parliament. No religious or political affiliation gives advantages or disadvantages, and religious believers are citizens with the same rights and obligations as anyone else.</p>
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	<p>Secularism is not atheism</p> <p>Atheism is a lack of belief in gods. Secularism simply provides a framework for a democratic society. Atheists have an obvious interest in supporting secularism, but secularism itself does not seek to challenge the tenets of any particular religion or belief, neither does it seek to impose atheism on anyone.</p> <p>Secularism protects free speech and expression</p> <p>Religious people have the right to express their beliefs publicly but so do those who oppose or question those beliefs. Religious beliefs, ideas and organisations must not enjoy privileged protection from the right to freedom of expression. In a democracy, all ideas and beliefs must be open to discussion. Individuals have rights; ideas do not.</p>
Subjects	RE Citizenship
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 operation of Parliament, including voting and elections, and the role of political parties• the precious liberties enjoyed by the citizens of the United Kingdom
Key Question	Who is a secularist?
Learning Outcomes	<p>Expected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pupils can explain what makes a specific viewpoint secularist and differentiate between pro-secularist and anti-secularist viewpoints. <p>Greater Depth:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pupils can also explain the pros and cons of secular and non-secular states and use examples to form their own point of view.
Stimulus	<p>Discuss and unpick the following viewpoints. Categorise the statements into 'pro-secularist' and 'anti-secularist'.</p> <p>Can pupils identify the <i>specific</i> beliefs that make the statements pro or anti-secularist?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. "I think the government should listen to what the church has to say on important matters – I mean, about half of the people in

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	<p>this country are Christian, so they are representing their views...”</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">2. “Well, I’m actually a Hindu and I take my worship and religion very seriously. I don’t think it has anything to do with politics though – for me, it’s a deeply personal and private part of my life...”3. “I’m a Christian and regular churchgoer – I think it’s good that the Bishops are given seats in Parliament. The Church of England really helps the people of the UK and the tradition of the Bishop’s Bench is a reward for their great service to the country...”4. “I’m a Muslim and I believe that my religion should be part of everything in society – including the law and politics – I see religion in every aspect of life...”5. “What nonsense – all religion is just made-up stories that people used to explain the world before we understood science. It has no place in the law, no place in politics and no place in a modern, progressive society...”6. “I believe that a person’s beliefs are completely personal – if they want to pray to their god or gods then that’s fine – I don’t want to stop them. If they want to go to their temple or church to worship, then they are free to do so. Just don’t force me to do the same – don’t let their religious beliefs impinge on my human rights and don’t mix up religion with the state or politics...”
Exercise	<p>Read and discuss the following quotes from significant secularists.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. "Modern society requires and deserves a truly secular state, by which I do not mean state atheism, but state neutrality in all matters pertaining to religion: the recognition that faith is personal and no business of the state." (Richard Dawkins, New Statesman)2. "In an increasingly atheistic and multi-faith society, a secular state, which protects all religions and privileges none, is a model to embrace. If David Cameron wants a real legacy, he could do no better than to bring home Thomas Jefferson's 'wall of separation'." (George Eaton, New Statesman)3. "It is legitimate for democracy and respectful of secularism to have a dialogue with religions. That is why I have called for a

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	<p>positive secularism. It would be madness to ignore religion" (Nicolas Sarkozy, former President of France)</p> <p>4. "Let me surprise you first by saying that I am a supporter of secular society. My family roots are in the beginnings of what has become the Irish Republic. In the early years of the last century, the Catholic Church in Ireland exercised an undue influence on the way in which government approached social and moral legislation. The modern secular state is a safer place - it allows space for a proper separation of legislature, judiciary and church. There is then room for a proper relationship between church and state. The state should be the guardian and protector of religious freedom, but it should not defer to religion." (Bishop David Chillingworth, The Sunday Times)</p> <p>5. "We cannot, and should not, protect our country's children from being brought up by ultra-conservative religious parents but we can, and should, ensure that they go to a school where they learn about other religions, about humanism, about living without religion and are given the confidence that people of all faiths and none are treated equally under the law." (Professor Susan Blackmore)</p> <p>6. I swear by my religion. I will die for it. But it is my personal affair. The state has nothing to do with it. The state would look after your secular welfare, health, communications, foreign relations, currency and so on, but not your or my religion. That is everybody's personal concern! (Mahatma Gandhi)</p> <p>Answer the following questions giving evidence directly from the quotes.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">Are the secularist viewpoints above anti-religion? How can you prove this?Can a religious person support secularism?What do secularists believe should be kept separate?Can you give reasons why they believe this separation is important?Can you think of potential problems that could be caused by religious groups having a say in government?What are your thoughts about the link between religion and state?Can you write a description of a secularist using the information you have learned in today's lesson?
Take it Further	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Think about today's learning, decide whether you hold secularist views, you are against secularism or you aren't sure yet.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Write a paragraph explaining why you hold these views. Try to reinforce your thoughts with quotes from the viewpoints considered today.
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