

Saving Creation

Collective Worship Resources for Schools

To go alongside the diocese Saving Creation Toolkit for Schools, we have produced a short series of collective worship resources to look at the Christian perspective on environmental matters. These aim to raise the profile of environmental issues in Church of England schools, to begin such discussions with pupils and to demonstrate a biblical foundation for environmental action.

In the early autumn (during September and October), the Church of England has a season called 'Creationtide'. These acts of worship could be used as part of the focus for this season. Alternatively, they could be used as you begin to introduce and use the elements of the Toolkit in school.

The resources include:

- 6 acts of collective worship on this theme:
 1. God's gardeners
 2. Time to rest
 3. Justice for all
 4. Having everything
 5. The Temple of God
 6. The End of the Story

The resources include the outline of the each act of worship, with some guidance on the words you can use and the questions you can ask. You can use the resources as they are or adapt them to fit your needs and/or usual patterns of worship.



Collective Worship 1 – God’s gardeners

Gathering

Use your usual school liturgy for gathering in worship or Leader: Thank you for joining me for collective worship today. Peace be with you. All: And also with you. Leader: At the start of our worship we light a candle to remind us that Jesus is the light of the World. [Light the candle] Lord Jesus, shine your light on us today.

Engaging

Starting questions you could ask:

- How do you feel when you hear in the media about climate change and the environment?
- If you believe in God, what do you think he thinks about the situation the world is in?

Today we are starting a short series to look at what Christians think God’s perspective on the environment and the mess humanity has made of it. In each act of worship, we will look at it from a different angle and also consider what our response might be.

We are going to start today by looking at the world God created, and the job he gave to humanity concerning it.

We are going to read some words from the very start of the Bible. In the book of Genesis, we read the story describing the beginning of the world. Some Christians believe this is an exact account of how the world was created, many others Christians believe it is an ancient story teaching humanity about God’s purpose for the world and our part in that plan. Whatever their viewpoint, most Christians would agree that Genesis has something important to tell us about God, ourselves and our world.

Let’s watch a retelling of Genesis 1.

Show the video ‘In the Beginning’ by Steve Turner <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oTQbhaa1BNs>

Who does the story say made everything?

What does it say was God’s opinion of the world he had created?

Clarify that Christians believe it was God who created everything in the whole of the universe. You can mention that some believe he did it in seven days while many others believe he worked over millions of years to achieve it. All, however, agree that, whatever the timescale, God is its source and creator.

In the story of Genesis God repeatedly described the world and all the things in it which he had created as ‘Good’.

If you have something that is ‘good’, how do you treat it?

Encourage the children to recognise that we try to treat things that are good well so that they stay good, whether that is new clothes, our favourite toy or anything else.

In the story, when God makes humans he gives them a special job to do. Let’s read it.

“²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image and likeness. And let them rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky. Let them rule over the tame animals, over all the earth and over all the small crawling animals on the earth.”

“²⁷ So God created human beings in his image. In the image of God he created them. He created them male and female. ²⁸ God blessed them and said, “Have many children and grow in number. Fill the earth and be its master. Rule over the fish in the sea and over the birds in the sky. Rule over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

“²⁹ God said, “Look, I have given you all the plants that have grain for seeds. And I have given you all the trees whose fruits have seeds in them. They will be food for you.”

What was the job that God gave to human beings? What do you think is meant by this? How were we meant to do it?

Help the children recognise that humans were given the job of ruling over creation and gather their thoughts on what this means.

Some people have taken God's instruction to rule over creation as permission to do what we want with it, no matter what the consequences. Do you think that is the way a good ruler would behave? In the story, the humans have only one example of a ruler to copy and that is God himself. Is that the way God showed them to rule?

A little bit later we see a bit more about what type of 'ruling' God wants humanity to do. Let's read what it says.

"¹⁵ The Lord God put the man in the garden of Eden to care for it and work it."

God put humans in charge of creation to be gardeners! How does a gardener 'rule' their garden? What are they trying to achieve?

Encourage the children to recognise that a gardener works hard and brings order to a garden so that the garden can flourish and be a lovely place.

And so Christians believe that humanity is not supposed to rule over creation like a greedy evil king, just taking whatever he can get. Instead we are supposed to care for creation like a gardener looks after her garden, working hard to make sure it can flourish and grow.

Responding

And so, at the start of our thinking about what the Bible teaches Christians about how we should treat creation, we have learnt that humanity should care for creation not exploit it. Is that how we have behaved?

Reflective questions you could ask:

- **Can you think of ways in which humanity has exploited creation and damaged it?**
- **Can you think of ways in which humanity has cared for creation and looked after it?**
- **It is easy to think about humanity's faults, but what about our own actions. In what ways does what you do damage creation or look after it?**

If time allows you could ask some children to share their thoughts on this.

You could have a short time of silence for reflection and introduce it in this way:

We are going to have a short time of silent reflection to think about what we have learned. You might want to think about ways in which you can change your behaviour to care for our world better. If you want to, in the silence, you could make a promise to God to change and ask for his help to carry it out.

Sending

You could sum up the message of the worship. For example, you could say:

Today we have learnt that Christians believe we are supposed to rule creation like gardeners rule a garden, caring for it and helping it flourish.

You could say some prayers. Remember to make your prayer invitation by the way you introduce it, for example,
– **If you would like to join in with my prayer, you can listen carefully and say 'amen' at the end.**

You could say your own prayer or use these words:

Creator God, thank you that you are the creator of everything and that you made it good. Help us to rule like good gardeners caring for what you have made. Where this is not the case, help us to take action to change the way humanity is treating this world, putting pressure on businesses and leaders to make the changes that are needed to look after our planet for the future. Amen.

You could finish your act of worship
with your usual school liturgy

or **Leader: At the end of our worship we extinguish the candle with these words, [Blow out the candle] May the light of God shine from us and the peace of God be with us always. Amen.**

**Go in peace to love and serve
the Lord.**

or **May the grace of our Lord
Jesus Christ, and the love of
God and the fellowship of the
Holy Spirit, be with us all, now
and forever, Amen**

Collective Worship 2 – Time to Rest

Gathering

Use your usual school liturgy for gathering in worship

or
Leader: Thank you for joining me for collective worship today.
Peace be with you.
All: And also with you.
Leader: At the start of our worship we light a candle to remind us that Jesus is the light of the World.
[Light the candle] Lord Jesus, shine your light on us today.

Engaging

Starting questions you could ask:

- **What would it be like if there were no weekends? What would you miss?**
- **How would you begin to feel after a while? How would your teachers begin to feel?**

Encourage the pupils to recognise that weekends give us time to rest and recover for the next week. Without these we would probably run out of energy after a while, their teachers certainly would!

Do you remember the video we watched last time, retelling the story of creation from the Bible? Do you remember how it ended? If you have forgotten, these are the last words.

'God said 'Good' and the World was great. God said 'Rest' and they all slept late!'

Were you surprised by the way the story of God creating the world finished? Let's read what the Bible itself says:

"¹ So the sky, the earth and all that filled them were finished. ² By the seventh day God finished the work he had been doing. So on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³ God blessed the seventh day and made it a holy day. He made it holy because on that day he rested. He rested from all the work he had done in creating the world."

Why do you think the story tells us that God rested at the end of the creation story? Do you think God can get tired and so need rest? If not, what do you think this is trying to tell us?

Encourage the children to understand that Christians believe that God did not need to rest. Instead many Christians believe that this is showing us something about how important having time to rest is. If you have used any of the Rhythm of Life material at Advent, Lent or Pentecost, you might remind the children about one of the seven habits being Resting, seeing what they remember of this. For those who haven't used Rhythm of Life, you could discuss with the children how important resting is to humans.

So 'resting' is very important to people for their well-being, but you will remember that we are linking about how Christians view Creation. So what has resting got to do with that? Well first of all, the resting on the Sabbath day was not just for the people. The Bible says it was for all their animals, their livestock too!

And this is not the only thing that the Bible says about resting. The People of God are told to let the land rest as well!

Here's what it says:

"¹⁰ "For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, ¹¹ but during the seventh year let the land lie unploughed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what is left. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove.

"¹² "Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest,"

Why do you think it is good for the land to rest too?

This part of the Bible was written thousands of years ago when people didn't have many of the modern farming methods that we have today. But the remarkable thing is that good farmers and gardeners today realise that regularly letting the land rest is best way make sure it stay healthy and productive. It is called leaving the land 'fallow' and means not farming a piece of land for a while. It allows the land to recover and so produce better crops afterwards.

It has been discovered that if you don't allow land time to recover but keep farming it constantly, eventually all the goodness and nutrients in the earth will be used up and it won't produce good crops.

Many environmental problems are happening today because humanity keeps taking and taking from the earth and from nature and never allows time for it to rest and recover.

Responding

If we are to give the environment time to rest and recover, it will mean each of us changing our ways. We won't be able to just keep taking and we might not be able to have whatever we want whenever we want it.

Reflective questions you could ask:

- **How do you think we can give the world a chance to 'rest'? How would we have to change our behaviour?**
- **How will it affect the things we buy, like food, clothes and other things?**

Elements such as consuming and wasting less can be part of the response. Recycling also means fewer new resources are used for things.

Most importantly, a change in attitude is needed. We need to start thinking that what we want is not the most important thing, but putting other things first instead. This is crucial in our environmental response, but is also an important aspect of living well with other people.

Can you think of other times when we have to put aside what we want and put other things first?

You might get examples of other ways in which you have encouraged pupils to put others first, such as serving each other, being generous or forgiving people. These may connect back to your school vision or values.

You could have a short time of silence for reflection and introduce it in this way:

We are going to have a short time of silent reflection to think about what we have learned. You might want to think about ways in which you can change how you behave, to use fewer of the earth's resources. You could also think about other ways in which you could put the needs of others ahead of your own wants. If you choose, you could even ask God to help you change.

Sending

You could sum up the message of the worship. For example, you could say:

Today we have learnt that humanity needs to allow the earth to rest and recover, as God always planned that we should. This will mean each one of us changing the ways in which we behave to put the needs of the planet before what each of us wants.

You could say some prayers. Remember to make your prayer invitational by the way you introduce it, for example
– **If you would like to join in with my prayer, you can listen carefully and say 'amen' at the end.**

You could say your own prayer or use these words:

Father God, just like we need time for rest and recovery, so does our world. Help us each to play our part so by changing the way we behave so that it gets time to do just this. Help us put the needs of our planet before our own desires and, in the same way, put the needs of others before ourselves. Amen

You could finish your act of worship
with your usual school liturgy

or

**Leader: At the end of our worship we extinguish the candle
with these words, [Blow out the candle] May the light of God
shine from us and the peace of God be with us always. Amen.**

**Go in peace to love and serve
the Lord.**

**May the grace of our Lord
Jesus Christ, and the love of
God and the fellowship of the
Holy Spirit, be with us all, now
and forever, Amen**

Collective Worship 3 – Justice for all

Gathering

Use your usual school liturgy for gathering in worship

or

Leader: Thank you for joining me for collective worship today.

Peace be with you.

All: And also with you.

Leader: At the start of our worship we light a candle to remind us that Jesus is the light of the World.

[Light the candle] Lord Jesus, shine your light on us today.

Engaging

Starting questions you could ask:

- **How do you feel when things are unfair against you? How do you feel about the people who act unfairly?**
- **Why do you think unfairness makes us feel so strongly?**

From the responses, help the children to appreciate that unfairness affects us deeply and that it is often the feeling of powerlessness that amplifies this. You might also want to ask them if there are times when things are unfair in their favour and what they think is the impact on others.

One of the strongest arguments for Christians about caring for our environment is not specifically about creation at all. It is about how we treat people. Let's listen to what the Bible says about some of God's priorities when thinking about how we behave:

Psalm 82

³ Defend the orphans and the weak. Defend the rights of the poor and suffering. ⁴ Save the weak and helpless from the power of the wicked.

Proverbs 31

⁸ Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. Defend the rights of all those who have nothing. ⁹ Speak up and judge fairly. Defend the rights of the poor and needy.

These are just two examples, but there are many more. The word 'Defend' here means to stick up for these people and protect them from harm. Throughout the Bible, we learn that God cares for us all, but also that those who are wanting to live for God are told to take particular care to uphold and fight for the good of those who are poor, weak, needy and powerless. Christians believe that this is to be a priority for the way they live.

But, what do you think this has to do with taking care of the planet? Why are these two linked?

You may get a range of answers. This might include the idea that the planet is now needy and can't look after itself. That is good, but is not the heart of the point being made. The point is that, right across the planet, those being hit hardest by the effects of climate change are those who are poorest and most needy, those who are least able to do anything about it. This may come up naturally, but if not you could explain it in these terms:

In most parts of the world, the people being hit hardest by climate change are those who are poorest and most in need. Many were living on the edge of survival already, but the changes in climate are destroying their ways of life and pushing them over that edge. In the rich parts of the world, like ours, we have the money to be able to do many things to cope with changes in the climate, but in the poorer parts of the world these changes can be disastrous. Changing weather patterns can bring crop failures, water shortages, rising sea levels, decreasing of important animal numbers and many other effects. Without the money and resources of the rich parts of the world, it may be too much for many of these people to survive.

What do you think these people would want us to do about climate change?

If we don't take action to care for the environment, we are actually making things worse for these people.

If we are to truly take care of the poor, needy and weak, and climate change hits them hardest, taking action to reduce the impact of climate change has to be part of our response. Actions, even small ones, we take here can improve the lot of these people. We will probably never meet any of them, but Christians, and many others of different faiths and no faith, believe that we should be doing all we can to help them.

Responding

So today we have learnt that Christians believe that God cares for us all, but that he tells us we should have a particular care for the poor, powerless, weak and needy around the world. Our actions, no matter how small, could help to save them from the disastrous effects of climate change.

Reflective questions you could ask:

- In what ways are the people in these situations just like us?
- If the places were reversed, and it was your way of life that was being destroyed by climate change, what would you want others to do?
- Is not being bothered or the inconvenience of changing our behaviour a good enough argument for not doing anything to help?

You could have a short time of silence for reflection and introduce it in this way:

We are going to have a short time of silent reflection to think about what we have learned. You might like to think about what you would feel if it were you or your family whose lives were being ruined by the changing climate. If this makes you determined to do what you can, you might like to promise yourself to take action. You could even, in the silence, ask God to help you keep that promise.

Sending

You could sum up the message of the worship. For example, you could say:

Today we have learnt that the situation of the poor, needy, weak and powerless is of great importance to God and that climate change is hurting these people the most. They are just like us, so taking action to help them should be a priority for us too.

You could say some prayers. Remember to make your prayer invitational by the way you introduce it, for example
– **If you would like to join in with my prayer, you can listen carefully and say 'amen' at the end.**

You could say your own prayer or use these words:

God of Justice, we know your heart breaks when you see the suffering caused by climate change, especially in the poorer parts of the world. Help us to take action to change what we can, out of love and compassion for those in most need, not just self-interest.

Amen

You could finish your act of worship
with your usual school liturgy

or

**Leader: At the end of our worship we extinguish the candle
with these words, [Blow out the candle] May the light of God
shine from us and the peace of God be with us always. Amen.**

**Go in peace to love and serve
the Lord.**

or

**May the grace of our Lord
Jesus Christ, and the love of
God and the fellowship of the
Holy Spirit, be with us all, now
and forever, Amen**

Collective Worship 4 – Having Everything

Gathering

Use your usual school liturgy for gathering in worship

or Leader: Thank you for joining me for collective worship today.

Peace be with you.

All: And also with you.

Leader: At the start of our worship we light a candle to remind us that Jesus is the light of the World.

[Light the candle] Lord Jesus, shine your light on us today.

Engaging

Starting questions you could ask:

- **Can you think of a character in a story who wanted everything?**
- **Are characters like that usually characters we are meant to like or not like?**
- **Why do you think this is?**

(You might like to use the character of the greedy Violet Beauregarde from Charlie and the Chocolate factory as an illustration, or another character of your own choosing.)

Characters who are greedy and want more than their fair share are often seen as negative characters in fiction. They are portrayed as selfish and mean individuals who we are not meant to like or copy.

For Christians, the idea of not taking more than your fair share is one that comes from the Bible. In the Old Testament, there is a story where the people of God are travelling for a long time in the wilderness, having just escaped from slavery in Egypt. There is no food for them to eat, so God provides it for them.

⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses, “I will cause food to fall like rain from the sky. This food will be for all of you. Every day the people must go out and gather what they need for that day. I will do this to see if the people will do what I teach them.

Every day, God sent enough of this strange heavenly bread, called ‘manna’ (which means ‘What is this?’ in the original Hebrew language) for the people to eat. Everyone had to collect only enough for them and their family. But what happened if they tried to be greedy?

²⁰ But some of the people did not listen to Moses. They kept part of it to eat the next morning. But it became full of worms and began to stink.

God provided what the people needed and they were not meant to be greedy and try to keep more than they needed for that day.

Unfortunately, many people have forgotten the idea of ‘our fair share’. We live in a culture where we are encouraged to have whatever we want. It is called ‘consumerism.’ We are constantly encouraged to buy new things whenever we want them, owning more and more. During his life, Jesus had plenty to say about people who cared more about the money and things they possessed than the people in need around them.

¹⁹ “Don’t store treasures for yourselves here on earth. Moths and rust will destroy treasures here on earth. And thieves can break into your house and steal the things you have. ²⁰ So store your treasure in heaven. The treasures in heaven cannot be destroyed by moths or rust. And thieves cannot break in and steal that treasure. ²¹ Your heart will be where your treasure is.

²⁴ “No one can be a slave to two masters. He will hate one master and love the other. Or he will follow one master and refuse to follow the other. So you cannot serve God and money at the same time.

Jesus was clear that wanting it all, whether that is money or possessions, means that things will become more important to us than God or other people.

But there is another problem too. Everything we buy or use must be made of something. The resources and energy needed to make them are not unlimited. One day, if we are not careful the earth's resources could run out. Even before that, if we in the richer parts of the world just greedily buy and use whatever we want without limits, then we are leaving less for the majority of people who do not live in richer countries.

We are having way more than our fair share. Have we become like those greedy characters from the stories we discussed?

Responding

Christians believe that God wants us to take seriously the idea of 'our fair share'.

Reflective questions you could ask:

- **What can we, from the rich parts of the world, do to make sure we are not taking more than our fair share?**
- **What can we do to carefully use the world's resources and not to waste them?**
- **How can we make sure that others, in poorer parts of the world, also get their fair share?**

If time allows you could ask some children to share their thoughts on this.

You could have a short time of silence for reflection and introduce it in this way:

We are going to have a short time of silent reflection to think about what we have learned. You might want to think about times you want more than you need. How can you be careful not to want more than your fair share? If you want to, in the silence, you could make a promise to God to change your behaviour and ask for his help to carry it out.

Sending

You could sum up the message of the worship. For example, you could say:

Today we have learnt that Christians believe God wants us not to be greedy with the things we buy and use. We should be satisfied with our fair share so that we don't waste the planet's resources.

You could say some prayers. Remember to make your prayer invitational by the way you introduce it, for example,
– **If you would like to join in with my prayer, you can listen carefully and say 'amen' at the end.**

You could say your own prayer or use these words:

Father God, you promise to give us what we need, not whatever we want. Teach us to be satisfied with our fair share, not greedy for more. Help us to take care of the earth's resources, not to waste them on whatever we want, so that everyone can have their fair share too. Amen.

You could finish your act of worship
with your usual school liturgy

or

**Leader: At the end of our worship we extinguish the candle
with these words, [Blow out the candle] May the light of God
shine from us and the peace of God be with us always. Amen.**

**Go in peace to love and serve
the Lord.**

**May the grace of our Lord
Jesus Christ, and the love of
God and the fellowship of the
Holy Spirit, be with us all, now
and forever, Amen**

Collective Worship 5 – The Temple of God

Gathering

Use your usual school liturgy for gathering in worship or Leader: Thank you for joining me for collective worship today. Peace be with you. All: And also with you. Leader: At the start of our worship we light a candle to remind us that Jesus is the light of the World. [Light the candle] Lord Jesus, shine your light on us today.

Engaging

Starting questions you could ask:

- **Look at these five images. What are they and what do they have in common?**

Show the five images from the accompanying PowerPoint. They are a mosque, a Hindu temple, Leeds Minster, a synagogue and a Sikh temple, all from our region. For pupils, the important thing is that they are all special places of worship. The sixth slide shows what each picture is.

- **Have you ever visited a place of worship like one of these?**
- **How did you behave when you were there?**

At this point you could prompt pupils with some outrageous types of behaviour, for example “Did you run around shouting? Did you throw your litter on the floor? Did you break the furniture? Did you traipse mud all over the carpet? Did you steal things from there?” etc.

We know that if we visit a special place of worship, we are to treat it with respect and care. It is a special place for meeting God for the people of that faith and so we need to look after it properly and respectfully.

In the Bible, we can read that the people of God had a special place of worship called ‘the Temple’. The building was destroyed long ago, but here is a model showing what it might have looked like.

This is slide 7 of the PowerPoint.

The building in the centre is called the Holy of Holies (click for label). It was the most special part of the Temple. Only one single person could enter this space, and that was only once a year.

Then there were areas into which Jewish people could go and areas for everyone else.

Whilst this building was the ultimate place of worship for the Jewish people of that time, they were also very clear that the building was a symbol for the whole of creation.

For them, the Holy of Holies stood for the spiritual realm in which God lives, what some might call ‘Heaven’. So they believed that the Holy of Holies was where heaven and earth met. As they visited the Temple, they were drawing close to this very special place.

The rest of the building represented the created world in which humanity dwells, even though they did believe that they had a special closeness to God in the world compared to everyone else.

And so the whole earth was seen as God’s temple, given for people to live in and care for. Like them, many Christians today continue to believe the idea that the whole earth should be viewed as God’s temple.

Many people treat the world and its resources as theirs, to be used however they see fit to benefit themselves. If, however, we start to see the earth as God’s temple, it can change our perspective of it and make us more respectful.

Responding

And so, if the world, with its natural beauty and resources, is to be viewed as God’s temple, how might that change the way we behave and treat it?

Reflective questions you could ask:

- **Think of some of the ways we suggested you WOULDN’T behave in a place of worship, such as a temple. How might they suggest ways we SHOULDN’T behave in God’s temple, the Earth.**
(for example: Littering – discarding waste carelessly on the land or in the oceans, Damaging – ruining habits and other ecosystems, Stealing – taking and using natural resources without care and limit)

- How do you think we should behave instead?

If we are going to preserve the planet as a safe place to live for ourselves and future generations, we must start viewing it as a special place which needs our respect and care.

You could have a short time of silence for reflection and introduce it in this way:

We are going to have a short time of silent reflection to think about what we have learned. You might want to think how you view the world and its natural resources. Do you see it as something just to satisfy your needs? Or do you recognise that the earth is a special place that needs to be valued and treated with care? If you choose, in the silence you could even ask for help to see the earth through God's eyes and to change the way you treat it as a result.

Sending

You could sum up the message of the worship. For example, you could say:

Today we have seen that Christians view the earth as God's temple, a special place that we are meant to look after and respect. For the good of the world and all people, humanity needs to start treating the earth as a special place in this way, so that we care for it and preserve it.

You could say some prayers. Remember to make your prayer invitational by the way you introduce it, for example

– If you would like to join in with my prayer, you can listen carefully and say 'amen' at the end.

You could say your own prayer or use these words:

Creator God, you made the earth as a place for people to live, full of beauty and wonder. We pray that nations, businesses and individuals will stop behaving as if the world is theirs to use up as they wish. Instead, help us to see the world as your temple, treating it and its resources with the care and respect they deserve. Amen

You could finish your act of worship
with your usual school liturgy

or Leader: At the end of our worship we extinguish the candle
with these words, [Blow out the candle] May the light of God
shine from us and the peace of God be with us always. Amen.

**Go in peace to love and serve
the Lord.**

**May the grace of our Lord
Jesus Christ, and the love of
God and the fellowship of the
Holy Spirit, be with us all, now
and forever, Amen**

Collective Worship 6 – The End of the Story

Gathering

Use your usual school liturgy for gathering in worship or Leader: Thank you for joining me for collective worship today. Peace be with you. All: And also with you. Leader: At the start of our worship we light a candle to remind us that Jesus is the light of the World. [Light the candle] Lord Jesus, shine your light on us today.

Engaging

NB: There could be pupils or adults within school who have suffered bereavement and are still struggling with this. The content of this worship is focused primarily on the Christian understanding of what happens at the end of time. However, due to the association of 'heaven' with the questions 'What happens when we die?' care should be taken to ensure that coverage of this content is not upsetting for those present.

Starting questions you could ask:

- If you were going to redecorate your bedroom, would you wreck it first?
- Why wouldn't this be a good idea?

When someone mentions 'heaven' what images come to your mind? For Christians, the idea of heaven is an important part of their beliefs, but it is one that is often misunderstood. Heaven is primarily associated with what happens to people when they die. It can even sometimes be portrayed as winged souls floating around on clouds. But this is not in fact what the Bible teaches.

For Christians, heaven actually means the spiritual realm, where God dwells. However, the Bible does not teach that this is where people go at the end of the story when God makes all things right. The last book of the Bible, which is called Revelation, is full of complicated pictures of this time at the end of the story. But for Christians it teaches a wonderful conclusion to the story of humanity and creation. This is what it says:

21 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth had disappeared. Now there was no sea.² And I saw the holy city coming down out of heaven from God. This holy city is the new Jerusalem. It was prepared like a bride dressed for her husband.³ I heard a loud voice from the throne. The voice said, "Now God's home is with men. He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them and will be their God."⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, sadness, crying, or pain. All the old ways are gone."

Whilst some of the picture painted is hard to understand, the central idea is not that the earth will disappear and humanity will go to live in a spiritual heaven. Instead, at the end of the story, Christians believe that heaven and earth, the spiritual and physical, will be combined into a restored, joined-together 'heaven & earth' place, with God and humans living together there.

For many years, some Christians would argue that we didn't need to care for the planet. They would say it didn't matter if we used up all its resources and wrecked the place because, in the end, humanity wouldn't need it because we were going to a spiritual heaven. But, as we have seen, this isn't what the Bible teaches will happen at the end of the story.

The Bible teaches that God has plans for the earth, that in some way it will be an important part of the end of the story and what comes afterwards. Even if God is planning in the end to renew earth and heaven, looking after the earth we have now would seem like a good idea in the meantime.

The Bible doesn't give us any details of what this new 'earth & heaven' place will be like in practical terms, but it does make clear that it will be wonderful:

There will be no more death, sadness, crying, or pain.

That does sound like a good place to be. And Christians are encouraged to try to make this earth now as much like that end of the story as they can, even as they live their lives today. When the Lord's prayer is prayed, it includes the words:

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

That means that humanity should strive to ensure that sadness, crying, pain and destruction are not the experience of people today, just like at the end of the story. This aim includes reducing the suffering of people and creation caused by the damage we are doing to our planet through climate change and other environmental destruction.

Christians believe the earth is part of God's plans for the end of the story. Looking after it should be part of our plans now.

Responding

We might not know what the end of God's story will be like in detail, but we know enough to help us think about our response today.

Reflective questions you could ask:

- In what ways can you prevent sadness, crying and pain in those around you?
- In what ways and for whom might our damage to the climate and environment cause death, sadness, crying and pain to people in the world?
- What can we do now to reduce the impact on those people?

You could have a short time of silence for reflection and introduce it in this way:

We are going to have a short time of silent reflection to think about what we have learned. You might like to think about the Christian idea of the end of God's story - a new place, with heaven and earth, spiritual and physical, combined and God and man living together. What do you think that might be like? You might like to ask God to help you understand this and how it should affect how you choose to live today.

Sending

You could sum up the message of the worship. For example, you could say:

Today we have learnt what the Bible teaches about the end of God's story for creation and humanity. It is not actually an end but the beginning of something even better. Christians believe we should start to try to live like that 'something better' today.

You could say some prayers. Remember to make your prayer invitational by the way you introduce it, for example – If you would like to join in with my prayer, you can listen carefully and say 'amen' at the end.

You could say your own prayer or use these words:

God of Eternity, thank you for the promise of the future you have in store for creation and humanity. Help us bring echoes of your everlasting kingdom into our everyday today, by caring for others and the world you have given us.

Amen

You could finish your act of worship
with your usual school liturgy

or

Leader: At the end of our worship we extinguish the candle
with these words, [Blow out the candle] May the light of God
shine from us and the peace of God be with us always. Amen.

Go in peace to love and serve
the Lord.

or

May the grace of our Lord
Jesus Christ, and the love of
God and the fellowship of the
Holy Spirit, be with us all, now
and forever, Amen