Fertile Question: *Is my existence part of a bigger plan?*

Core Content Area 3:  Where are we going?

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Fertile Question: *Is my existence part of a bigger plan?*

Core Content Area 3: Where are we going?

**TOPIC 3.1: Freedom and responsibility**

**Lesson 3.1.1 Is there a bigger plan?**

In this lesson students will explore Christian teachings about freedom and destiny.

**Teachers: Before You Start!**

1. Read the Teacher Background on freedom and destiny.

**For students to explore religious teachings about freedom and destiny, select from the following activities:**

1. Explore ideas about destiny, plan and freedom of choice.
   a. Reflect on your own life in light of the fertile question for this unit: *Is my existence part of a bigger plan?*
      i. View the YouTube clip from the movie *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. Discuss with a partner in what ways this part of Harry’s story illustrates the struggle of the fertile question. What is Dumbledore’s conclusion about destiny and freedom?
      ii. Consider the following questions in your own mind: How free do you feel to make your own decisions? What is limiting your freedom at this point in your life? Are the limitations coming from within yourself or outside? How might this change when you leave school, when you leave home, get a job, go to university, get married? How are the two ideas of freedom and responsibility connected? Do you feel guided towards making particular choices in your life? If so who or what is guiding you? How will you know you have chosen a path that is life giving for you? What might you do if you found yourself on a path that wasn’t life giving for you? Do you think people have any impact on their destiny, or is it all to do with luck?
      iii. Create an artistic response to the questions in the previous activity. (This could form part of your assessment task if you are using the suggested item for this unit.) Your response could be from any genre of the arts: art, music, dance, poetry, photography etc.
   b. Examine religious teachings about freedom and destiny.
      i. Identify the key messages about freedom and human existence in the quotes below from Catholic theologian Richard McBrien and the Catholic Catechism.
         *If we are not free, we are not responsible. And if we are not responsible, human existence is reduced to mechanical existence. Without freedom and responsibility there is no love, no faith, no hope, no trust, no compassion, no friendship, no justice. Everything is calculated, predetermined, subject only to accident and /or miscalculation.* (McBrien, 1994)  
         **1731** Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one’s own responsibility. By free will one shapes one’s own life. Human freedom is a force for growth and maturity in truth and goodness; it attains its perfection when directed toward God, our beatitude. Catechism of the Catholic Church.
      ii. Judaism, Christianity and Islam are religions in which people believe that their lives are part of a divine plan; but people are also considered to be unique individuals who need to develop and follow a moral code which is prescribed by God. Christians believe that God’s plan is for all humans to become fully human and to bring about God’s reign (or the Kingdom of God) on earth. Thomas Groome writes: *Looking to the actual life of Jesus, we recognise that becoming fully alive includes becoming free and responsible, just and peace-able, merciful and compassionate, kind and respectful, hospitable and inclusive, prayerful and centred, balanced and integrated, hopeful and faith-filled, and above all loving.*

   In light of this quote what personal responsibilities do Christians have in bringing about the Kingdom of God on earth? How do these ideas compare with ideas about fate, luck and God’s will? Discuss.
Fertile Question: Is my existence part of a bigger plan?

Core Content Area 3: Where are we going?

TOPIC 3.1: Freedom and responsibility

Lesson 3.1.2 Follow your dreams

In this lesson students explore the importance of dreams and goals and their impact on individual and universal change.

For students to explore the importance of dreams and their impact on individual and universal change, select from the following activities:

1. Explore examples of how dreams and ideas have changed the world.
   a. Choose one important change that has happened in the world and investigate how the change came about.
      i. Research one invention or idea that has had a major impact on the world. Record information about how the idea for change came about, one or more key people involved in the change, and a brief summary of how the idea or invention has changed the destiny of the people affected.
         Examples include: the end of Apartheid in South Africa, International Peace day, the discovery and invention of vaccinations or antibiotics, the right to vote in Australia for woman or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the invention of the aeroplane or the internet etc.
      ii. Present your findings in a word cloud using Tagxedo. Choose a shape for your cloud that represents the person or idea. Check out the Tagxedo gallery for examples. Choose a piece of music that aligns with the richness of the idea. Share with the class your justification for your choices.
      iii. Complete a consequences chart to explore what might have happened if the idea or invention had never occurred. Share with a partner. See Useful Resources for a chart example.
   b. Explore the connection between freedom, choice, dreams and destiny.
      i. View the short movie clip of a speech to students about freedom of choice, dreams, values and destiny.
      ii. Reflect on people in your life (including yourself) who you know have pursued a dream. It doesn’t have to be a huge dream, just an intentional pursuit of some higher good or particular way of being or to achieve a particular goal.
      iii. Create a list of questions that you would like to ask that person about their experiences of success and failure, joy and disappointment in the pursuit of their dreams. If possible conduct an interview with that person using your questions. This could be done face to face, by phone or by email or letter. Explain that you are interested in how following dreams impacts on your life.
      iv. Share responses in a small group and identify common themes.
      v. Conclude this lesson by reflecting on the part that choice has to play in a person’s destiny.
Fertile Question: *Is my existence part of a bigger plan?*

**Core Content Area 3: Where are we going?**

**TOPIC 3.2: Destiny and the arts**

**Lesson 3.2.1 Art and the meaning of life**

In this lesson students will explore the way artists have contributed to the human search for meaning.

**Teachers: Before You Start!**

1. Consider setting up a class collaboration page such as Stixy for students to post their favourite quotes about art.
2. Consider introducing the Assessment task in this lesson if you are using the suggested task for this unit.

**For students to explore the way artists have contributed to the human search for meaning, select from the following activities:**

1. Explore ways in which artists have contributed to the human search for meaning.
   a. Examine works of art that depict human understandings about origins, purpose and destiny.
      i. Examine Paul Gaugin’s painting *Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?* It is meant to be viewed from left to right. What do you see? How has the artist represented the three questions? What evidence of religious ideas is present in the painting? Is there evidence of philosophical perspectives? Comment on the use of colour. Research the context of the artist and the painting. How does this new knowledge help you to interpret the work?
      
      ii. View the *Scream* by Edvard Munch and then read the following poem that Munch himself wrote of his work. *I was walking along a path with two friends – the sun was setting – suddenly the sky turned blood red – I paused, feeling exhausted, and leaned on the fence – there was blood and tongues of fire above the blue-black fjord and the city – my friends walked on, and I stood there trembling with anxiety – and I sensed an infinite scream passing through nature.* Compare the experience of viewing the painting to the experience of reading a description of it. What was similar and what was different? Which do you prefer?
      
      iii. View and critique the strengths and weaknesses of the short film *A story for tomorrow* by Dan Riordan and Dana Saint (gnarly bay productions). The introduction to this film claims it is a meditation on the secrets of happiness and what it means to be human. Suggest some themes on this topic about the purpose and destiny of humans that you think might be missing from the film.

2. Explore the Assessment task that is suggested for this unit.
Fertile Question: *Is my existence part of a bigger plan?*

**Core Content Area 3: Where are we going?**

**TOPIC 3.2: Destiny and the arts**

**Lesson 3.2.2 Music and destiny**

In this lesson students will explore how musicians have expressed their beliefs or positions about aspects of life meaning, purpose and destiny.

**Teachers: Before You Start!**

1. Invite students to bring in their favourite inspirational song to share, that says something about life meaning, purpose, or destiny.

**For students to explore how musicians have presented ideas about life meaning, purpose and destiny, select from the following activities:**

1. Explore songs and music that present ideas about life meaning, purpose and destiny.
   a. Share favourite songs that speak to you about life, its meaning, purpose or destiny.
      i  Locate a song that speaks to you about life, its meaning, purpose or destiny.
      ii Share the songs in a small group with a short justification about what the song means to you.
      iii Reflect on the way music assists people to make sense of experiences or feelings.
   b. Create a poem or song about origins, purpose and destiny.
      i  Individually, or in pairs, write a song that expresses your ideas about origins, purpose and destiny.
         (Note: a song of three verses written by an individual could be used as part of the triptych assessment task).
**Fertile Question:** Is my existence part of a bigger plan?

**Core Content Area 3: Where are we going?**

**TOPIC 3.3: Life after death**

**Lesson 3.3.1 Beliefs about the afterlife**

In this lesson students will explore the way that religious beliefs about the afterlife are connected to funeral and burial rituals.

**Teachers: Before You Start!**

1. Read the Teacher Background on life after death.

**For students to explore the way that religious beliefs about the afterlife are connected to funeral and burial rituals, select from the following activities:**

1. Investigate the ways religions connect beliefs about life after death with funeral and burial rites.
   a. Explore ideas about the afterlife.
      i. Create a collaborative drawing that depicts ideas about the afterlife. Form a group of four. Create a Flockdraw canvas and divide the canvas into four quadrants. Each person draws their ideas about the afterlife in their space. Share your explanation of the drawing with the group.
      ii. Discuss as a class the various themes of the drawings and look for common and uncommon elements. Where do people generally get their ideas about life after death?
   b. Investigate the funeral rites of the following traditions: Catholic Christian, Jewish and Islamic.
      i. read the information in Useful Resources about the beliefs about life after death of the three faith traditions.
      ii. Form groups of three to investigate the funeral rites of one each of the three traditions mentioned above.
      iii. Complete a retrieval chart to record the symbols, actions, words in prayers in the rites and their meanings about life on earth and life after death. See Useful Resources. The following websites will provide the information needed to complete the Retrieval Chart.
         Catholic funerals symbols and rites, Catholic Funeral prayers (Download the booklet from this site), Jewish funeral customs, comprehensive description of Jewish funeral customs, Islam Death Rites, Funeral rites and regulations in Islam
      iv. Share findings with the other members of your group and discuss the ways in which the funeral rites reflect the beliefs about the afterlife of these religious traditions.
   v. Read and reflect on the following from American theologian Harvey Cox:

   However advanced other animals might be — chimpanzees use tools, and dolphins exhibit the rudiments of speech and empathy — only humans marked the spots where they placed the remains of their dead, at first only with a small pile of stones. Already they were trying to wrench meaning from mystery, and this is what set them apart from the other creatures. The awareness of one’s own mortality raises the question of the meaning of life, and this eventually spawned philosophy, religion, and culture.
Fertile Question: *Is my existence part of a bigger plan?*

Core Content Area 3: Where are we going?

**TOPIC 3.3: Life after death**

**Lesson 3.3.2 Predictions about the end times**

In this lesson students will examine ideas about the end of time.

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**Teachers: Before You Start!**

1. Be sure to end this lesson on a note of hope!

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**For students to examine ideas about the end of time, select from the following activities:**

1. Explore the ways groups within the society (from the past and from today) have wrestled with the idea of an afterlife and preparing for the end of time.
   a. Explore ideas and predictions about the end of time.
      i. Share ideas past and present about predictions of the end of time.
      ii. Read about the Mayan calendar and the modern interpretation of the end of the world.
      iii. Explore the story of Nostradamus and discuss how his predictions have been used to interpret world events. How does the popularity of his predictions highlight the human need for finding order in the midst of chaos?
   b. Complete a SWOT analysis of a secular view of the end of the world and life after death, and a SWOT analysis of the Catholic Christian view. Possible sources include the Nicene Creed of the Catholic Church.

2. Review the philosopher’s positions discussed and analysed in the first lesson of this unit.
   a. Reflect on the learnings you have gained during this unit. Complete a KWL chart to record what you knew before, what you have learnt and what you still would like to know.
Lesson 3.1.2

If

Then . .
Then . .
Then . .
Then . .
Then . .
Then . .
Then . .
Then . .
Lesson 3.3.1

Life after death

Judaism

Many Jews believe that human life continues beyond death and that the final destiny of a person is olam haba, the world to come. Olam haba is a state of spiritual perfection beyond what we can imagine. Most people have to be purified at a place called Gehinnom after they die before entering olam haba. The predominant view of destiny for Jewish people is that you live and die only once and that purification takes place after death, thereby expressing a linear eschatology.

Traditional Jews have always insisted on burying a dead body. It is considered to be a more respectful way of treating the body. It also takes account of the beliefs of some streams of Jewish theology that human existence beyond death is not only of an immortal soul but of a resurrected body. Orthodox Jews insist that the body must be preserved for final resurrection. Reform Jews reject the literal understanding of bodily resurrection and have adjusted the blessing prayer in the light of that.

Christian funeral rites and life after death

The Paschal Mystery, Jesus' Life, Death and Resurrection, is a living reality for Christians.

It is not just an event that happened 2000 years ago; it is the presence of the Risen Jesus, his Spirit and his Kingdom, today and always. The Paschal Mystery is the promise of life beyond death for Christians which we receive at Baptism. Together at one Altar

Christianity, like Judaism and Islam, has a linear view of human existence with one final judgement based on a single lifetime, and a temporary post mortem purification that prepares the person for final communion with God. The important difference is the belief that Jesus has already been resurrected on the third day after his crucifixion. Because of Jesus’ resurrection, Christian funeral rites focus on the theme of Jesus’ victory over death and the promise it holds for those who die in faith in Jesus. The use of gestures and symbols during Christian funerals include objects also associated with baptism. Water, a white pall and the Easter candle form a sacramental link between birth and death, the candle symbolising the hope that the deceased person is now present in the light of God. Incense is used as a sign of reverence for the body that is considered to have been the temple of the Holy Spirit since baptism.

Muslim funeral rites and life after death

According to Islamic belief, the immortal soul separates from the body at death and the soul is questioned by two angels to see if the person has led a good, moral and religious life. The answers determine the soul’s destiny at the end of the world. As they wait for the last day, the souls of the dead are pressed down into the grave in proportion to the weight of their sins. The body should not be cremated because it is believed that the soul could sense the destruction of its former body by fire. The body is considered an essential part of the human person and is required for resurrection of the body at the end of time when the person will be completely restored body and soul. According to the Qur’an, there will be a final Day of Judgement when everyone will be judged according to the life led: those who have followed the will of Allah will go to paradise and those who have not will be punished and condemned to hell.

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