

Introduction

Water is a powerful and much used religious symbol. This unit of work is an outline for exploring its meaning for Christians and in particular the sacrament of baptism. The intended learning outcomes are that:

- children should be able to describe a range of meanings associated with water
- children can give an accurate account of one way in which Christians use water symbolically
- children can describe in simple terms some of the beliefs associated with the ritual use of water
- children can suggest and discuss why water is such a powerful and universal symbol

Development

1. Introduce the idea of water being used to mean different things to different people. Talk through what associations water has for the children.
2. Sit the class quietly around a pond or equivalent open piece of water so that they can spend some time observing it. At some point the teacher should throw a small stone in and encourage the children to watch the ripples as they spread. What words come to mind? The children should jot down their ideas.
3. Ask the children to imagine themselves to be small water creatures, which can dive down under the water. What would they see and how would it feel? Can they describe the contrast between above and below the water's surface?
4. In the classroom explore some pictures/videos of water in different moods (e.g. waterfalls, a millpond, the crashing waves or a rippling brook). Create a word bank of adjectives to describe water. The children could now go on to create a poem or devise music and movement as a response to one or several of these different moods and characteristics of water. What feelings does water generate? Share the children's responses as a group, leading into an open discussion as to why they think people from all religious backgrounds use water as a symbol. What things might water represent? Record the children's thoughts.
5. Now investigate what water means to Christians in particular.

Read the story of the baptism of Jesus in Mark 1: 4-11. This event could be turned into a simple piece of drama. Freeze frame the action and interview the bystanders. What do they think is going on? What happens in the story? What does it mean?

Baptism was clearly a special moment. It was a beginning for Jesus to his work and an important encouragement.

Baptism for John was about making a break with the past; about washing away the bad ways and making a new start.

6. What does baptism mean for Christians today?

Either: invite in someone who has recently had a young child baptised and interview them about what happened and why it was important to them.



And/or: invite in an adult Christian who was baptised by full immersion when they were older. Why did she/he decide to do this? What happened? What did it mean to him/her?

Explore the ideas of life and death that are involved in this ceremony.

And/or: invite in a local Christian minister who can perform a pretend infant baptism for the class using a doll, introducing the children to a form of words that might be used at this Christian ceremony.

7. The children could now go on to put together a short instruction booklet about what it means to be baptised. Comment on the similarities and differences between a 'christening' as a baby and an adult baptism
8. You may like at this point to compare and contrast the Christian sacrament of baptism with an Amrit ceremony among Sikhs
9. Finally revisit the initial discussion with the class about the moods that water might evoke and discuss them now in relation to the Christian ritual that has been explored.

You may like to take this one stage further by looking at the story of the baptism of the Ethiopian treasury official as recorded in Acts 8: 26-35.