

Lesson Plan – Exploring Secularism

KS4 Lesson – Secularism, religion and society - Debate

Background	This is a debate lesson. Pupils should read the stimulus made of different cards. Each card in the stimulus will answer one debate question and contain a short, factual background related to the debate question and 3 viewpoints to support one side of the argument. Class should be split into groups of 3 or 4 and each group will be assigned a debate question and short stimulus for their side of the question.
Key Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Should blasphemy be legal?• Should we have faith schools?• Should there be religious exemptions to animal welfare laws?• Should religious leaders have seats in the Parliament?
Learning Outcomes	Pupils will understand the background of the debate Pupils will be able to evaluate arguments Pupils will be able to argue for and against in the debate Difference between KS4/5
Stimulus	Stimulus 1 Debate questions 1.Should religious leaders have seats in the Parliament? Background: The UK Parliament is made up of the House of Commons and House of Lords. The big decisions that affect how the country is run are made in both. These form the Houses of Parliament, and both do similar work, like making laws and debating important issues to do with how the country is run. Usually, the decisions made in one House have to be approved by the other. The 650 members of the Commons are voted for by the public. On the other hand, there are about 780 members of the House of Lords (the number varies) and they're not currently voted for by the public. The UK Parliament automatically awards 26 seats in the House of Lords to bishops of the Church of England. These bishops are able to (and do) vote on legislation, make interventions, and lead prayers at the start of each day's business.

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Against:

Viewpoint 1 (Equal religious rights to all)

We are a group of religiously diverse pupils. Few of us are members of Church of England, some follow other religions and most of us being non-religious. All of us hold different beliefs on many religious and social issues. But, we all believe that we should not have CofE bishops in the Parliament because the UK society is similar to our group, it is increasingly non-religious, and the religious ones are also increasingly diverse and made up of numerous religious groups. The automatic presence of the bishops in the House of Lords is not just a harmless legacy of a medieval constitution but a present example of religious discrimination, as others do not have the same rights and an example of CofE religious privilege, as only one religious denomination has a special place in the Parliament. Because it is not representative of all people, it represents undemocratic politics and people of other faiths and non-religious groups are being unfairly disadvantaged.

In your group, decide:

Should religious leaders have seats in the Parliament? Prepare a list of arguments for your side.

Why should they, or why should they not have them?

Can you think of any other arguments for your position? Make a list.

What counterarguments do you anticipate?

Can you prepare a rebuttal for them?

Viewpoint 2 (Cherry pick your leader)

We should not have any religious groups in the Parliament – it is impossible to decide which religions should participate and which leaders should be chosen. Even if religious leaders would provide some sort of special moral expertise to guide our laws and public policy, we should not have religious leaders in the Parliament because it is not possible to decide which religious leaders and from which religions or religious denominations should be given seats. We live in an increasingly multifaith society with diversity of religions, but also a diversity inside the same religious tradition, so who do we give seats to out of hundreds or even thousands of different religious groups? Who will represent Hindus or Muslims? They do not have organised leadership structure like the Catholic or Anglican Church and are very diverse in their religious views, with many liberal or conservative strands. Many religious traditions are not organised worldviews with religious leadership who represents them, and this would mean that only those religious groups that

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organise themselves politically would benefit from this. Only the big religious denominations that are already dominant would benefit from this, whilst perhaps smaller dissenting with diverging views, and more progressive groups would lose out.

In your group, decide:

Should religious leaders have seats in the Parliament? Prepare a list of arguments for your side.

Why should they, or why should they not have them?

Can you think of any other arguments for your position? Make a list.

What counterarguments do you anticipate?

Can you prepare a rebuttal for them?

Viewpoint 3 (Enlightenment)

We should not have any religious groups in the Parliament – religious worldviews are backwards and outdated. Whatever is your religious beliefs, you should keep it to yourself when acting as a member of the public and working for others. Religious reasoning is different from evidence based public reasoning as it is based on expertise in public policymaking, on science and rationalism, and not on some „tradition“. These traditions are outdated and can never be in synch with modern day life, for this reason: Religious belief should be private. Religious leaders in any form should not affect public policymaking and influence legislation. Religious reasoning based on tradition is limited in ability to make good and rational decisions for all. No one should be given a place in the parliament exclusively based on religious belief.

In your group, decide:

Should religious leaders have seats in the Parliament? Prepare a list of arguments for your side.

Why should they, or why should they not have them?

Can you think of any other arguments for your position? Make a list.

What counterarguments do you anticipate?

Can you prepare a rebuttal for them?

For:

Viewpoint 1 (Great moral leaders)

We should have CofE bishops in the Parliament – we are a Christian country and members of the CofE are still the biggest religious group in the UK. British Social attitudes survey of 2018 has shown that around 13% of people profess being members of the Anglican Church. This makes it the single biggest denomination in the UK and

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the traditional religion of our country. For this reason, having CofE bishops in the House of Lords would help in preserving our identity. It will help preserve our good Christian values, as bishops have moral and ethical expertise that is useful to check on politicians. Also, their moral expertise would guarantee they would work for all the people and all religious groups in a good way.

In your group, decide:

Should religious leaders have seats in the Parliament? Prepare a list of arguments for your side.

Why should they, or why should they not have them?

Can you think of any other arguments for your position? Make a list.

What counterarguments do you anticipate?

Can you prepare a rebuttal for them?

Viewpoint 2 (Believers of all religions, unite)

Religious leaders are representatives of great religious traditions that promote good social and moral life, and as such are greatly beneficial to our society and should be given more power. We should have all religious groups in the Parliament – it is good for society to have moral and ethical people have some say in the legislation. The House of Lords should have special unelected places for members of all major religious groups. This would be beneficial on many levels, as it is only fair to have all religions and not just one. It would be beneficial to have diversity of religious views on moral and ethical issues, as none by themselves can give the best insight. Also, it would be more representational given the increasing diversity of religions, and it would promote social cohesion as it provides a good example for individual religious people how to cooperate and work together despite their differences. This is the only way to provide a well needed moral and spiritual expertise when deciding on public policy.

In your group, decide:

Should religious leaders have seats in the Parliament? Prepare a list of arguments for your side.

Why should they, or why should they not have them?

Can you think of any other arguments for your position? Make a list.

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Viewpoint 3 (Make Britain's Christendom great again)

Our party believes that we should have religious leaders in the Parliament, but only from some religious traditions that are linked with our history and tradition. This means that we should have Christian groups like Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Baptists, Methodists and others who have built this nation into what it is today. Our culture and values were not built on traditions of other world religions, so why should we have them in the Parliament? This is not a religious privilege, because privilege is something that is undeserved. Our religious leaders have earned the right, as they have shown throughout the course of history, that they can make our nation great.

In your group, decide:

Should religious leaders have seats in the Parliament? Prepare a list of arguments for your side.

Why should they, or why should they not have them?

Can you think of any other arguments for your position? Make a list.

What counterarguments do you anticipate?

Can you prepare a rebuttal for them?

2.Should blasphemy be legal?

Background:

Blasphemy is defined in the Cambridge Dictionary as “something that you say or do that shows you do not respect God or a religion”. Generally, the term is applied by different groups to describe beliefs or statements they have a theological disagreement with, because either they differ on interpretations of a religion or criticise religious ideas and institutions. It is a language that is deemed offensive to the religious sentiments of certain group or individuals.

For:

Viewpoint (Do not tolerate the intolerant)

Blasphemy is an offence to God, no one should have the right to do it freely, and we are right to punish those that do. We are a Christian country and the rights of Christians need to be respected. It is not alright to offend other people's deeply held beliefs and mock them. Christianity teaches love and tolerance, and we should protect those values from mistreatment of those that are intolerant of us.

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In your group, decide:

Should blasphemy be legal? Prepare a list of arguments for your side.

Can you think of any other arguments for your position? Make a list.

What counterarguments do you anticipate?

Can you prepare a rebuttal for them?

Viewpoint 2 (Curb your differences)

Blasphemy laws are good at preventing discrimination, conflict, violence and protecting social harmony and religious peace. If we punish people who insult and criticise any religious beliefs, this will prevent confrontation between different religious groups, since they will not be allowed to offend each other without consequences. This is a good thing, especially in our multicultural societies with many faiths.

In your group, decide:

Should blasphemy be legal? Prepare a list of arguments for your side.

Can you think of any other arguments for your position? Make a list.

What counterarguments do you anticipate?

Can you prepare a rebuttal for them?

Viewpoint 3 (Politically correct)

We are a non-religious group and humanists, but we find it to be very important that we have a law that will protect the sentiments of all religious and non-religious communities in the UK. No religious or non-religious worldview should be mocked, and we should have laws in place to prevent that. Mocking the worldviews that are part of someone's identity can cause great emotional harm and should be restricted.

In your group, decide:

Should blasphemy be legal? Prepare a list of arguments for your side.

Can you think of any other arguments for your position? Make a list.

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Can you prepare a rebuttal for them?

Against:

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Viewpoint 1 (No progressive voices please)

We are liberal Muslims and believe that there should be no blasphemy laws. These kinds of laws not only prevent legitimate criticism of some religious beliefs or potentially dangerous religious leadership, but are also well known to produce a culture of mob violence against blasphemers in countries that have blasphemy laws in place. These laws legitimise persecution of religious minorities and different and progressive views inside religious tradition under a disguise of protecting the „correct“ view of the religion.

In your group, decide:

Should blasphemy be legal? Prepare a list of arguments for your side.

Can you think of any other arguments for your position? Make a list.

What counterarguments do you anticipate?

Can you prepare a rebuttal for them?

Viewpoint 2 (Offense is taken, not given)

Freedom of expression and freedom of speech are basic human rights and every set of religious or non-religious beliefs should be allowed to be criticised, offended or even satirised and mocked. Religious views inside the same religion are highly diverse, and what is offensive to some Christians for example is not offensive to some other Christians even though they hold similar or same beliefs. In the end, what is offensive to someone is arbitrary and subjective. Someone's subjective feelings of being offended cannot be the criteria for limiting the freedom of speech because feelings are subjective and anyone can claim they are offended without an objective way to determine if it is true or not.

In your group, decide:

Should blasphemy be legal? Prepare a list of arguments for your side.

Can you think of any other arguments for your position? Make a list.

What counterarguments do you anticipate?

Can you prepare a rebuttal for them?

Viewpoint 3 (Your freedom ends where my freedom begins)

Human rights protect individuals and not ideas or beliefs. Freedom of speech is a fundamental right and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that all ideas can be scrutinised, criticised, satirised and mocked. These rights were hard fought and liberal democracies uphold them as they understand that the only way to fight bad ideas is if we are free to express criticism against them.

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Those that demand that their beliefs are respected and safeguarded against criticism or ridicule are the intolerant of others and their right of freedom of expression.

In your group, decide:

Should blasphemy be legal? Prepare a list of arguments for your side.

Can you think of any other arguments for your position? Make a list. What counterarguments do you anticipate?

Can you prepare a rebuttal for them?

3. Should we have faith schools?

Background:

A **faith school** is a school in the United Kingdom that teaches a general curriculum but which has a particular religious character or formal links with a religious or faith-based organisation. The term is most commonly applied to state-funded faith schools, although many independent schools also have religious characteristics. Schools with a *formal* faith designation may give priority to applicants who are of the faith, and specific exemptions from Section 85 of the Equality Act 2010 enable them to do that. However, state-funded faith schools must admit other applicants if they cannot fill all of their places and must ensure that their admission arrangements comply with the School Admissions Code.

For:

Viewpoint 1 (Love your neighbour)

Faith schools have better ethos and community cohesion than non-faith schools, inspired by their religions. Religious teachers bring in an extra value into education with the moral values inspired by their religions. Moral education of pupils is important, and faith schools make sure that pupils can be brought up on good values like Christian teachings on love and compassion, Islamic teaching on charity and good deeds etc. This is something that is not so strongly promoted in non-faith schools. We know that there are many charities that help others and care of the environment that are of religious ethos and their religion is what drives it. So, why not promote this good behaviour by allowing parents to send their children into faith schools?

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In your group, decide:

Should we have faith schools? Prepare a list of arguments for your side.

Can you think of any other arguments for your position? Make a list.

What counterarguments do you anticipate?

Can you prepare a rebuttal for them?

Viewpoint 2 (Post-colonial justice)

We are a multicultural and multifaith society, and we need to help non-Christian religious minorities preserve their identity. Having faith schools is one of the good ways to support religious and ethnic minorities in preserving their culture. Our country was one of the main colonizing powers that subjugated and exploited a quarter of the planet and by doing so eradicated many cultures and weakened communities. Other religious groups deserve our help, and we should allow them to have their own faith schools in the name of fairness for everything that was done.

In your group, decide:

Should we have faith schools? Prepare a list of arguments for your side.

Can you think of any other arguments for your position? Make a list.

What counterarguments do you anticipate?

Can you prepare a rebuttal for them?

Viewpoint 3 (Protect religious freedoms)

One of the human rights is freedom of religion. This means that everyone has the right to profess any religion and have the freedom to change their beliefs. If this freedom is protected by human rights, than it should be the right to have your children educated in a school that best provides and caters for the religious beliefs of the pupils and parents. Anyone that does not wish to accommodate this basic human right is either a militant atheist who hates religions or ignorant of what human rights are.

In your group, decide:

Should we have faith schools? Prepare a list of arguments for your side.

Can you think of any other arguments for your position? Make a list.

What counterarguments do you anticipate?

Can you prepare a rebuttal for them?

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Against:

Viewpoint 1 (Stop the tribalism)

Faith schools are divisive and sectarian. They select, label and divide children from an early age based on the religious beliefs of their parents. This is a form of child indoctrination and state funded, which means everyone is paying their taxes to support it! Raising children and telling them that this is what is the best to believe in, is a form of child abuse and should be strictly forbidden. This is not multiculturalism, this is multi-segregationalism. We are building walls and dividing people based on what the parents believe in. Everyone should have good and non-partisan or biased education and should be able to decide for themselves once they become adults.

In your group, decide:

Should we have faith schools? Prepare a list of arguments for your side.

Can you think of any other arguments for your position? Make a list.

What counterarguments do you anticipate?

Can you prepare a rebuttal for them?

Viewpoint 2 (Covert social selection)

Faith schools have the right to discriminate in their admission policies! If they are oversubscribed, and depending on what type of school it is (from 50% to up to 100%), they can accept only the pupils of their own faith and reject the applications of the others. This is not only a form of religious discrimination, but actually a hideous excuse to be selective in the admission of pupils. Data tells us that faith schools have significantly lower number of pupils on Free school meals (socially disadvantaged pupils), and it is usually these pupils that are statistically behind in their progress and attainment because of this disadvantage. This means that faith schools choose on purpose pupils who have higher attainment progress, something that would be illegal for any other type of school besides faith schools! And they brag how their special religious ethos is responsible for their higher scores in GCSEs compared to non-faith school. The audacity!

In your group, decide:

Should we have faith schools? Prepare a list of arguments for your side.

Can you think of any other arguments for your position? Make a list.

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What counterarguments do you anticipate?
Can you prepare a rebuttal for them?

Viewpoint 3 (Tolerate, not promote)

Religions are backwards and regressive. They are failed sciences from ancient times when people did not know better and had to explain things through imaginative stories. These stories are not only untrue and proven wrong by science, but are damaging to our society as they promote ignorance towards the real natural reality and promote Iron Age barbaric morality that is not compatible with our modern day standards of morality where we value equality, freedoms, human rights and free inquiry. Because we value freedoms, we do tolerate these religious systems and do not outright ban them. But, tolerating is one thing, and promoting it by using public money is a complete another thing!

In your group, decide:

Should we have faith schools? Prepare a list of arguments for your side.

Can you think of any other arguments for your position? Make a list.

What counterarguments do you anticipate?

Can you prepare a rebuttal for them?

4. Should there be religious exemptions to animal welfare laws?

Background:

Animal welfare legislation requires all animals to be stunned before slaughter in order to minimise suffering. Yet, slaughter of animals without pre-stunning is permitted in the UK despite a recommendation by the Government's own advisory body, the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC), that the practice should be banned. The only exemption allowed is for religious communities to meet Jewish and Muslim religious dietary preferences. All kosher meat (Jewish dietary requirements) is non-stunned and around 42% of halal (Islamic dietary requirements) is non-stunned (Figures from the Food Standards Agency for 2018). In total, 81.5% of animals were stunned prior to slaughter in 2017 in the UK.

For:

Viewpoint 1 (Human rights over animal rights)

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People's religious practices are more important than animals. Although animals are sentient beings that experience pain, they are not autonomous moral beings that have human rights. This “*speciesism*” is one of the reason why we as humans do take the right to eat animals. If we are more significant than animals, then our deeply held religious beliefs and practices that come from it should be protected.

In your group, decide:

Should there be religious exemptions to animal welfare laws?

Prepare a list of arguments for your side.

Can you think of any other arguments for your position? Make a list.

What counterarguments do you anticipate?

Can you prepare a rebuttal for them?

Viewpoint 2 (Religious slaughter is the humane slaughter)

Religious slaughter is good for animal welfare, as the method of slaughter is to minimise the pain and animal distress. For example, both the *shechita* (kosher meat) and *dhabibah* (halal meat) slaughter require the use of a sharp knife and a cut to the neck area in order for the animal to quickly lose blood flow to the brain and lose consciousness. Other animals must not be present as well, and everything is done in order to minimise the pain and distress of animals. Mass factory farming of animals usually involves pre-stunning, but afterwards they saw the animal alive in a mass slaughterhouse where other animals are present. Traditional slaughter is not done in such a mass slaughter way.

In your group, decide:

Should there be religious exemptions to animal welfare laws?

Prepare a list of arguments for your side.

Can you think of any other arguments for your position? Make a list.

What counterarguments do you anticipate?

Can you prepare a rebuttal for them?

Viewpoint 3 (Proxy anti-religious bigotry)

Motivation behind ending the religious slaughter is often grounded in antisemitism and islamophobia. Animal welfare is just a proxy for a wider issue of anti-religious bigotry. New atheism, militant secularism and anti-religious bigotry both on the left and the right use animal welfare to attack religions. The far right has especially been vocal against religious migrant groups and have openly criticised many of their religious practices. The reason why people advocate for animal rights is not to protect the animals, but its motivation is deeply anti-religious sentiments.

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In your group, decide:

Should there be religious exemptions to animal welfare laws?

Prepare a list of arguments for your side.

Can you think of any other arguments for your position? Make a list.

What counterarguments do you anticipate?

Can you prepare a rebuttal for them?

Against:

Viewpoint 1 (Trust science)

Animals are sentient beings and experience pain in a very similar way humans do. EU's Scientific Panel on Animal Health and Welfare (AHAW) have stated that: "Due to the serious animal welfare concerns associated with slaughter without stunning, pre-cut stunning should always be performed." The government's own advisory body, the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) states that the practice should be banned. The FAWC have concluded that animals slaughtered without pre-stunning are likely to experience "very significant pain and distress" before they become unconscious.

The scientific consensus is clear that it is more humane to stun an animal prior to slaughter than not to do so.

In your group, decide:

Should there be religious exemptions to animal welfare laws?

Prepare a list of arguments for your side.

Can you think of any other arguments for your position? Make a list.

What counterarguments do you anticipate?

Can you prepare a rebuttal for them?

Viewpoint 2 (Boo backwards religions)

We should have complete separation of the state and religion, and both should be completely disentangled. There should be no accommodation for religious practices or anything stemming from religious beliefs even if there would be no concerns about animal welfare, as religious practices and beliefs are superstitious and are inherently negative for societies, we should restrict them whenever we can.

In your group, decide:

Should there be religious exemptions to animal welfare laws?

Prepare a list of arguments for your side.

Can you think of any other arguments for your position? Make a list.

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	<p>What counterarguments do you anticipate? Can you prepare a rebuttal for them?</p> <p>Viewpoint 3 (One law for all)</p> <p>We should accommodate religious practices, but this should not come to the expense of anyone else. There must be one-law-for-all and equality before the law without allowing certain groups any sort of privilege, especially if that privilege would entail allowing slaughter of animals in a way that includes avoidable and unnecessary suffering of sentient beings. If the law demands that animals are stunned before the slaughter to reduce the pain and suffering, then this should be applied to everyone, irrelevant of what they believe in or what is their religious or cultural practice.</p> <p>In your group, decide: Should there be religious exemptions to animal welfare laws? Prepare a list of arguments for your side. Can you think of any other arguments for your position? Make a list. What counterarguments do you anticipate? Can you prepare a rebuttal for them?</p>
Exercise	<p>Debate lesson (or split over 2 option). Option for teacher to split over multiple lessons e.g. go away as homework in groups to prepare and then last 20 mins of next 4 lessons. Or all in one lesson.</p> <p>Teacher can decide how to organise the debate part of the lesson, or they can follow the following instructions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Split into groups of 3-4• Assigned a debate question and a side• Read the short stimulus for your side of the question and discuss• Have a series of mini debates (Opening statement and 2 rebuttals)• Class discuss

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	<p>Mini debate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Open statement• Response 1• Response 2 (if teacher allows time)• Audience questions (Teacher decides 1 or more questions for each side)• Audience votes
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