

Media Engagement with Religion – Teachers’ Resource

Summary of Michael Wakelin’s talk

The media and religion want different things. Religion is about good news but bad news tends to get more attention from the media. Hypocrisy, sex, power, and violence make the news – add religion and you get a great story! The media is often not interested in nuance or subtlety. TV drama often does religion poorly, presenting only caricatures or ill-informed depictions of religious characters. Muslims (especially in traditional dress) may be presented as terrorists, while “good” Muslims wear Western dress (Spooks, 24). Soap operas are particularly bad at representing religion. But there are examples of good coverage of religion on TV – e.g. Rev, Around the World in 80 Faiths. Radio does religion particularly well. The secular culture of broadcasting can mean that presenters with religious convictions keep these as private as possible.

Why is the coverage often bad? A lack of religious literacy in the people making these programmes, showing the need for a more informed and nuanced understanding of the realities of religious faith today.

How can it improve? Raise religious literacy in media. Alan Rosenblatt urges religious groups to take hold of the message in the media themselves. “Seize the narrative, don’t cede it!” In the age of social media we are all the storytellers.

Ways to use this resource:

Think, pair, share: What would football look like if only portrayed from perspective of hooliganism? Encourage students to discuss whose perspective is being shown in media reports of religion.

Clip: Use the section in Michael Wakelin’s talk (from 07:00 to 13:05) to get students to think about how the media shows religion.

Read Dr David Tollerton’s blog in response to the Charlie Hebdo attack at <http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/theologyandreligionresearch/2015/01/09/on-blasphemy-and-the-charlie-hebdo-shootings/> Use his 3 possible responses to encourage students to think about how the media should depict religion. Students could write guidelines for the media on how to depict religion. Once the guidelines have been developed groups of students could re-write recent religious news stories. This could be presented in a simple written format or you might get them to make a webpage, or to write them as a series of tweets (140 characters including hashtags – further info on twitter can be found here <http://mashable.com/2012/06/05/twitter-for-beginners/>).

Statements: These could be used as evaluative questions for GCSE practice. Or they could be used as discussion starter ideas. They could be used as continuum statements. You could ask students to rank them in the order with which they agree with the statements – justifying their top and bottom choices. You could use them as debate questions – “This house believes that...”