

FOR SCHOOLS · KS2 (YEARS 5–6) AND KS3 (YEARS 7–9)

One God in three faiths

Poppy Inkwell. Clara Wolcott Driscoll. Bequest of Charles Maurer · CC0 1.0

One 60-minute lesson. Pupils compare the central statements of belief in one God in Judaism (the Shema), Christianity (the creeds and the Trinity) and Islam (Surah al-Ikhlas and tawhid). They learn what is shared, where the faiths really differ, and how to describe each fairly in its own words.

Curriculum links

- Locally agreed syllabuses commonly require pupils to know and compare key beliefs about God in Christianity and at least two other principal religions. Check your own syllabus's wording.
- KS2 themes: beliefs about God; key texts and prayers; how beliefs are shared and different across religions.
- KS3 themes: monotheism; the Trinity; tawhid; the Shema; how believers explain difficult ideas; diversity within and between religions.
- Good preparation for GCSE Religious Studies components on beliefs about the nature of God.

Objectives

- Know the opening of the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4), the first line of the Nicene Creed and Surah al-Ikhlas (Qur'an 112), and say which faith each comes from.
- Explain that Jews, Christians and Muslims all believe in one God.
- Describe the Christian belief in the Trinity in Christian words, and explain why Jews and Muslims understand God's oneness differently.

- Know that Arabic-speaking Christians and Jews also use the word Allah for God.

Starter

Ten minutes. Write the number 1 on the board and ask pupils for all the ways something can be “one”: one person, one team, one family, one pizza with eight slices. Then reveal three words: Hebrew echad, Arabic ahad and English “one”. Point out that echad and ahad come from the same ancient Semitic word.

Main activities

- Three statements (15 minutes). Give each group a card with the three texts: the Shema, “Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4, JPS 1917); the Nicene Creed, “We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty…”, with the later lines on the Son and the Holy Spirit; and Surah al-Ikhlas, “Say: He is God, One. God, the Everlasting Refuge. He has not fathered, and was not born, and there is none comparable to Him” (Qur’an 112). Pupils highlight what all three share (one God, Creator, unique) in one colour and what is different in another.
- Hear each faith explain itself (15 minutes). Play a short clip of the Shema being recited and one of Surah al-Ikhlas. Then explain the Trinity in Christian words: Christians believe in one God in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, not three gods; they often say it is a mystery, beyond full human understanding. Explain that Jews and Muslims believe God’s oneness admits no such distinction, which is why the Qur’an says God “has not fathered, and was not born”.
- Same word (10 minutes). Show the first verse of the Arabic Bible (“In the beginning Allah created the heavens and the earth”) and explain that Arabic-speaking Christians and Jews say Allah for God. Pupils

discuss in pairs: does using the same word mean believing the same things?

Plenary

Ten minutes. Fold a page into three columns headed Judaism, Christianity, Islam. Pupils write one sentence in each, in that faith's own words, about what it believes about God. Then a whole-class sentence underneath about what all three share.

Differentiation

Support: shorten the texts to their first line; provide a word bank (one, Creator, Trinity, Shema, tawhid, Allah). Pair readers. Stretch: KS3 pupils compare analogies Christians use for the Trinity (such as water, ice and steam, or the sun, its light and its heat) and discuss why Christian theologians say every analogy falls short. Or research Maimonides' first two principles of faith and the Muslim term tawhid.

Assessment

Look for pupils who can (a) match each text to its faith; (b) state accurately that all three are monotheistic; (c) describe the Trinity without saying "Christians believe in three gods"; (d) explain fairly why Jews and Muslims disagree with it; (e) avoid "they all believe the same thing".

Three faiths: fact box

JUDAISM	CHRISTIANITY

The Shema, “Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4), is said morning and evening and is often a Jew’s last words. Maimonides’ 13 Principles begin with God as Creator and God as one.

Christians believe in one God in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Nicene Creed (325 and 381 CE) says this in words shared by most churches. Christians say this is not three gods.

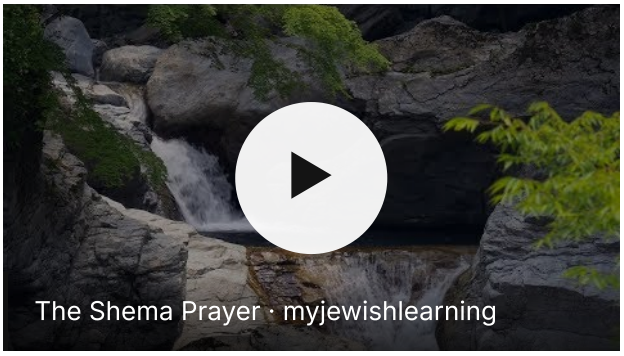
ISLAM

Tawhid, the oneness of God, is Islam’s first principle. Surah al-Ikhlas (Qur’an 112) sums it up: God is One, has no child or parent, and nothing is like Him. The declaration of faith begins: “There is no god but God.”

TAKE CARE

Avoid “they all believe the same thing” and avoid ranking the faiths. Describe the Trinity in Christian words and tawhid and the Shema in Jewish and Muslim words. Invite, but don’t require, pupils of each faith to speak. Keep the debate about understanding, not about who is right.

Watch



Watch on YouTube ↗

My Jewish Learning on the Shema, the central Jewish prayer.



Watch on YouTube ↗

Surah al-Ikhlas recited by Mishary Rashid Alafasy (one minute).



Watch on YouTube ↗

For teachers and KS3 stretch: an Oxford professor on how early Christians understood the Trinity.



Watch on YouTube ↗

TED-Ed's overview of five major religions, as context.

Resources

- Ofsted research review: religious education (2021)
- NATRE: National Association of Teachers of RE
- One God (pupil page on this site)
- Deuteronomy 6 (Sefaria)
- Surah al-Ikhlas (Quran.com)
- The Nicene Creed (Church of England)
- BBC Bitesize KS3 Religious Studies