



EXPLORING SECULARISM

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Dear

I am writing to make you aware of an exciting new resource for secondary schools:
Exploring Secularism (www.exploringsecularism.org).

Secularism raises significant questions about how we balance freedom of, and from, religion with other rights. These are some of the most important questions which arise in all of the humanities, from religious and belief education to citizenship, and from the arts to history.

Exploring Secularism provides teachers with the material they need to ask these questions in an informed way. It is not a manifesto of answers. It encourages students to explore a range of answers and come to some of their own.

The Commission on Religious Education has recognised secularism as a key concept in the study of religion and worldviews. By using *Exploring Secularism*, you and your students will join a long tradition of people from all faiths and none, of artists and authors, of politicians and philosophers, judges and theologians, all of whom have grappled with these debates.

The issues considered in *Exploring Secularism* are growing ever more relevant as British society considers how best to respond to growing religious diversity, growing non-belief, political instability and intolerance.

People will have a range of views on all sorts of secularist issues, including the limits of rights like freedom of speech and of belief, or on how best to practice tolerance for those with different faiths and beliefs. By exploring how different people interpret these shared values, these resources help students gain a deeper understanding. This directly relates to the 'fundamental British values' that schools have a duty to promote:

Democracy: The resources help students explore and appreciate the role of freedom of and from religion in our democratic system (as well as other democratic and non-democratic systems) and why democracy goes beyond simple majority rule.

The rule of law: Secularism is about the balance of the rule of law and individual liberty with other rights. By improving students' understanding of equality law, through real life examples, the resources help students understand how the rule of law impacts how we practise our beliefs and respect the rights of others.

Individual liberty: These resources help students – in both a theoretical and example led way – explore the relationship and importance of individual liberty to other rights with a focus on the individual (as opposed to group) freedom of and from religion.

Mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs: Secularism promotes freedom of belief, and the qualified freedom to manifest beliefs subject to the rights of others. These resources deal with real contemporary examples of different beliefs coming into conflict



and helps students explore how to resolve such conflicts in a way that respects the rights of all involved.

So far the website features two major resources:

Exploring Secularism: A guide for teachers sets out the principles behind all of our resources “Student led”, “Teacher mediated”, “Built on shared values”, “Balance and critical reflection” and “Transparent”.

Whether or not you are planning on using the other resources, this guide is an essential introduction. It offers advice and a secularist perspective on the key questions, and helps teachers anticipate where these might come up in the curriculum.

The Core Principles Resource Pack features nineteen original resources, presentations, exercises and stimuli for students to explore secularism’s basic political philosophy of separation, freedom and equality. Through real world examples, different viewpoints and thought experiments, students will understand, apply, contrast and critique secularist reasoning.

They’ll form their own opinions and understand others’ on what secularism is, where it comes from and why it is supported or opposed. Students will explore how religious privilege, tolerance and discrimination affect our lives and the decisions we make.

Exploring Secularism is a project of the National Secular Society. The NSS works for the separation of religion and state and equal respect for everyone’s human rights so that no one is either advantaged or disadvantaged on account of their beliefs.

I encourage you to explore the range of resources available on the website. For a free copy of the guide for teachers, or to discuss using *Exploring Secularism* in your school, please contact education@secularism.org.uk

Best wishes,

Alastair Lichten

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