

Approaching Journal Work for the Junior Cert Religious Education Exam

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A teacher who is about to begin journal work with their class should refer to the following materials

- 1) Department of Education guidelines on the journal booklet. The guidelines are issued to schools sitting Junior Cert Religious Education. www.examinations.ie
- 2) Galway Education Centre - Religious Education Support Service. A sample procedure is provided including written assignments for students on each section of the booklet. www.gec.ie
- 3) An Tobar: Full members of An Tobar can avail of assistance from the team through a school visit. www.antoobar.ie

Last year I worked on the following title from Section C with my third year exam class; *'Sacred times throughout the year for a believer in Islam'*.

Section One: Choosing a Topic

The title was chosen by the pupils as they had studied Islam in class and found it interesting. The topic was flexible and gave the class the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge on the topic and develop different skills. We decided to do the journal booklet as a class group.

Friday prayer was chosen as the sacred time to examine the Islamic tradition and so I started by brainstorming the idea with the students. Good questions to introduce the topic at this stage are:

- 1) What do you know already about this title?

- 2) How could you find out more about this topic?

I asked the students to record their answers at the back of their religion copy. They felt that they could research the topic on the internet and in the school library. The class also agreed that a trip to the Islamic Cultural Centre in Clonskea would be invaluable and would give them the opportunity to encounter the lived reality of the topic. I divided the class into four groups with each group taking responsibility for a different job, e.g. research, preparation for the trip etc.

Finally in order to fill in section one of the booklets the students were asked to answer questions such as

- 1) What title did you choose for your journal work?
- 2) Why did you choose this title?
- 3) What personal title would you give your booklet?
- 4) What do you hope to achieve by doing the journal booklet?

Section Two: Getting Started

This section in the journal booklet asks the students to recall what they plan to do to research/investigate the journal title. If the class are completing the work as a group it is important that each student outline their own role in the research and then the role of the other members of the class.

Example:

"I plan to research Friday Prayer by going to the school library and reading textbooks. Other members of the class are planning to do their research on the internet"

The journal work will draw on particular skills – enquiring, observing, problem solving, researching, reflecting, organising, evaluating. The students should decide which of these skills they plan to use and how they will use them.

"I plan to use enquiry skills when I visit the mosque and ask the Imam questions about Friday prayer and why it is a sacred time for Muslims"

A definition of each of the skills listed can be found in the Galway Education and Marino resources given at the start of this article

Section Three: Work

All research and activities have to be completed before section three of the booklet can be written up. It is a good idea to give the students a time limit to complete the work.

For the chosen topic the four groups took responsibility for each of the following:

1. Group one — research in the school library using resource textbooks and then on the internet (**research skills**)
2. Group two — organising the trip including confirming a date, booking a bus, collecting money (**organisational skills**)
3. Group three — preparing questions on the topic and asking these questions on the visit to the centre (**enquiry skills**)
4. Group four — recording what we saw and observed in the mosque (**observational skills**)

When the research and the visit had been completed I asked the students to answer the following questions:

- 1) Describe what work you did on the journal title?
- 2) If you worked as part of a group what work did the other students do on the journal title?
- 3) Why did you include this work as part of your title?
- 4) Which part of the investigation did you find the most interesting?
- 5) What was your reaction to the research and activities? What was the group's reaction?

The questions help them to complete section three of the booklet.

Section Four: Discoveries

This section in the journal booklet asks the students to describe what they learned, what skills they used in the process of the investigation and what other sections of the religious education course the title reminded them of studying.

It is a good idea to start this section with a series of questions, example:

- 1) What did you know about Friday prayer before you started this topic?
- 2) What new information did you learn?
- 3) How do you feel about the Islamic religion now that you have completed the topic?
- 4) What skills did you use and how did you use them in the work?
- 5) What other topics in the religion course does this booklet remind you of studying?

The questions given for section three and four can help the students to develop **reflection and evaluation skills**. The students had no difficulty in recalling what they had learned while researching the topic. I reminded each group of the skills they had employed during their investigation.

Looking through the R.E. syllabus we agreed that the journal title reminded them of studying Section B Christianity, Section C Major World Religions and Section E A Celebration of Faith (note: students only select two sections for the booklet). The following reasons were given for the sections chosen:

1. "My journal work reminded me of studying Christianity as I kept drawing similarities between the two religions during my investigation. For example the call to prayer reminded me of the angelus" etc.
2. "My journal work reminded me of studying the Islamic religion. I was able to observe people doing the ritual washing (wudu) before entering the mosque" etc.

3. "My journal work reminded me of studying the celebration of faith. I observed how Friday is a sacred time for Muslims" etc.

Section Five: Looking Back

This final section asks the students to reflect on their experience of the journal work; what went well, what they might do differently and what advice they would give to someone who was about to start writing the booklet.

It is also useful to start this section of the booklet with a series of questions for the students:

1. What went well during your research and writing on this title?
2. If you were starting the booklet again what would you do differently?
3. Imagine someone in your school is starting the journal and they have chosen the same title as you. What advice would you give them?

Teachers are sent a blank copy of the journal booklet along with the list of titles at the beginning of the academic year (state examinations commission). It is worthwhile photocopying a booklet for each student in the class and asking them to complete a rough copy of it.

Examination booklets are sent to schools in the second term.

Ideas for the 2007 Titles

Section A 2 - A profile of how two Christian denominations are working together in a community.

If there is a protestant church/community in the area, interview the local pastor and catholic priest to see if they are working together. If there are inter-denominational services can the students attend? Can they assist in the preparation etc?

Section B 2 - Reflections on the Jewishness of Jesus.

Teacher could focus on Jesus' teaching in the synagogue, getting examples from the scriptures. Also the significance of the last supper being a Passover meal and even recreate a Passover meal with the class (see resources from An Tobar Resource Centre for ideas).

Section C 2 - A profile of the expansion of one world religion - Islam.

Interpret the word expansion to mean the growth of the Islamic religion since the time of Muhammad. Most of the Junior Cert R.E. textbooks examine how Islam has developed and expanded since then (especially in Ireland). Also include further research on the internet and trip to the Islamic Cultural Centre in Clonskea is highly recommended.

Section D 2 - An investigation of influences on the religious beliefs of young people today.

All religion textbooks deal with the changing face of religion in Ireland over

the last century. The investigation could take the form of a survey where the students are getting information from their peers. A detailed survey, with well thought out questions would employ organisational, enquiry and evaluating skills.

Section E 2 - An analysis of the importance of participation, as an element, in an experience of worship.

Including an activity is very useful in the journal work. One approach to this title would be to ask the class to organise their own liturgy with each student involved in a particular part of the service. The preparation for the liturgy and the experience itself could use organising, observing and reflection skills.

Section F 1 - An exploration of things that can influence a person in deciding if something is right or wrong.

Students could begin by brainstorming what they believe are the influences on a person's moral decision making. Similar to the Section D title a survey of attitudes might be worthwhile here focusing on these influences and why they are consulted in the moral decision making process.

