

*Lesson sequence for teaching about “Religion and Diversity”  
Created by student teachers from Church University College of Teacher Education, Vienna, 2016*

## **Eschatology and Transcendence**

*How do I imagine „divine“ life here on earth and later on after death?*

### **About the sequence**

In the beginning, pupils shall get an overview over different religious traditions, focussing on the different beliefs about god / divinity / transcendence: Is there a God? How do people believe in god(s)? How is the divine sphere thought to be? In the next step, children / youths should be encouraged to link these aspects to their own view, to their own beliefs, focussing now on how they think about death and life after death (and conceptions of hope and consolation). The steps to reach this aim are: general views on death / dying; the question of what happens after death; different religious concepts of transcendence / new or eternal life etc.

**The plan goes for 3 lessons (each 90 min.) for pupils aged 12-14 years**

### **Aims and intended learning customs**

Pupils get basic information on perceptions of god in different religion; on this basis they shall be able to articulate their own views.

### **Differentiation**

None can escape death, it is the end of life for every human being. This also means that the question what happens after death (or whether there is something happening) concerns everyone. In modern pluralist European societies there is a broad variety of beliefs (and not-beliefs) in this domain and individual beliefs often show a mixture of elements which originate in very different religious traditions.

### **Key words**

Perception of God / Divinity, Life after death, Heaven, transcendence, eschatology

### **Prior learning**

In their own personal context most pupils were confronted with death in one or the other way, and maybe they also thought about the question of what meaning life itself can have. If they attended RE in the years before they have learned already about the Christian concept of resurrection and eternal life connected to Easter.

## Diversity

Pupils should get an overview on how different religions / religious traditions think about divinity and what follows death (eternal life, rebirth...) and they should be able to link these perceptions with the different forms of faith. In modern (European) society such perceptions quite often are mixed up with one another and a growing number of people is constructing individual combinations of religious elements.

Lesson 1:	Learning aims:	Suggested teaching activities	Intended learning outcomes:	Diversity:	Points to note:
<p>How and what is God? Does God exist – and if so, how many of them? Overview over different religions, perceptions of God, core contents of religious traditions</p>	<p>Pupils should get an overview over different religions and their faith.</p> <p>Pupils are aware of the different identity markers of religious traditions, especially regarding the question of God / Divinity</p> <p>Pupils reflect on differences and common aspects in their own personal context / class</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An overview over different religions and religious traditions (esp. Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism), focussing on the teachings about god; using prepared short texts about the religions, texts from the various religious traditions and images, pupils shall prepare in groups answers to different questions in a way that they are able to tell the others about the results afterwards</li> <li>• Following the work in small groups, pupils shall fill a worksheet with an overview comparing the five religions</li> <li>• To underline the main aspects of the different perceptions of god, during this work images / pieces of art from the different religions can be showed.</li> <li>• Taking chosen biblical verses (esp. from the Psalter, see Itze Ulrike / Moers Edelgard (2014):</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pupils can identify common aspects, similarities and differences between different religious traditions</li> <li>• Pupils can reflect upon their own perceptions of god / divinity and are able to articulate them and express them in creative ways</li> </ul>	<p>In the different religions and religious traditions – and even among the adherents of these traditions – there is a broad variety of perceiving god / divinity and transcendence</p>	<p>Basic knowledge about the various ways to think about „god“ are necessary</p> <p>These sequences are developed from the point of view of Christian-denominational RE</p> <p>The question of god is a key opener to get a basic understanding about the main aspects of the major religious traditions. Upon this basis further work is possible – and the question of transcendence, god and divinity is closely like to the perceptions of a possible life after death</p> <p><i>The cited Internet links are in German!</i></p> <p><a href="http://religion.bildung-rp.de/fileadmin/_migrated/content_uploads/04-Tod-Online-mit_Arbeitsblaettern.pdf">http://religion.bildung-rp.de/fileadmin/_migrated/content_uploads/04-Tod-Online-mit_Arbeitsblaettern.pdf</a></p>

		<p>Theologisieren in der Grundschule, S. 90), referring to the symbols, images and word referring to god and selected pieces of art, pupils shall be encouraged to think about their own perceptions of god / divinity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pupils shall collect their own word, images, symbols, phrases which come to their mind</li> <li>• Pupils have the possibility to express these thoughts and perceptions in various starting with questions which are given to them as an impulse, e.g. „If God has a colour / a smell / a sound, what would it be?“</li> <li>• As an additional work outside class pupils can be invited to take a picture with their cameras of something which they refer to God, be it in nature, in simple things or anything else.</li> </ul>			<p><a href="http://www.lebenausgestorben.de/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Arbeitsbl%C3%A4tter.pdf">http://www.lebenausgestorben.de/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Arbeitsbl%C3%A4tter.pdf</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.planet-wissen.de/gesellschaft/tod_und_trauer/sterben/pwielebennachdemtod100.html">http://www.planet-wissen.de/gesellschaft/tod_und_trauer/sterben/pwielebennachdemtod100.html</a></p> <p><a href="http://katamt.kirchen.net/Portals/katamt/Gesamt%204_2014.pdf">http://katamt.kirchen.net/Portals/katamt/Gesamt%204_2014.pdf</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.rbb-online.de/schulstunde-tod/das_danach/Schluss_aus_und_vorbei.html">http://www.rbb-online.de/schulstunde-tod/das_danach/Schluss_aus_und_vorbei.html</a></p>
<p><b>Lesson 2:</b> Hope, consolation and</p>	<p>Pupils shall get to know about various religious forms of dealing with death,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visiting a cemetery: if possible, pupils shall visit a cemetery nearby their school and as a first step the group as a whole takes a look at</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pupils can identify different symbols and images of hope</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyone has his/her own perception of death and</li> </ul>	<p>Bevor visiting the cemetery, the general rules of conduct in such a place have to be made clear.</p>

<p>expectations facing death</p>	<p>esp. In the Christian tradition and shall get a differentiating perception of the different religious positions these forms have as a basis.</p>	<p>one or two tombs and discuss their feelings; afterwards they talk a walk around in small groups, having different questions in mind: what symbols / words of consolation do you find? What signs of hope can you find? Can you identify ways of expressing life? What symbols / images can you find on the tombs? Are there flowers or candles – and why? etc. Pupils shall take notes, make drawings or photographs so that they can present the results later on in class.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If it is not possible to visit a cemetery, images of tombs can be shown in class, and pupils talk a „walk through the pictures“</li> <li>• As a preparation for this (virtual) visit, the already existing images and thoughts of pupils shall be collected: Who has been to a cemetery? What kind of place is this to you? What are the rules of behaviour t a cemetery – and why is this so?</li> <li>• Pupils can be confronted with pictures of cemeteries and express their spontaneous feelings and thoughts</li> </ul>	<p>and consolation as they are visible on tombs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graves and death notices show images and words of hope – pupils can identify them and reflect upon their use (see Scherer Gisela, Umgang mit Tod, Sterben und Trauer - Kinder beschäftigen sich mit existentiellen Fragen)</li> </ul>	<p>what can represent hope or consolation in facing death; everyone has his/her own way of dealing with mortality in general and one’s own death or the death of close persons.</p>	<p>It has to be checked:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Is there a cemetery nearby?</li> <li>(2) What kind of cemetery can be visited (is it just for one denomination or a general one)?</li> <li>(3) Might it be that on the cemetery in question there are graves of relatives of one or more of the pupils? How could be dealt with such a situation?</li> </ol> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zPOE-4KTTGI">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zPOE-4KTTGI</a></p>
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		<p>Further possibilities for working in this issue could be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working on songs like “Tears in heaven” or “Knocking on heaven’s door”</li> <li>• God, heaven and transcendence in commercials: Nespresso spots, spots working with word, symbols and images of paradise or eternity; pupils shall be led to an understanding of the religious motives in question and be able to think about why they are used in commercials – and why they are able to identify them as religious connotations.</li> <li>• Working with books like „Ente, Tod und Tulpe“ with worksheets (questions e.g. like How do I see death? How does it look like where we go after death?)</li> <li>• How do we deal with death? Death is omnipresent in the media (news, TV series, computer games) and at the same time, it is kind of idealized and in our own context it mostly happens in hospitals where death becomes in a certain way invisible so it seems</li> </ul>			
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		we are nonetheless willing to keep it away from us.			
<p><b>Lesson 3:</b></p> <p>Heaven – Thinking about transcendence</p>	<p>Pupils know about Christian perceptions of heaven / the kingdom of god, resurrection and eternal life and can compare them with similar or completely different concepts in other religions / religious traditions</p> <p>Pupils shall reflect about their own perceptions of heaven and are able to articulate them in various ways</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collection of spontaneous associations: If heaven had a colour / a smell / sound..., if heaven would be a landscape, what would it look like?</li> <li>- What is heaven?; selected phrases are presented on the board, pupils shall react to these phrases in writing down their thoughts, opinions (the same can be done with pictures)</li> <li>- For working on the issue of „heaven on earth“, the blessings of Jesus can be read and discussed</li> <li>- Powerpoint presentation „Gibt’s im Himmel Schokolade?“ („Is there chocolate in heaven?“)</li> <li>- Guided Discussion with pupils: how do you imagine heaven? Can you draw a picture how heaven could look like – or how a world should look like in which we all would want to live?</li> <li>- The different images, texts and thoughts presented by the pupils shall be put in relation to the perceptions of transcendence in different religions / religious</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pupils develop and create their own perception / image of heaven.</li> <li>• Pupils can reflect upon different approaches to „heaven“ as a concept.</li> <li>• Pupils can compare different religions regarding their approaches to life after death.</li> </ul>	<p>Different concepts of heaven / transcendence in general in different religions / religious traditions are identified.</p> <p>Diversity in the group, based on differing personal experiences, beliefs, social backgrounds etc. are made explicit and pupils can exchange their views.</p>	<p>A lot of very different issues could be discussed around this topic – therefore it is very important to have a clear concept and a straight line in preparing this lesson, a clear focus has to be defined</p> <p>In the context of denominational Christian RE a primary Christian perspective is legitimate and sensible but regarding diversity in general and having in mind the broad range of beliefs existing in modern day society, it is necessary to have a look at other concepts too.</p> <p>To make this lesson a worthy experience to them, pupils should be encouraged to reflect upon their own beliefs – without thinking in first line whether they are „correct“ in any way. For many it might be the first occasion to think explicitly about this topic so they have first to be able to think about this and to articulate their thoughts.</p>

		<p>traditions; this could be done in the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ In small groups mirages / pieces of art can be discussed: what do they tell us about how heaven / eternal life... is believed in this religion? What are common points with Christianity? What are the differences?</li><li>→ In the complete group the results can be discussed and in a final round pupils shall reflect and discuss how these different positions relate to their own personal point of view.</li></ul>			
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