



Introduction to the series

Many schools are interested in exploring Christianity as a world faith in their religious education and collective worship. In [Where in the World?](#) (BRF, 2012 and updated in 2018), we sketched out some of the many ways Christians around the world express and live out their faith. Church buildings provide another way of exploring this multicultural phenomenon followed by roughly one-third of the people on the planet. These buildings reflect a country's history, its human geography and the beliefs and traditions of that branch of the Christian world that uses them. Across the world, many churches of similar traditions ('denominations') show similarities in design and usage, whilst others reflect local cultures and communities. Each has its own story to tell, reflecting its own 'take' on the Jesus story that has affected billions of people through the centuries. For further teaching resources on this, see [Churches from around the World](#) (BRF, 2019)

Preparation

- Images of the stations from a variety of settings (including pilgrims on Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem)

[St Francis Chapel, Lorgues \(photo\)](#)

- Child-friendly Bibles and/or copies of the original Bible passages referred to below

[The scriptural stations of the cross](#)

Lesson introduction: stations and travel

Have you ever been on a special journey that took you around a very special place that told a story? Where did you go? (*Expect at least one Disneyland-style answer.*) Theme parks often guide visitors along a route telling a story, but the idea of making a story-journey is very old – much older than any theme park.

Development: stations of the cross

Long ago, Christians would visit the holy land to see the places where key Bible stories happened. Can you think of any places they might want to visit? (*e.g. Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Nazareth*). Why do you think people might want to do this? (*To try to get closer to the stories; to picture what happened better in their own minds.*)

People making this journey were called pilgrims. Can we name any other faiths that make a journey like this? (*Muslims visiting Mecca; Sikhs visiting the golden temple in Amritsar.*) Today, many Christian pilgrims travel to the city of Jerusalem in Israel to walk the Via Dolorosa ('Road of Tears'), marking the journey that Jesus made carrying his cross to the place where he was crucified on Good

Friday. Some pilgrims carry wooden crosses themselves. Why? (*Possibly to remember the story as vividly as possible.*)

However, visiting Jerusalem could be difficult or dangerous, so in medieval times someone came up with the idea of making the journey at home, recreating Jesus' journey using pictures or statues to remember different parts of the story. These became known as 'the stations of the cross'. To start with, stations were created outside church buildings. But then they were also brought inside, using the internal walls of churches. Worshippers walking 'the stations of the cross' visit each station in turn, pausing to remember what happened at this point, to think and pray- then, they move on to the next station.

A new Bible-based version of the Stations was created in 2007:

1. Jesus praying in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-41)
2. Jesus is betrayed by Judas and arrested (Mark 14:43-46)
3. Jesus is condemned by the Sanhedrin (Luke 22:66-71)
4. Jesus is denied by Peter (Matthew 26:69-75)
5. Jesus is judged by Pilate (Mark 15:1-5, 15)
6. Jesus is scourged and crowned with thorns (John 19:1-3)
7. Jesus takes up his cross (John 19:6, 15-17)
8. Jesus is helped by Simon of Cyrene to carry his cross (Mark 15:21)
9. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem (Luke 23:27-31)
10. Jesus is crucified (Luke 23:33-34)
11. Jesus promises his kingdom to the repentant thief (Luke 23:39-43)
12. Jesus entrusts Mary and John to each other (John 19:25-27)
13. Jesus dies on the cross (Luke 23:44-46)
14. Jesus is laid in the tomb (Matthew 27:57-60)
15. Jesus comes back to life (Matthew 28:1-10)

Sometimes, a script will be provided for those visiting each station. First will come a simple Bible reading, followed by a thought-provoking meditation and then a prayer. These could all simply be about the Bible story, but they might refer to other issues, such as the suffering of Christians and others around the world. It's all designed to give the Bible story a greater impact for believers.

Challenge activities and prompts for reflection

First, recap the original Bible story of Good Friday, using a child-friendly version.

Ask: how could we bring these stations to life today, and reflect what they might mean for believers?

Storytelling and display

Create a set of 14 or 15 objects that together tell the story of the stations, that can be handled safely by younger children. (e.g. a model tree for station 1, a bag of money for station 2). Challenge pupils

to tell the story themselves in the right order in their own words, using only these objects to aid the memory. (Beware of using sharp objects, for health and safety.)

Discuss how each object can convey an important idea that adds to the whole story. As an extension, plan then record a series of thoughts about each station that can be loaded on to an MP3 player or iPod, for an individual to use with headphones while handling each object.

Drama

First, use warm-ups, including 'circle statues', where everyone stands in a circle facing away from the centre then turns as 'statues' illustrating a chosen mood or idea. Then in small groups, set the challenge of telling parts of the whole story in 14 or 15 freeze-frames, each involving 2 or 3 people and lasting 10 seconds. (Something to rehearse and share in collective worship?)

Afterwards, discuss what it feels like to play 'Jesus' in this story. Many professional actors find it extremely difficult, because the audience has preconceived ideas of what Jesus might look like or what he might do. During the freeze-frames, ask particular 'characters' what they might be feeling or thinking. Afterwards, write about the experience, and annotate photos taken during this exercise. Which do pupils think is the most important scene for Christians to see, and why? What questions might a professional actor have if they are asked to play Jesus? (Does gender matter, and why?)

Music

Together, set the challenge of summing up the mood of each station in seven words or less. Then explore the different moods and emotions that can be expressed by different instruments, according to how they are played. In groups, compose a short piece of expressive music to illustrate one or more of the stations. (An improvised musical 'script' of swirls, dots and dashes might be useful when planning.)

Perform the results, then play them back together. Also, there are many pieces of professional music based on the stations, easily found online by searching 'Music for stations of the cross'. Share part of one piece with the class. Can the class create a playlist of music tracks for the stations? The tracks do not have to be 'religious', but do need to be evocative of the mood or key idea.

Art

Create a simple series of 14 or 15 images or symbols, each conveying a key idea or feature for one station (e.g. a tree for station 1, a bag of money for station 2). Or as a class project create a complete series of stations together, for display in the school hall. Afterwards (or beforehand) show examples of other stations in use around the world. Which does the class think are the most effective, and why? For a believer (or an unbeliever), which of the 14 might be the most important, and why? As an extension, plan a temporary outdoor 'stations of the cross' garden display in the school grounds.



Literacy

Choose a Bible reading associated with one station. Think about what that passage could mean for a Christian believer or someone else today, then write a short piece explaining your own thoughts and questions about the passage. Conclude with a prayer or poem relating to this. Alternatively, create one important question for people to think about when they visit each station.

Plenary: for reflection

If Christian believers have already 'walked' the other 14 stations, how important might having a station 15 (Jesus' resurrection) be for them? Why?

Background information for teachers

If you are planning artistic responses to the stations, anticipate how they might turn out when completed. If you are aiming for responses that are well-finished and intended for display or performance, then extra lesson time will be needed for completion. Please note that simply 'retelling the story' is a basic English comprehension exercise, but good RE provides opportunities for pupils to ask thoughtful questions about the story and reflect on its potential impact and meaning for believers. So please use either the suggested reflection questions for each activity and plenary or something similar.

The stations of the cross are a tool for prayer and meditation found across the Christian world, used especially during Lent and holy week. The number of stations grew since their first use in medieval times, but from the 17th century the traditional list of stations (not all of which have a biblical foundation) has been:

1. Pilate condemns Jesus to die
2. Jesus accepts his cross
3. Jesus falls for the first time
4. Jesus meets his mother, Mary
5. Simon of Cyrene helps carry the cross
6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus
7. Jesus falls for the second time
8. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem
9. Jesus falls for the third time
10. Jesus is stripped of his clothes
11. Jesus is nailed to the cross
12. Jesus dies on the cross
13. Jesus is taken down from the cross
14. Jesus is placed in the tomb

(Note: the traditional list of 14 stations can include a station 15 as well, showing the resurrection of



Jesus Christ, but some of the events retold in the original 14 stations don't actually appear in the Bible stories of Good Friday.)