

Understanding the world: overview (age 11+)

Big question: How can I know what is true?

Key vocab: scepticism, curiosity, responsibility, evidence, science, progress, natural, atheist



Knowledge outcomes: Students should know about the following common features of a humanist approach to understanding the world		
Adopting a sceptical approach to the search for knowledge	Believing science provides the best way of answering questions about the world	Believing that the world is a natural place and looking for natural explanations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The recognition that our beliefs can be true or false and that we can be mistaken • Allowing our beliefs to be open to question • The responsibility to use reason and to look for evidence • Being willing to adapt or change beliefs when faced with new evidence • Being patient and comfortable with uncertainty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Science as a process that asks questions and allows us to test claims • Being wary of claims that have no scientific evidence or can't be tested (e.g. claims based solely on faith or revelation) • Science as a process that sometimes makes mistakes but is self-correcting • Science as a source of progress in our understanding • Philosophy as a means of approaching questions that science can't answer • Curiosity as a pleasure and science as a source of wonder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The absence of belief in supernatural beings or forces • The absence of belief in a god due to the absence of persuasive evidence • The word for someone who does not believe in a god is 'atheist' • Supporting freedom of belief (and not allowing different beliefs to get in the way of friendship)

Introduction

- Begin with the '[A humanist approach to life: a summary](#)' slide to introduce/recap the core features of a humanist approach to life.
- Explain that you are going to explore the way humanists understand the world around us – what they do and don't believe in and how they decide what to believe.

Scepticism

- Ask the students what 'belief' means. Explain that we all have beliefs. Sometimes they are true, sometimes not.
- There are two [Understanding the world information sheets](#) (lower and higher). Which is more suitable will depend on the age and existing knowledge of the students. The guidance below relates to the higher sheet. However, the lower sheet may be more suitable for some students.
- Share and discuss the first section of the [Understanding the world information sheet \(A sceptical approach, and Reasoning and responsibility\)](#), on why humanists believe all our beliefs should be open to question.
- Digging deeper: Show the [Origins film](#) (truetube.co.uk/film/origins?tab=film) and discuss how our different backgrounds and upbringing can lead to different beliefs.

Science

- Discuss the second section of the [Understanding the world information sheet, \(Science, Making progress, and A source of wonder\)](#), and explore the reasons humanists believe science provides the best method for answering questions about the world.
- Show and discuss the [How do we know what is true? film](#)
- Digging deeper: Show and discuss the [Science communication film](#) featuring Jim al-Khalili

Believing the world is a natural place

- Discuss the third section of the [Understanding the world information sheet, \(What do humanists believe? and Atheism and agnosticism\)](#), on the things humanists do and don't believe in.
- You could also share the [What is a humanist approach to understanding the world? information sheet](#).

Digging deeper: Science and religion, humanism and religion

- Ask the students to carry out the [Science and religion questions activity](#).
- Share and discuss the [Science and religion: humanism and religion information sheet](#) to explore whether humanists believe science can answer all our questions. Explain that the 'religion versus science' debate can perhaps be better framed as a choice between religion and humanism.

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 [humanist responses activity](#).
- Review the knowledge outcomes above.
- Ask the students what questions they would like to ask a humanist.