

What is humanism? (KS3/KS4)

An assembly for World Humanist Day (21 June) or a general introduction to humanism.

Play 'Be More Kind' by Frank Turner as the students enter the assembly

Ask the students if they had heard that song before? Does anyone know the artist? What did they think that song was about?

Explain that Frank Turner is a humanist and this song reflects his humanist worldview.

Explain that today (or on the 21 June) it is World Humanist Day, a day celebrated by humanists around the world. Humanism is not a religion but it is a non-religious approach to life followed by many people in the UK and around the world. The day is not marked by tradition or ritual, instead, many humanist groups and organisations mark it with activities or conferences that aim to raise awareness of their values. In this assembly you are going to learn a little more about what these values are.

Show the pictures of the three humanists.

Ask the students if they recognise any of these humanists. What do they know about them if they recognise them?

Explain that on this day that humanists celebrate, you are going to explore three things that humanists celebrate and value about being human:

- 1) Our capacity to use science to answer questions about the world
- 2) Our natural capacity for empathy and the development of human rights
- 3) Our creativity and the diversity of our talents and potential

Show the picture of Alice Roberts

Explain that first you're going to learn about Professor Alice Roberts

Explain Alice grew up in Bristol in South West England. Despite having a flair for art and illustration – and winning a Blue Peter award for her artwork when she was 15 years old – she pursued science as her subject of choice.

Explain that Alice studied medicine at university, and went on to specialise in anatomy, eventually becoming an anatomy lecturer. She completed a PhD in the study of disease in ancient human remains. She is now a presenter of scientific and archeological TV programmes, and is also the President of Humanists UK, a charity that raises awareness of humanism and supports non-religious people.

Explain that by pursuing science, Alice's life work has revolved around asking questions about the world and applying the scientific method to find evidence that can enable us to find answers.

Show the quote. As Alice describes here, 'Science is the best tool we have for understanding the world around us, and that is both wonderful and enriching in itself, as well as essential to making all sorts of political, economic, and environmental decisions.'

Explain that humanists believe we should ask questions about the world around us, and they believe science is the best method that we have to determine what is true. Humanists believe the world is a natural place, as they see no persuasive scientific evidence for the supernatural. They don't believe in a god or gods.

Show the quote. As Alice says here: 'Being a humanist means always asking questions about the world around you, treating others with understanding and kindness, and recognising that the world is a natural place with no supernatural side.'

Show the picture of Gulalai Ismail

Explain that the next humanist whose life and work provides an example of the humanist worldview is Gulalai Ismail.

Explain that Gulalai grew up in Pakistan. Her father was a human rights activist, and from an early age she learnt about human rights. Despite being interested in science, and studying biotechnology at university, she couldn't ignore the inequality that she could see in the treatment of girls and boys in her society. When her female cousin was 15, she had an arranged marriage to a man twice her age, and then couldn't finish her education, while her male cousins were allowed to stay in school. Seeing these things happen drove Gulalai towards taking a stand for women's rights. When she was 16 years old, she set up an organisation with her sister called 'Aware Girls'. This provided young girls with awareness of their human rights and gave them the tools to be able to encourage their families and communities to support their education. Gulalai wanted to empower them to be free to choose how they lived their lives. For this, she won the International Humanist of the Year award in 2014.

Explain that for Gulalai, the fact that she was able to pursue her own education wasn't enough, she wanted other girls and women to have the same freedom that she did. Empathy and compassion for other people is important to humanists, and it's the reason why humanists fight for human rights. Humanists believe we should treat others the way we would like to be treated. Humanists believe that this is the one life we all have; there's no afterlife. That means we must work towards making this life as fair and just as possible in the here and now.

Show the quote 'I have learnt that freedom of thought and expression is key to peace and equality. It's through freedom of thought and equality for everyone that we can make our societies a dignified place to live.'

Show the picture of Frank Turner

Explain that lastly, you'll look at Frank Turner, and how his life reflects the humanist approach to life.

Explain that Frank Turner is an English musician and singer-songwriter who wrote and performed the song you heard on your way into assembly. Frank is a prolific songwriter and performer, having released eight solo studio albums and regularly performs on tour. He sees music as a way of communing and connecting with other people, and for him, rock shows are a form of social and communal gathering. He has dedicated his life to art through music, and he views art as an expression of empathy for other people.

Show the quote

Explain that for humanists, there is no ultimate, external or higher meaning to life, instead they believe that instead we can make our own lives meaningful. They believe that there are many different ways to find happiness and make the most of the one life that we have. For Frank, meaning can be found in creativity, music, and the connections we make with other people. Different humanists will find meaning and happiness in other ways (e.g through following our passions, achieving our goals, making connections, and working to make the world a better place).

Ask the students about the different ways they find happiness and what gives their lives meaning.

Explain that for humanists there is no one single way to find happiness. We all have different tastes and talents. Humanists believe we should be free to decide what we believe and how we live as long as we do not cause harm to others. Freedom of belief is important to humanists (and that includes being free to choose not to be a humanist).

Show the pictures of the three humanists with the ‘What it means to be a humanist?’

- Asking questions and using science to understand the world
- Having empathy for others and fighting for human rights
- Finding happiness and meaning for ourselves in the one life we have

Show the students the quote from Alice Roberts on humanism as a final thought.

Explain that you’ll listen to Frank Turner’s song one more time and consider how its message expresses his humanist worldview.

Play ‘Be More Kind’ by Frank Turner for students to leave the assembly