

CfE (RME): First Level

Lesson Sequence Planner for:

The What's-it Tree

A story from **Buddhism**

Text and Notes for Teachers offering useful context and suggested questions is available to download at:

www.storyandreligion.div.ed.ac.uk/schools/resources

Keywords	Main Activity Summary
<p><i>Buddhism</i> <i>Buddha</i> <i>appearance</i> <i>reality</i> <i>wisdom</i></p>	<p><i>This sequence of learning can be structured to take place over <u>two or three 45 minute lessons</u>.</i></p> <p>Before exploring the story, an activity is suggested to trigger cognitive conflict in learners so that while they hold one belief about something they have seen, they are constantly challenged by someone else's description and belief that they too are correct in their perception of what is real and true.</p> <p>The story narrative is revealed and the lesson facilitator directs a discussion and frames questions to support learning about the Buddhist goal of understanding reality versus appearance and that, in all of our lives, regardless of religion, things are often not as they first seem.</p> <p>There is then a further story (The Blind Men and the Elephant) with which to deepen learning by comparing the scenarios presented and the learning that occurs for the stories' characters.</p>
Resources Required	Learning Intention(s):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BEFORE: Notes for Teachers from website Images of <i>Butea Monosperma</i> tree (page 4) (cut up, enough for ONE image per group of 3 or 4 learners) • DURING: Story text including introduction (page 5) Learner task photocopiable (page 7) PowerPoint of tree images (<i>see website</i>) • AFTER: Suggested questions and prompts for reflection (page 3) • EXTENSION: Story text – with blanks (page 5) Story text complete (<i>see website</i>) Elephant pictures (page 6) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to identify that having a proper understanding of reality is an important goal of Buddhism • to know that Buddha told this story to show that a person's <i>current</i> knowledge may be incomplete in some way • to be aware of and be able to describe how a tree changes in representation during different seasons and make links with other knowledge about impermanence (in the natural world) • to acknowledge that knowing only parts of a whole or part of the truth can lead to misunderstandings • to notice and articulate that the appearance of something may be different from the reality (including in social situations)
RME Experiences & Outcomes First Level	Linked Experiences & Outcomes First Level
<p>RME 1-04a Through exploring stories from world religions, I can describe some of their key beliefs.</p> <p>RME 1-04c I can talk about my own beliefs, or express them in other ways.</p> <p>RME 1-05a Having explored stories from world religions, I can show my developing understanding of key values of those faiths and how they might be put into action in people's lives and communities.</p> <p>RME 1-05b I can describe the key features of the values of world religions which are expressed in stories.</p> <p>RME 1-07a I am developing respect for others and my understanding of their beliefs and values.</p> <p>RME 1-08a I am developing an increasing awareness and understanding of my own beliefs and I put them into action in positive ways.</p>	<p>LIT 1-02a <i>When I engage with others, I know when and how to listen, when to talk, how much to say, when to ask questions and how to respond with respect.</i></p> <p>LIT 1-07a <i>I can show my understanding of what I listen to or watch by responding to and asking different kinds of questions.</i></p> <p>LIT 1-09a <i>When listening and talking with others for different purposes, I can exchange information, experiences, explanations, ideas and opinions, and clarify points by asking questions or by asking others to say more.</i></p> <p>LIT 1-15a <i>I am learning to make notes under given headings and use them to understand information, explore ideas and problems and create new texts.</i></p> <p>LIT 1-16a <i>To show my understanding across different areas of learning, I can identify and consider the purpose and main ideas of a text.</i></p> <p>ENG 1-17a <i>To show my understanding, I can respond to different kinds of questions and other close reading tasks and I am learning to create some questions of my own.</i></p> <p>ENG 1-19a <i>I can share my thoughts about structure, characters and/or setting, recognise the writer's message and relate it to my own experiences, and comment on the effective choice of words and other features.</i></p>

Suggested organisation of learning:

BEFORE the story

- Organise your learners into trios or groups of four.
- Tell your learners that you are going to show them a picture of the 'What's-it tree', but that **they must keep what they see a secret** for just now.
- Encourage them to notice the colours, size, shapes and texture of what they see and think about how they would describe what they've seen.

- Using the pictures provided in this pack, show each group only **ONE** picture of the four available.
- This can be done by asking a group to come to you while you show them a picture in a way that only they can see and then swapping the picture for the next group without anyone noticing.
Or, you can distribute single pictures in envelopes, instructing learners to open their envelope at your command and look at the image with their group.

- It is vital to the success of this task that **learners see only one of the four** images at this point.
Ensure that at each image is seen by at least one group.

- As learners are viewing, but not discussing what they see, emphasize that each of them now knows what a 'What's-it tree' looks like.

- Using the LEARNER TASK photocopiable, ask learners to complete speech bubble 1.
"I saw the What's-it tree. The What's-it tree is..."
Ask them not to discuss this task and to write a description of what they saw (colour, shape, texture, size etc.). *(Arrange for scribing or encourage drawings if differentiation is required.)*
If images have been distributed around the classroom, collect them all in at this point to prevent 'peeking' in the next task!

- Organise the cross-pollination of descriptions across the class to stimulate cognitive conflict.
Ask learners to move around the room sharing their description of the 'What's-it tree' with as many of their peers as possible in the time you allow.
Encourage them to listen to others' descriptions carefully but keep reminding them that they have all seen a real 'What's-it tree'.
Try not to engage with speculation of what is going on yet and encourage learners to respectfully stand their ground and believe that they're correct and being truthful.

- When you feel they are ready to return to their own space, ask learners to think carefully about what their friends have said and complete speech bubble 2.
"My friend saw the What's-it tree. He/She said the What's-it tree is..."

- Continue to direct learners to complete prompts in boxes **3.** and **4.**

- Encourage some learners to share their ideas and responses before you narrate the story.

DURING the story

Before narrating the story, share the explanation of Buddhism and Buddha found before the text of the story in this pack. It might serve as a helpful reminder to your learners, or provide a brief introduction if this is their first experience of a Buddhist story or teaching.

Narrate the story to your learners. You may wish to display the PowerPoint of images (*available to download from www.storyandreligion.div.ed.ac.uk/schools/resources*) as you read each of the brother's descriptions, and so that every learner can now see each of the four different images.

AFTER the story

Select from the range of suggested questions for Circle Time discussion. Choose those which best suit your learners and will help to extend the thinking they have shown so far. The list is not exhaustive and you may wish to alter the language for your own use.

Discussion and questioning should be framed in such a way that the following Learning Intentions are met as fully as the level of your learners allows:

- *to identify that having a proper understanding of reality is an important goal of Buddhism*
- *to know that Buddha told this story to show that a person's current knowledge may be incomplete in some way*
- *to be aware of and be able to describe how a tree changes in representation during different seasons and make links with other knowledge about impermanence (in the natural world)*
- *to acknowledge that knowing only parts of a whole or part of the truth can lead to misunderstandings*
- *to notice and articulate that the appearance of something may be different from the reality (including in social situations)*

Suggested Questions

- Are the brothers right or wrong when they say that they know what the tree looks like?
- Were you right or wrong when you said you knew what the tree looks like?
- Why couldn't any of you describe the tree fully?
- Why couldn't any of the brothers describe the tree fully?
- If you'd been shown all four pictures of the tree at the start of this story, how would you describe the tree?
- How do you think the brothers would have described the tree if they'd seen it in all four seasons?
- Why do you think the brothers started to argue?
- Did you argue with anyone in the class?
- How can we be sure that we are always seeing things as they really are and not just what they look like at a particular time? (Reality versus Appearance)
- Can you describe a time when you saw or experienced something you thought was one thing, but turned out to be another?
- Do you think it could be dangerous to only see something from one point of view?
- Can you describe a time when your point of view about a situation was different from someone else's?
- What did you do or say to resolve this or reach a shared understanding?

Prompts for Reflection

Learners could be encouraged to complete the following prompts during a discussion, upon invitation or in writing, either individually, in pairs or on group table mats:

- This story made me think about...
- I would like to ask...
- I wonder...
- I will remember this story because...
- I would like to know more about...

EXTENSION: Using *'The Blind Men and the Elephant'* story

The pictures of the elephant features can be used in a similar way to those of the 'What's-it tree'.

Before sharing the story, give only one picture to a group (or pair) of learners and ask them to think of a way to complete the statement with an appropriate noun.

Ask each group or pair to share their idea. Discuss and select the best comparisons to fill in the blanks of the story as you narrate it. Display the story on an IWB, written on board or as a print-out. You could challenge more able learners to complete this as a group or paired task.

Invite learners to collage their images to create group representations of the elephant (cut and stick). They could also draw in the missing body, tail and legs to create a display alongside the original and the class's versions of the story.

Return to the Learning Intentions about Buddhist teachings and values to frame questions for further discussion about this story and their individual response to the final statement: *"But of course, they were all right, and all wrong."*



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Introduction to Buddha and Buddhism

The story which we will explore today is a story from the religion of Buddhism:

“Buddhists follow the teachings of a man called Siddhartha Gautama, who lived in India about 2500 years ago. He saw that there was suffering in the world and tried to find a way to end it. When he found the answer, he became known as the Buddha, or ‘one who is awake’, because he was able to see things as they really are. Buddhists use his teachings as a guide through their lives.”

(Anita Ganeri, 2001, Storyteller: Buddhist Stories, Evans Brothers Ltd., London)

The Story of the What’s-It Tree

In the past, there were four princes who wanted to see a famous tree, known as the *kimsuka* or “what’s-it” tree. They asked their charioteer to take them to see it. He agreed, but instead of taking them all together, he took them one at a time, at different times in the year.

He showed the older brother the tree when there were just buds on the trunk.

The next he took to see the tree when the leaves were fresh and green.

The next he took when the tree’s large, flesh-coloured flowers were in bloom.

The youngest he took when the tree was in fruit.

Later on the princes began to talk about the nature of the what’s-it tree. One said it looked like a charred stump. Another said it was like a lovely green banyan tree. The third said it was like a mass of flesh (*meat*). The last insisted it was more like an acacia tree. They began to argue, each one accusing the other of being wrong.

Their father, the king, came to know of their discussions. He explained to them that they had all seen the same tree, but in different conditions.

The Buddha explained it to the monks, saying: “At that time I was the wise king.”

The Buddha told this story after four monks achieved nirvana through different forms of meditation, to explain that there can be many different approaches to the same thing.

The Blind Men and the Elephant

Some blind men were shown an elephant and asked to describe it.

One, who had touched the head, said an elephant was like a _____.

Another, who was familiar with the ears, said an elephant was like a _____.

Another, who had touched a leg, said an elephant was like a _____.

Another, who had felt a tusk, said an elephant was like a _____.

Then they started to argue over who was right.

But of course, they were all right, and all wrong.

(see completed version of text at www.storyandreligion.div.ed.ac.uk/schools/resources appended to The Story of the What’s-it Tree pack)



This tusk is like a ...



This ear is like a...



This leg is like a ...



This head is like a ...



Listen carefully. Your teacher will guide you to complete the statements at the right time.

1. I saw the What's-it tree.

The What's-it tree is _____

2. My friend saw the What's-it tree.

He/She said the What's-it tree is _____

3. Who is right? Who is wrong?

4. Can you explain what's going on?
