

# What can we learn from these non-religious stories?



## Background knowledge for the teacher

- Story is a vital part of RE for 5–7s.
- When approaching non-religious worldviews, using story to explore beliefs and values is very valuable, and here we present two stories which can be used in this way.
- Many non-religious people, including Humanists, contrast their view of life with religious views by focusing on the choice between faith and rationality. For many Humanists, religion is unattractive when it asks people to ‘just have faith’ or ‘trust in God’ because this goes beyond the evidence we have, and they believe living by the evidence is good.
- Another Humanist value, shared by many non-religious people, is open-mindedness. This may be contrasted with acceptance of authority within religion: instead of following teachings from ancient scriptures, many Humanists are eager to be open-minded about the possibilities generated by new ideas.
- Many non-religious values overlap with those promoted by faith groups. But here we are emphasising the values of reasonableness, or rationality, courage and open-heartedness. These values are characteristic of many non-religious life stances, and are worth exploring with every pupil.

This unit provides teachers of younger pupils with two fresh stories to use when exploring values, and with a set of related activities that enable children to work in groups and alone, in speaking, listening and writing, on the meanings and values the stories open up.

The work in this unit could support those using RE Today scheme of work (unit 1.8: ‘How should we care for others and the world, and why does it matter?’). This would add in a study of non-religious worldviews to this unit.



## Essential knowledge for the pupil

Pupils will know:

- stories can help us to think about what matters, our beliefs and values. They can show us good ways to behave and bad behaviour to avoid
- non-religious people can decide what is good and bad by thinking about it carefully together. Being reasonable often solves a problem and shows you a way forward
- being reasonable or rational means thinking about things carefully, and not being superstitious or rushing forward with no idea how to do it
- one way to live a good life is to be observant and thoughtful (rather than to pray or to follow God’s rules)



## Assessment for 5–7s

The statements below suggest ‘emerging’, ‘expected’ and ‘exceeding’ outcomes from this unit for 5–7-year-olds. Adapt them for the age of pupils you are teaching. If necessary adapt the ‘e’ words to the assessment language of your school.

### Emerging

- Retell simply the outline of a story about values.
- Talk thoughtfully, when prompted, about the values in the story.

### Expected

- Recognise and talk thoughtfully about the values of different characters in a story.
- Relate these values simply to their own experiences and lives.

### Exceeding

- Outline how some people who are non-religious value open-mindedness or being reasonable.
- Consider and discuss questions about what it means for non-religious people to live a good life.

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This unit helps pupils in Scotland to achieve RME 1–09a.



## eResources

Go to [www.natre.org.uk/inspiring-re/](http://www.natre.org.uk/inspiring-re/) to access the resources below.

- Teachers may find it interesting to see how non-religious alternatives to the Ten Commandments could look. There are some examples on the *TIME Magazine* website.
- Pedro Pablo Sacristán is a storyteller who makes his work freely available. The second story in this unit, *Ice in the Forest*, is based on one of Pedro’s ideas. His website has many more examples.

Members are able to download extra resources to support this unit:

- A PowerPoint presentation.
- A5 versions of the pictures to use with the story *At the traffic lights* from p. 13.

Activity  
1

## Tit for tat?

Talk to the children about how people sometimes hit back a little harder than we get hit! So bad behaviour gets worse. Tit for tat? It happens in every school, during many playtimes.

Ask pupils:

- Can you think of any tit for tat behaviour at school?
- Can you think of any tit for tat behaviour at home?

Explain that you are going to tell a story about this topic. Ask the pupils to look out for any hidden messages in the story.

Activity  
2

## Storytelling

This fun story is about a cyclist and a car driver getting a bad case of road rage at each other, but it doesn't help anyone.

Share the *At the traffic lights* story on p. 13 with the class, either reading it aloud, or telling it your own way. Suggested actions for you, and to allow the pupils to join in are written in italics within the story.

Ask the class if they have heard of the 'Golden Rule': 'Treat others as you would like to be treated.' Would this have helped the cyclist and the driver? (Probably; it could have saved them some trouble.) Have the children ever heard an adult ask: 'And how would you like that if she did it to you?' This question asks us to think about applying the Golden Rule.

With the class in groups, or as a whole class, discuss:

- Who started it? What was unfair?
- Who was to blame, Bob or Andy?
- Would two women ever do this?
- Do you know any other stories like this one?
- Does the story have any hidden messages?
- Do we know anyone who behaves like Bob or Andy?
- What could have happened instead if they had behaved kindly?
- What is there for you to learn from this story?

Activity  
3

## Cartoon strip

Put the class into three groups and give each pupil one little section of the story to draw, so that the whole story is shared within the group. Ask them to put all their drawings together with masking tape so that each group has a long strip cartoon that tells the whole story.

Ask the groups to:

- rehearse retelling the story using the cartoon strip
- choose a title for their story which shares the message of the story

Compare the ways the three different groups do this task.

Discuss the themes of the story with the pupils:

- Escalation: say to the pupils: 'People often make a little trouble bigger'.
- The need for tolerance or forgiveness – otherwise ... Say to the pupils: 'If you can't say sorry you won't get far!'
- The idea that violence breeds violence. Say to the pupils: 'If you hurt me, and I hurt you, it gets worse!'

Ask the pupils:

- Is this a good story to tell others? Why? Why not?
- Is this a story non-religious people might use? Why? Why not?

Activity  
4

## Be reasonable! Use your brains!

One key reason why people reject religions is that they ask for faith that goes, or seems to go, beyond rationality. Humanists and other atheists ask instead for evidence and seek to give no more credulity to a proposition than the evidence allows. While this point may be hard for some 5–7s to understand, the story *Ice in the forest*, p. 14, is intended to open up the idea of thinking carefully and not jumping to conclusions too swiftly. Using your brains to help you work out what to do is a good idea! This is in the right area for 5–7s.

Share the story *Ice in the forest* with the pupils.

Ask pupils to discuss these points with their talking partner:

- Are there any hidden messages in this story?
- What helped the weasel to get the crown?
- What was the weasel's idea?
- When do we need to think before we act?

Activity  
5

## A drawing reflection

Make a big picture of the ice block on a large sheet of paper. Leave space underneath.

Ask all the pupils to draw an animal trying to break the ice by force.

Give the children a flame shape on yellow, red or orange paper, with 'think first' written on it. They can add a word or an image themselves. Make the fire under the ice out of the flames.

Activity  
6

## Thinking carefully

When do we need to think first, before we do anything?

Ask the pupils to work in small groups.

- Make a list of ten or more examples of thinking first.
- Is it easier to solve a problem if we think first? Why is that?

Using the weasel and speech bubble on p. 15, ask pupils to write or draw two or three sentences to explain what could be learnt from this non-religious story.



### For older pupils

- Use a set of flashcards with a word on one side to introduce children to a list of values words: bravery, peace, kindness, sharing, reasonableness, supporting, comforting. What are the opposites of these words? Write them on the back of the cards. You could hang the cards up on ribbons for a walk-through.
- They can choose any word from which to create a story themselves. Tell them their story might have characters in it who put the value into action, or who do the opposite. Link this to the story-writing pupils are doing in English lessons.
- The article refers briefly to Humanism; find out more on the Humanists UK website. Look at the 'Happy Human' logo and the tagline 'for the one life we have' as a way to explore Humanist ethics.



### For younger pupils

Pupils in the 4–5 age group have a keen sense of what is naughty and what is kind.

You might introduce this topic by discussing some stories the children already know and love in terms of who in the story was naughty and what happened next. Next consider who in the story was nice – and what happened next.

This work uses the language of values and simple morality to explore stories, and opens up the possibility of deciding what is good for ourselves, without referring to gods or scriptures.



# At the traffic lights

Activity  
2

Activity  
3



## Andy the cyclist, Bob the driver and the traffic lights: a story for thinking about forgiveness and tolerance.

As you read this story to the class, you might use the action patterns (in italics) to get everyone involved. You might use two miniature figures, a toy bicycle, toy car and a traffic lights picture as props to tell the story. There are three pictures at the bottom of the story to help you with this. If you tell it with the actions, the pupils should find it funny.

Andy loved riding his bike.

*Do an action for riding a bike.*

One day he was going fast down the hill when saw the lights go amber, then red, ahead of him. As he raced down the hill he put his brakes on. The bicycle slowed to a stop, just on the white line by the traffic lights. He put a foot down on the ground to steady himself and waited. Cars hurried by in the other direction.

Bob drove up behind Andy, and was in a rush. He wanted a quick getaway when the lights turned green. So he beeped his horn and waved his hand to Andy to move over to the left-hand side.

*Do an action and sound for beeping a horn.*

Andy was annoyed! He shook his head at Bob, and he pulled a rude face.

*Make a rude and annoyed face.*

Bob felt annoyed. He inched forward in his car, very slowly, until the bumper just touched the mudguard of Andy's bike, with a tiny soft bump.

*Bump two fists together softly.*

Andy didn't like this one bit. He turned, and aimed a big mouthful of spit at Bob's windscreen. It was a direct hit. It dribbled down the glass.

*Don't try spitting! Use your fingers to show how the spit dribbled down the windscreen.*

Bob felt furious. He wasn't going to be made to look stupid in this way. There were people on the pavement watching. They were laughing at him. He pushed his foot down and made a revving sound with his engine –

*Make the 'vroom vroom' noise of an engine revving.*

– and made a very rude hand signal at Andy.

*You may or may not want to suggest that pupils thumb their noses (they may know ruder hand gestures!).*

The angry Andy did not want to lose face either. He climbed off his bike, and swung his boot hard at the car's headlight.

*Mime aiming a kick at a car headlight.*

When he kicked it, the light shattered into a hundred bits of broken glass.

*Make the sound of the light smashing.*

Bob jumped out of the car in a moment. He was a big man. He stepped up to where Andy had laid his bike on the road and stamped on the wheels. Both the wheels bent.

*Mime stamping on a bicycle to bend the wheels.*

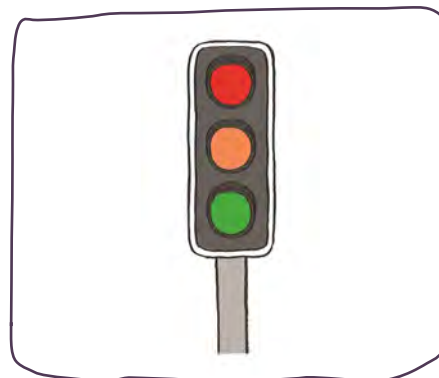
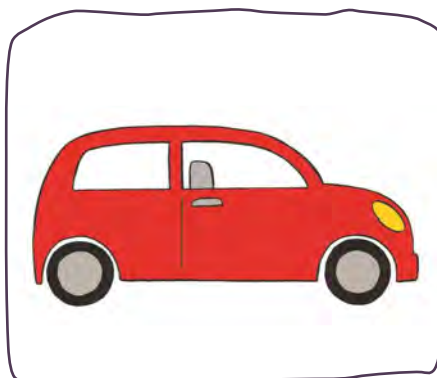
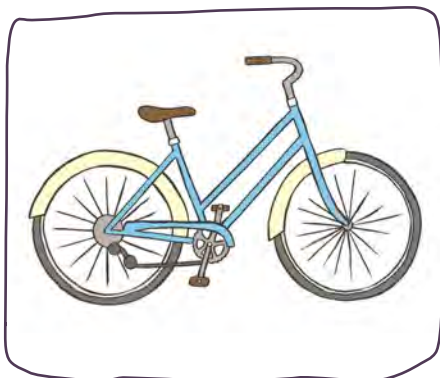
Andy's fury went up one level higher. He picked up his bent bike, lifted it high over his head and threw it hard at Bob's car bonnet. The pedals gouged deep scrapes into the paintwork, and the handlebars hit the windscreen, cracking it down the middle.

*Mime picking up a bike above your head and throwing it.*

Bob and Andy stood glaring at each other with their fists clenched. The crowd watched. What would happen next?

*Mime Bob or Andy looking very angry.*

Then the traffic lights turned green.



# Ice in the forest: a story about thinking reasonably

One morning all the animals of the jungle were amazed to see that a huge block of ice had appeared in the jungle during the night. No one knew where it had come from, but it was massive – as tall as a tree, as wide as ten elephants. It was freezing cold. Even going close to the block made you feel freezing! The block was transparent – you could see through it. And frozen in the middle was a beautiful silver crown. The animals all stood in a circle around the block, talking about how cold the ice was and how lovely the silver crown was. They all chattered about how they could get the crown out of the ice.

Old Lion, King of the Jungle, spoke: ‘This beautiful crown will be for our next king or queen,’ he roared. ‘Whoever can get the crown out first will be our next ruler.’

What happened next? All the animals lost their fear and dislike of the cold and threw themselves at the block of ice. They all wanted to get the treasure. Well, everyone except for the weasel, who stood for a while looking at the block and thinking. She watched all the other animals hitting the block, kicking, throwing things – and hurting themselves and each other!

The elephant held a log in his trunk and hit the block. But it did not crack. By mistake, he hit the gorilla, and they started fighting.

The tiger was using his claws to try to tear the block apart, but they stuck in the ice and froze his paws.

All the antelopes knew that ice is just cold water. So they all licked at the ice, but their tongues stuck to the frozen surface. It was so painful that the ice pulled the skin off their tongues.

The monkeys swung in the trees throwing big stones at the ice block, but they just bounced off, falling on the other animals below.

This went on for hours, but the ice was so solid and so huge that all the animals’ efforts made no difference at all. When they were exhausted, they all flopped to the ground. That was when they noticed something was moving inside the block of ice! Something was scampering about in the middle of the block, right next to the treasure ...

Was the treasure alive? Did the treasure have an owner living with it? Not at all!

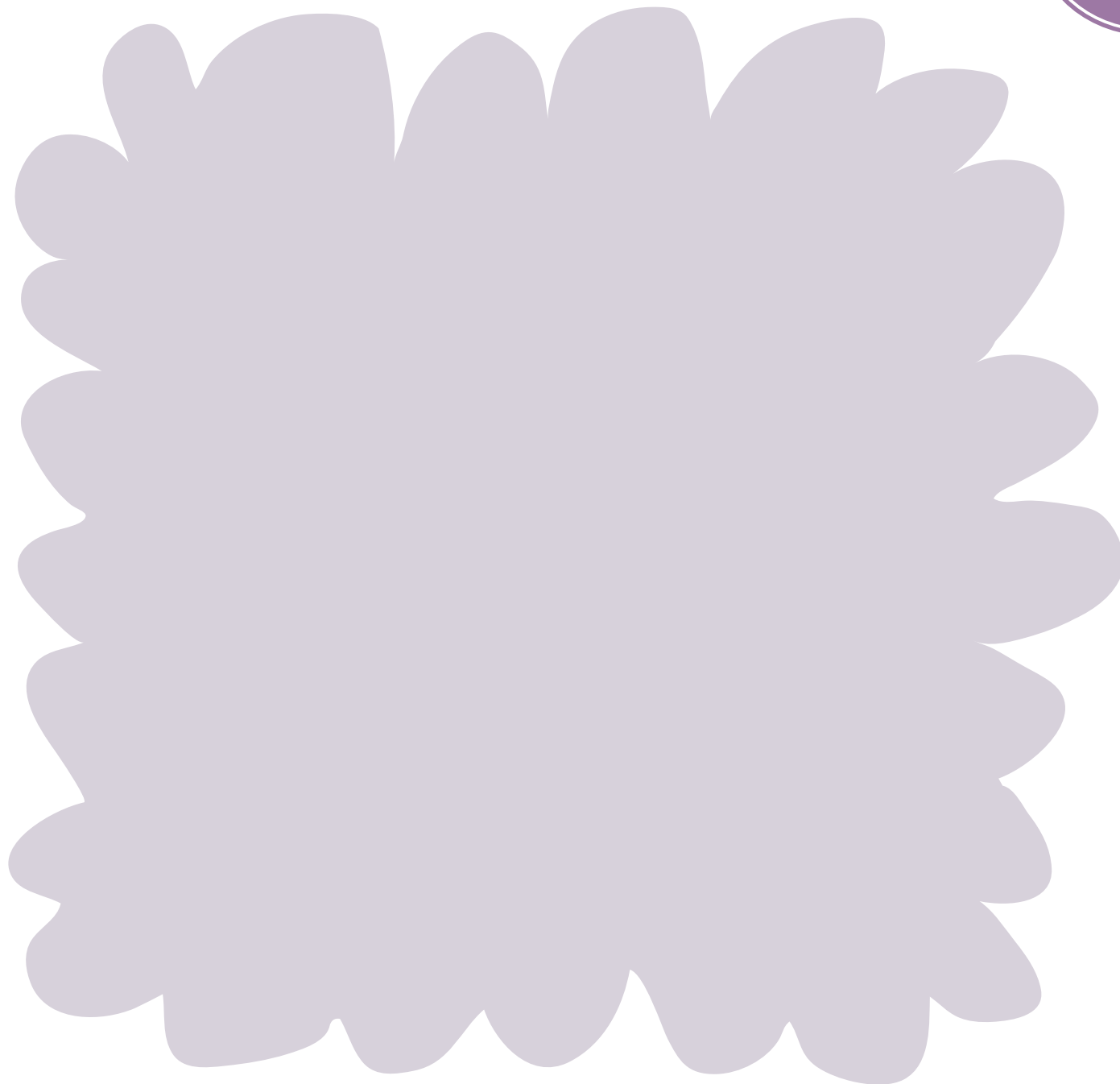
It was the weasel. And a few minutes later she disappeared from inside the ice block, and then popped up among the other animals carrying the beautiful silver crown. She took it to Old Lion. The animals were all amazed!

‘What did you do?’ asked Old Lion.

‘Well,’ said the clever weasel, ‘I took some time to think, and I noticed that the other animals were using force, but getting nowhere. So I thought: what beats ice? Fire, I thought. So I made a tunnel under the earth (we weasels are good at that) and built a fire under the ice block, which was hot enough to melt a tunnel right into the middle of the ice. Then I put the fire out and climbed inside, up my tunnel, to get the crown. Here it is, Your Majesty.’

Old Lion replied: ‘You have shown us all how important it is to think and be reasonable about what to do. Well done! You shall be the next ruler of this jungle. You shall be Queen Weasel of the Silver Crown.’

Adapted from the original story by Pedro Pablo Sacristán, used with permission. [freestoriesforkids.com](http://freestoriesforkids.com)



'Least Weasel (*Mustela nivalis*) at the British Wildlife Centre, Surrey, England' © Keven Law. CC BY-SA 2.0 license. See [bit.ly/1jxQJMa](https://bit.ly/1jxQJMa)