

Secondary Teacher Guide 1

Tips on Teaching about Hinduism

IES strives to make the teaching of Hinduism as rewarding as possible. This often involves addressing the challenges which teachers face, particularly their concern to accurately present the tradition. We hope the following guidelines will prove useful to you. For more details, please consult educational experts, such as your local RE Adviser. IES staff will also be happy to help further.

- When teaching Hinduism, do not neglect to explore the inner life, the predominant world-view and its attendant values. Focusing merely on external features may help portray the tradition as strange - even primitive and superstitious. Try, therefore, to consistently relate practices to values and key concepts.
- Consequently, when reciting stories at primary level, examine the values they portray. In presenting exotic and unfamiliar practices, begin by exploring accessible concepts, such as people, belonging, sharing, the family, celebrating together, etc.
- At secondary level, begin with philosophical concepts such as *karma* and reincarnation. Start with such thought-provoking subjects, in preference to merely launching into an upgraded re-run of Key Stage 2 work. (Keep in mind the HMI report which mentions the lack of rigour in Key Stage 3 RE)
- Do not confine Hinduism to India (with some of its stereotyped images). As with other religions, Hinduism has practitioners world-wide.
- Nevertheless, Indian art, music, dance, crafts etc. are attractive features of the tradition and contribute towards exciting learning. Make good use of the sights, sounds, smells and tastes! At least until more recently, the link between Hindu religion and culture has been almost inseparable.
- Differentiate between (1) traditional beliefs and values, and (2) modern practices. They are often quite different, especially with issues of emigration and acculturation.
- Take into account the many types of Hindus - liberally use words like 'some', 'many' or 'most', e.g. "Many Hindus are fully vegetarian".
- Beware of using violent stories without understanding the concepts behind them. They can easily be misunderstood. Select stories that affirm values you are seeking to instil in your age groups.
- Nonetheless, do not shy away from presenting concepts and values that may confront popular notions of what is correct (for example, the idea of complementary roles for men and women rather than complete equality)
- Be careful about attributing your own values and meaning to stories. Although stories are often multi-layered, you represent the tradition more accurately by using them to convey the values and meaning for which they were originally intended.
- Select authentic classroom materials; i.e. those that are educationally sound and accurately represent the tradition.

- Try to present Hinduism through the eyes of Hindus, as well as from the Western viewpoint. Allow the tradition to speak for itself. For example, mention Hindus' own version of their history (which could well lead to an interesting discussion on the nature of time)
- Beware of using terms that might cause offence. For example, instead of "the gods", we advise you to use the word 'deities' (since it is inclusive of God, gods and goddesses and therefore accommodates the breadth of Hindu belief.) Do not speak of 'idols', with all its connotations, but of 'images', 'sacred images' or 'sacred statues'. Be careful also, of how you use the word "mythology". Some Hindus believe many of their stories to be true (albeit on a different level of reality).
- Beware of dismissing or pre-judging certain issues without trying to understand the concepts and intentions behind them, e.g. caste, the "sacred" cow and arranged marriage. Beware of stereotyped portraits of these subjects. Focusing on the downside may eclipse any inherent value. Keep in mind that many social problems are caused by misapplication of principles, not necessarily by the principles themselves
- Do not entirely equate "caste" with the system of four *varnas* and four *ashrams*. They are not the same, though there is naturally some connection.
- Make links and draw comparisons with other religions but beware of losing the identity and integrity of each. Avoid building inappropriate bridges (e.g. do not refer to the *trimurti* as 'the Hindu trinity')
- Invite Hindu people to your school and arrange trips to temples. These lend life to Hinduism as cannot be found in books alone.
- Let learning be fun, for student and teacher alike!