



Research-led Resources for the 3 – 7s: Supporting Religious Education in Today's World



Some of the 13 titles available in English and Welsh for the *Exploring Why* and *Exploring Our World* series

Bear Lands Publishing (a St Mary's Centre imprint) has published two new storybook series with free resources for 3- to -7- year-olds. The *Exploring Why* and the *Exploring Our World* series have both been sponsored by the Welsh Government's commissioning programme, which aims to support learners and teachers exploring key questions and themes relevant to religious education.

A response to research findings

These new curriculum materials are a response to key research findings of the *Young People and Attitudes to Religious Diversity Project* led by the University of Warwick. First, the quantitative findings of the project identify that there are areas of misinformation, and uninformed apprehension about living in religiously diverse societies. Education has a crucial role to play in correcting misunderstanding and allaying misinformed apprehension. The research identifies the need for educational intervention.

Second, the quantitative research gave close attention to the importance of different sources of information for young people in shaping their attitudes toward and understanding of living in religiously diverse societies. While some influence is attributed to television, internet, friends, and parents, the greatest proportion of influence is attributed to schools. This reinforces the notion that the school acts as an important vehicle both for shaping attitudes and for offering informed and structured information. If educational intervention is appropriate for equipping young people more effectively and more harmoniously to live within religiously diverse societies, then targeting curriculum development within schools is an important priority.

Third, among the theories that help to inform an understanding of young people's attitudes towards diversity (more generally), the contact hypothesis has a great deal still to offer. The data show that young people who are actually familiar with working and living alongside young people of diverse backgrounds tend to be more open to diversity. If curriculum intervention is an appropriate activity, then curriculum intervention that builds on the contact hypothesis understanding of the promotion of positive attitudes is one on which to be built. The curriculum intervention is focused on the early years in school (foundation and key stages 1 and 2), because of the importance of this age group in setting attitudes, either positive and favourable or prejudiced and detrimental.

Previous curriculum development by the research group has developed strategies for shaping positive attitudes by introducing young people to two core characters (Aled and Sian). The educational strategy is to promote identification with these two young people and to begin to explore the world through their lenses. In the current two new series of curriculum books there are 13 titles in which Aled and Sian encounter and experience a range of expressions of religious diversity. In so doing they take the young readers on a journey with them so that the young readers themselves become immersed in this world of diversity. This is a way of applying the contact hypothesis to be accessible to young people who are themselves not living in the environments in which that contact may be most easily accessible. Alongside the 13 full colour picture books there are open access web-based resources to enable the young people themselves and their teachers to access in greater depth the experiences portrayed within the books.

Exploring Why series

Aled and Siân love exploring the places where they live and the places they go to visit. They enjoy playing 'I Spy' to help them get to know these places better. In the *Exploring Why* series Aled and Siân are curious to find out why some of the things around them are important to their Christian, Jewish and Muslim friends. Together they explore bread, light, veil, cross, menorah and water, and then they participate in a Festival of Faiths where they remember and celebrate all these symbols of faith.

There are seven storybook titles in the *Exploring Why* series, which investigate some of the important things that Aled and Siân find in their exploration of the world around them. These important things are explored initially in the local secular environment before being explored through the eyes of young people from within a particular religious tradition. The seven storybook titles and religious traditions are:

- Cross (Christian)
- Bread (Christian)
- Veil (Muslim)
- Water (Muslim)
- Menorah (Jewish)
- Light (Jewish)
- Symbols of Faith (brings together the three religious traditions in a celebration of faiths)

Each storybook title is available in four different formats, which can be used flexibly according to individual contexts. The four storybook formats comprise:

- short-text version (short, simple text with pictures)
- long-text version (longer, more complex text with pictures)
- key question version (key questions and pictures)
- pictures version (pictures only without text)

All the formats are available as .pdf downloads, which can be used on whiteboards and a range of electronic devices used regularly by schools, young people and their families today.

The short-text version of each title is also available from the Welsh Books Council (<http://www.gwales.com/intro/>) as a B5 paperback book for school and class libraries, as well as for classroom use.

To support the storybooks, each storybook has its own pack of *Activity Resources for learners and teachers* in downloadable .pdf format. These Activity Resources follow the same structure as the storybooks. Therefore, for each double page of the storybook, there is:

- a page of ideas for activities for each of the seven areas of learning within the Foundation Phase;
- an activity sheet/s for learners to support one of these activity ideas;
- links ‘going deeper into aspects of religious education’.

In total, for each storybook title there are 140 ideas for activities and 10 activity sheets for learners.

Exploring Our World series

Aled and Siân love doing exciting things and exploring the world around them. In the *Exploring Our World* series Aled and Siân share some of their experiences with their Christian, Hindu, Jewish and Muslim friends. Aled and Siân also enjoy listening to their friends’ stories, and learn about how these relate to their own. This helps the friends get to know one another better. Together they explore the popular themes of celebrations, myself and others, times and seasons, journeys, special people, and signs and symbols.

There are six storybook titles in the *Exploring Our World* series, which investigate some of the important things that Aled and Siân find in their exploration of the world around them. These important things are explored first of all in the local secular environment before being explored through the eyes of young people from within particular religious traditions (Christian, Hindu, Jewish and Muslim). The six storybook titles are:

- *3- to -5-year-olds*
 - Celebrations
 - Myself and Others
 - Times and Seasons
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- *5- to -7-year-olds*
 - Journeys
 - Special People
 - Signs and Symbols

Each storybook title is available in four different formats, which can be used flexibly according to individual contexts. The four storybook formats comprise:

- short-text version (short, simple text with pictures)
- long-text version (longer, more complex text with pictures)
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How to access the resources

The free open-access resources are available at **hwb.wales.gov.uk/Resources** and **st-marys-centre.org.uk**

Paperback copies of the short story book version are available for the Welsh Books Council (<http://www.gwales.com/intro/>)