

Atheism and agnosticism: overview (age 11+)

Knowledge outcomes: students should learn the following about atheists and agnostics		
An atheist is somebody who does not believe in a god	An agnostic is somebody who says we cannot know whether a god exists or not	Humanists are atheists and agnostics who believe we can lead good and happy lives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Atheists don't see any persuasive reason or evidence to believe in a god • The evidence of suffering in the world makes many atheists find it hard to believe in an all-powerful, good god • There are scientific and social explanations for why people might believe in a god • Atheists don't believe a god created human beings, but believe human beings invented gods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People can be more or less confident about their belief or their absence of belief in a god • Many atheists are also agnostic – they accept we can't know for certain, but they don't think that there is a good reason to believe • Atheists believe the burden of proof should rest on the believer • It is impossible to prove something does not exist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing someone is an atheist or agnostic doesn't tell you anything else about how they live their life • Many atheists and agnostics believe it is important people know that it is OK not to believe in a god • Humanists believe that it is possible to lead good, happy, and meaningful lives without the need to believe in a god • Around half of the UK are atheists or agnostics (including some religious people)

Key vocab: belief, knowledge, atheist, agnostic, humanist, theist, certain, possible, probable, evidence, faith, proof

Introduction

- Explain that many people don't believe in a god and that you are going to explore some of the words used to describe these people and some of the reasons why they don't believe.

Atheism, agnosticism, and humanism

- Discuss what the words 'certain', 'probable', and 'possible' mean and how they are used.
- Carry out the ['Belief in god' scale activity](#) to explore the words 'atheist' and 'theist' and discuss the different levels of confidence people might have in their beliefs. You could follow this up by asking students to place quotes from real people on the scale.
- Share the [Atheists, agnostics, and humanists information sheet](#) and discuss the meanings of the different words and how much labels tell you about a person.
- Play [Is it still possible?](#) to explore whether or not it would still be possible for a god to exist if particular events happened and whether certainty is possible.

Digging deeper: Carry out the [Invisible gardener activity](#) or [Invisible teapot activity](#) and ask the students whether it is possible to prove that something does not exist.

Why might people not believe in a god?

- Share the [Why atheists don't believe Information sheet](#) and explore some of the reasons atheists might not believe in a god, where they think the burden of proof lies, and what they think might explain why some people do believe in a god.

The bus campaign

- Carry out the [Bus campaign activities](#) and discuss the purpose, response, effectiveness, and appropriateness of the campaign.

Digging deeper: The following activities and information sheets can support students to dig further into atheist perspectives on questions about god:

- [An alternative wager](#) (explores Pascal's wager and how a humanist might respond)
- [Miracles? activity](#)
- [Miracles?: a humanist perspective](#)
- [The problem of suffering](#)
- [The problem of suffering: the Epicurean paradox activity](#)
- [Theodicies and humanist responses](#)
- [The evil god challenge](#)
- [The evil god challenge film: youtube.com/watch?v=WiufsmxiUiU](#)

Summary and assessment

- Choose one or more of the following:
 - Share and discuss the [Multiple choice questions](#).
 - Carry out the [Fill in the blanks activity](#).
 - Ask students to complete the [atheist and agnostic responses activity](#).
- Review the knowledge outcomes above.