

Journaling in Religious Education

Ground Rules

How often are students expected to write in journals?

What kinds of things are acceptable as 'journaling' activities? Not just writing- sketches, drawings, collage, mindmaps.

What form will the journal take?

What is expected of individuals, e.g. quiet for journaling , do not have to write for entire time, some thinking time?

Privacy for self and others.

Presentation - creativity vs graffiti?

Focus on ideas rather than expression, punctuation and grammar.

Freewrite- write non-stop for allocated time, no editing, stopping, crossing out.



BEFORE, DURING, AFTER

BEFORE

What students remember about the topic from the previous lesson or their prior knowledge.

Questions they would like to have answered about the topic.

Reactions to/feelings about topic so far.

How could what they have learned so far be useful?

Use at the start of units of work in response to 'wondering questions' in Primary units and 'human heart' questions in Secondary units to get students to explore their personal experiences of God and why God created these feelings.

DURING

Use own words to explain understanding of topic.

Respond to focus questions.

AFTER

Reflect, summarise, respond, create



MODELS OF JOURNAL WRITING

TOPIC- Select a topic and free write for five minutes or longer.

FLOW CHART- Choose a shape for subject, branch out to other shapes containing sub-topics. Like mind mapping.

IDEAS BOX- fill with slips of paper with questions, quotes etc.

LIST- list of words, ideas, events, people or concepts relevant to topic or question.

REFLECTIVE DESCRIPTION – use detail to describe personal feelings, reactions and viewpoints.

UNSENT LETTER- allows students to express inner feelings about an individual as though they were face to face with the person in real life. Could be used in RE as a letter to God about students' concerns, things for which they wish to give thanks, questions about which they wonder.

STORYBOARD – Adding pictures or snippets of quotes, dialogue, creative writing. Allows students to exercise creativity and use other intelligences.

IMAGINATION - often suitable for “STOP and THINK” journal responses . Use senses, be creative. Give students ways to see how change could come about as they imagine a different world.

SELF-REFLECTING DIALOGUE- Good for problem solving. Uses skill students had when they were little- speaking with self or imaginary friend. In RE could be used as a dialogue with God about personal issues or concerns. Encourage students to look for patterns, new perspectives, solutions to problems, ways of coping.

JOURNAL KIT

Crayons, scissors, glue, coloured pencils, coloured paper, music CDs, candles, aromatherapy oils, oil burner, magazines for cutting up.

Interesting objects: Shells, Leaves ,Seed pods

Postcards

Textas

Bible

Books of inspirational quotes or stories

Art materials



JOURNAL STARTERS



Things I have left undone.....

Milestones in my life.....

Three things I get out of experiences of liturgy.....

'Forgiveness means that you do not carry the baggage of an experience' Gary Zukav. Write about an experience with baggage.

Six things that could make my life different.....

Today I learned ...

My goals (personal, academic, spiritual, sporting, leisure...) What I need to achieve them....

Describe a moment that brought you great joy.

In general I would describe my life as because.....

The contributions I have made to my family and my community

..... is a source of inspiration to me because.....

The first time I was aware of the experience of God in my life.....

Ten things that I want my son or daughter to know when they are 13/14/15.....

Describe five good things that happen to you almost every week.

An important issue in my life that I have been avoiding.....

'Forgive one another; rather than understand one another' Emma Goldman

Things that have held me back What I could do about them.....

If you could give any gift to the world, what would you give and to whom?

What does courage/compassion/reconciliation/loyalty/charity mean?

I would ban (give e.g. alcohol advertising, violent movies) because

'There are two sides to every coin'.

Hypotheticals, using concrete examples that are relevant to the unit you are studying. Imagine you are.....

- A refugee who does not speak English
- Someone whose best friend has just broken a confidence
- Someone who has not been invited to a party their peer group is attending

Use first person point of view to describe how this person would feel about their situation.

What do you like most about yourself?

A happy family is... Write a recipe for a happy family- do not just include the ingredients but what people need to do with those ingredients to achieve happiness.

What makes your best friend your best friend?

“Clothes make the person. “ Agree or disagree.

People who take advantage of others.....

What colour makes you think of happiness?

I wish everyone would learn to..... Then everyone would.....

I wish I could give.....

Something that really bugs me is.....

The best advice I have ever received is..... because.....

What makes you laugh?

I give thanks to God for... in my life.

Describe a time when you felt vengeful.

Who do you talk to when you have a problem? Why do you talk to this person?

Who or what has been a strong influence on your life?

Why is it important to be courteous/tactful/honest/ compassionate/have a sense of responsibility?

SOME JOURNAL STARTERS FOR YOUNGER WRITERS

I find it hard to...

My favourite thing is ...

My favourite Jesus story is ...

I find it easy to...

I find it difficult to...

Things I can do now that I couldn't do at the start of the year...

Four ways of showing someone that you care are...

Four ways of showing someone you don't care are...

I wonder about...

If I could change the world I would...

The best thing about today was ...

The worst thing about today was...

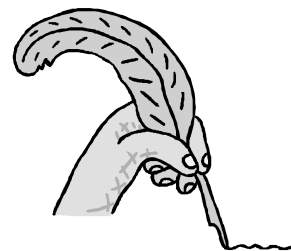
The most important person in my life is ...

Dear God, why...

I like...

I think friendship means...





SOME OTHER IDEAS FOR USING JOURNALS IN RE

SCRIPTURE QUOTES – Students copy out a quote from scripture determined by teacher or chosen by them. Meditate on quote using *Lectio Divina* (see handout) method. Write a response to the reading, outlining student's understanding.

PHOTOS – Students bring in a photo of significance. Connect with what is being studied in the unit e.g. Sacraments- First Communion photo, family, holidays, creation. Place on prayer focus in room. Invite students to show photo to class and briefly explain why they chose it, what the event and people represented mean to them. Teacher could break the ice by modelling this. Students reclaim their own photos and spend time journaling. Use focus questions such as:

- What event is the photo about?
- Who are the people in the photo? What do they mean to you? (If there are others in the photos.)
- Why was this a significant event in your life?
- Think about some of the 'human heart' or wonder questions you have studied so far in RE (teacher to provide a list). How did this experience and the people you shared it with, help you find some answers to one or some of these questions?

If possible, glue photo or a photocopy onto journal page.

READINGS- Use a brief passage from a fiction or non-fiction text, a poem or picture book that is relevant to the material being studied in the unit. Students respond with their own reactions to the situation or character. Predict what happens next, say what they would think, feel, do in that situation.

VIDEO CLIPS- Use a brief video clip from a film or a contemporary TV programme to stimulate students' writing. Use focus questions to link to unit material e.g. What attitudes to the human body are evident in the film clip? Are these typical of the attitudes held by many people today? Do you think such attitudes are just? What does the Church teach us about our bodies? Reflect on your own attitude to your own body- Would you change anything? Why? What could you gain by accepting what God has made?

SYMBOLS – On a prayer focus or prominent position in the room, place a symbol or symbols associated with material studied in the unit e.g. Lent- place a circlet of thorns (make one from rose branches or barbed wire) on a purple cloth. Get students to draw symbols and use them as a way into journal writing. Useful symbols- shells, shoes, branches, leaves, newspapers, masks, flowers, keys. Think about what a symbol can represent e.g. shoe as a metaphor for a journey.

POSTCARDS for brief responses.

PAPER IN DIFFERENT COLOURS AND TEXTURES

LECTIO DIVINA (DIVINE READING)

St Benedict taught this method of praying. He encouraged his monks to use the Scriptures as the basis of their prayers. There are three steps to *lectio divina*.

1. ***LECTIO (READING)***- Students choose or are given a passage from the Bible. (Use Gospel stories with younger students and epistles with young adults). They read the passage until they encounter an idea, sentence or phrase that appeals to them.
2. ***MEDITATIO (MEDITATION)***- Students pause and think about the idea, repeating the phrase or sentence over and over in their minds, letting the idea sink into their hearts and minds and examining the meanings of the words in depth.
3. ***ORATIO (PRAYER)***- Students speak with God about the passage. When they are finished, return to the reading and repeat the process.

USING THE JOURNAL – During the last stage of *lectio divina*, students could use their journal to respond to God in prayer.

Source: Glavich, Mary Kathleen, Leading Students Into Prayer. Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic, CT. 1993.



Saint Benedict of Nursia
(ca. 480 - ca. 547)

Plan for Journaling Presentation

What is a journal?

Why use a journal?

Starting out-

- Ground rules handout.

- Page 1 of journal-handout.

- Before, during, after handout

Strategies-

- Models of journal writing, journal kit handout

What do I get them to write?

- Journal activities from units handout

- Journal starters handout.

Making it meaningful in RE

- Model journal writing- participants to choose style.