

Using Knowledge Organisers in RE

The purpose of this guidance document is to support you to produce and use knowledge organisers (KOs) for RE. The exemplars provided focus on units from the Lincolnshire agreed syllabus for RE, but the principles for designing and using KOs are applicable for other syllabus/curriculum materials.

What is a Knowledge Organiser (KO)?

In the context of the most recent thinking on knowledge-rich, sequential curriculum design,¹ it is important that teachers are clear about what knowledge they are teaching in any given curriculum area. This knowledge should be ‘powerful knowledge’² in the context of that curriculum area, not simply knowledge that they feel pupils will find relevant or interesting. It should be carefully sequenced throughout the phases so that each stage of learning builds on the previous stage and unlocks the next stage.

A KO is a document (preferably a single page) that sets out the ‘powerful knowledge’ for a given topic of study. KOs can be used across the curriculum, although they may look slightly different for different curriculum areas.

What is a KO for?

Whilst KOs are useful to help teachers have a clear understanding of what they will be teaching in a given topic, their primary use is to support pupils to better transition new knowledge from the working memory to the long-term memory in such a way that it can be retrieved and reused when necessary. KOs also provide pupils with a clear summary of the knowledge that is being covered in any given topic and the way in which key ideas within the topic relate to each other, as well as helping them better understand how knowledge connects from one topic to the next.

Principle 1: KOs should be written to be pupil-friendly documents.

¹ Cf. e.g. [Christine Counsell, ‘Taking Curriculum Seriously’, Impact: 4 \(September 2018\)](#). See also the new [Ofsted Inspection Handbook 2019](#) for ways in which Ofsted inspectors will be looking at curriculum design and implementation.

² ‘Powerful knowledge’ is a term frequently used by Professor Michael Young. It refers to the most important or useful knowledge for any given curriculum area. Having acquired this knowledge, pupils will be better prepared to engage fully in the world. In this way, acquiring ‘powerful knowledge’ is one way of tackling issues of social injustice.

What should a KO include?

Not everything! It is important to select the most ‘powerful knowledge’ – the knowledge that is specialised for the topic of study. This means you need to be very clear about what the topic is intending to teach and how this fits into the broader curriculum. For example, if I am producing a KO for a topic on Roman Britain in KS2, it may well include reference to Julius Caesar’s attempted invasion of Britain in 55-4BC, but it probably won’t include a recipe for gliris (stuffed dormouse), even if we might explore Roman food as part of the broader study of the Roman Empire. Given that KOs are a useful tool for assessment (see below), it is essential to ask what knowledge you might reasonably want pupils to have acquired by the end of the topic such that you can effectively assess their progress in the curriculum area.

Principle 2: KOs must focus on the ‘powerful knowledge’ for that topic of study.

How should a KO be constructed?

Whilst you need to focus on including the ‘powerful knowledge’ for the topic of study, you also need to think carefully about how that knowledge is presented. It is unlikely that a list of key information will be sufficient. The best KOs depict knowledge in such a way as to highlight the *links* between ideas. This is the difference between helping pupils understand component elements of a topic and building a compound framework of understanding. In terms of moving knowledge from the short-term working memory to the long-term memory, organising information on a KO in a way that shows relationships and connections is much more effective. This might mean using dual coding³ as part of your KO.

Principle 3: KOs should show relationships between ideas not just a list of facts.

How should a KO be used?

KOs should be used frequently in the classroom. They can function as a starting point for learning, although it is important to recognise that the information contained in KOs will be elaborated upon during lessons. They can become the consistent point of reference during lessons to ensure that pupils’ attention is firmly directed towards the ‘powerful knowledge’ that is the focus of learning. They can be used as part of retrieval activities⁴ between lessons to ensure that pupils are able to recall and build upon prior learning. Designing KOs that display ‘powerful knowledge’ in different organisational structures can also be a useful

³ Verbal and visual information. Cf. <https://www.teachertoolkit.co.uk/2019/04/08/dual-coding/> and <https://www.olicav.com/#/dual-coding-with-teachers-book/> for more information.

⁴ Activities that require pupils to recall information from previous learning. Cf. some examples from Tom Sherrington, <https://teacherhead.com/2019/03/03/10-techniques-for-retrieval-practice/>.

activity for pupils to complete; this activity helps to demonstrate that they have understood the ways in which the ideas in the topic relate to each other. Finally, KOs can be used as a mechanism of both formative and summative assessment to ensure that pupils have gained the knowledge you have taught, and have also understood how this knowledge sits within a broader conceptual framework. This means that KOs must be designed to be user-friendly – they must be designed in such a way that they can be used effectively as part of teaching and learning activities during lessons.

Principle 4: KOs should be documents that can be used in the classroom as part of teaching and learning.

Principles for Designing Knowledge Organisers

- ❖ Principle 1: KOs should be written to be pupil-friendly documents.
- ❖ Principle 2: KOs must focus on the ‘powerful knowledge’ for that topic of study.
- ❖ Principle 3: KOs should show relationships between ideas not just a list of facts.
- ❖ Principle 4: KOs should be documents that can be used in the classroom as part of teaching and learning.

Designing KOs for RE

The design principles above are just as relevant for producing KOs in RE as any other curriculum area. Of particular importance in RE is being clear on the ‘powerful knowledge’ in any given topic of study. Whilst many curriculum areas have this clearly defined in National Curriculum documentation, RE curriculum can be shaped by a variety of different things, including locally agreed or Diocesan syllabuses. Establishing what constitutes ‘powerful knowledge’ in RE in your context is the starting point for designing a KO for a particular topic of study. When utilising dual coding as part of the process of designing a KO for RE, it is also important to bear in mind the prohibitions on the use of certain visual images in particular religions (e.g. the visual depiction of God in Judaism, Islam and Sikhism).

Below are some examples of KOs for RE; they are based on units of study from the Lincolnshire agreed syllabus. Many thanks to Sally Brooman and Anna Crosby for their support in producing these exemplars.

For more information and further support on designing and using KOs in RE, please contact [Gillian Georgiou](#), the Diocesan RE Adviser.

KO Template: Unit Title

Highlight key enquiry questions to drive learning

What should we know?

Include **powerful knowledge** for this topic in this box in such a way that it could be used for retrieval activities, for example, by blanking out some elements for pupils to complete.

Include some **dual coding** (visual and verbal information) to show how the different pieces of **powerful knowledge** connect and relate to each other.

What should we be able to do?

Provide clear expectations for pupils, preferably relating to end-of-phase or age-related expectations in RE in your context.

Write these such that they could be used as mini-assessment activities; in other words, rather than writing out an expectation, e.g. "Be able to explain why the Qur'an is important to Muslims", write it out as though it were the ideal pupil answer for this topic:

"Explain that the Qur'an is important to Muslims because it gives them guidance on how to follow the straight path."

What words should we understand and be able to use?

Indicate tier 2 and tier 3 vocabulary relevant to this topic; include pupil-friendly definitions so that this section can be used as part of retrieval practice/assessment.

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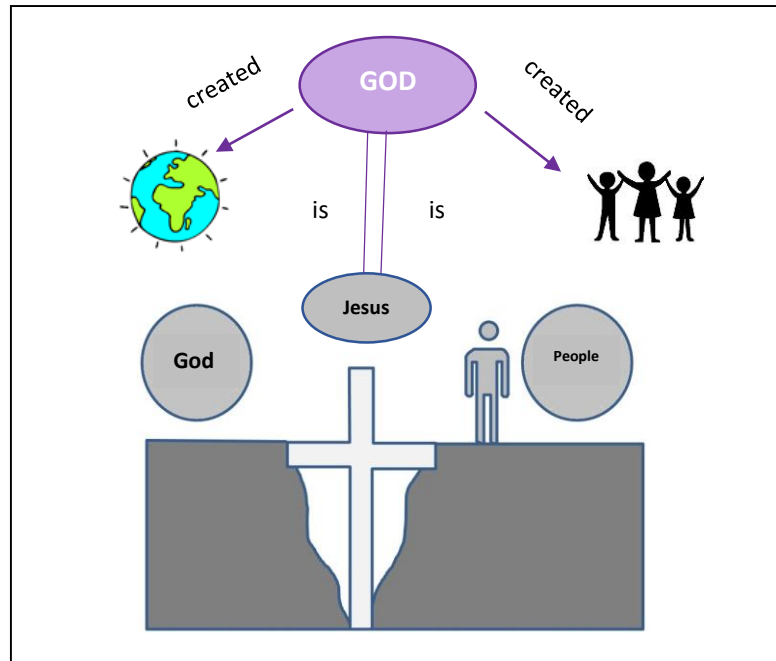
KS1 Compulsory: God (Christianity)

How is **God** described in the **Bible**? Who is **Jesus** and why is he important to Christians?

What should we know?

That Christians believe:

- in one **God** who created the world and was pleased with his creation
- that humans were created by God and have to look after God's creation
- that humans have made some bad choices but that God works with them to make things better
- that **Jesus** is God in the flesh (**incarnation**)
- that the **Bible** tells the story of **God, Jesus** and human beings
- that Jesus was **crucified** and that he came back to life (**resurrection**)



What should we be able to do?

- Explain that Christians believe there is one God who created the world
- Describe the Christian story of God creating the world and human beings
- Explain that Christians believe God has given humans a special job to look after the world
- Describe the consequences when humans make bad choices, for example, animals dying when we do not look after the environment
- Understand that Jesus is important to Christians because he is God in the flesh (**incarnation**)
- Understand that Jesus is important to Christians because they believe his death and **resurrection** help make the world a better place
- Give reasons why we think the world is not perfect and give some suggestions of how to make it a better place

What words should we understand and be able to use?

God	The all-powerful and all-loving being that Christians believe created the world and everything in it
Creation	The beginning of the world and everything in it
Jesus	A very important person for Christians; God in the flesh
Incarnation	'in the flesh'; Christians believe Jesus is God 'in the flesh', or God incarnate
Bible	The holy book of Christianity; tells the story of God, Jesus and human beings
Crucifixion	Jesus' death on a cross
Resurrection	Jesus' return to life after dying
Disciple	A follower of Jesus

KS2 Compulsory: God (Christianity)

What is the **Trinity** and why is it important to Christians? How do symbols help Christians understand God?

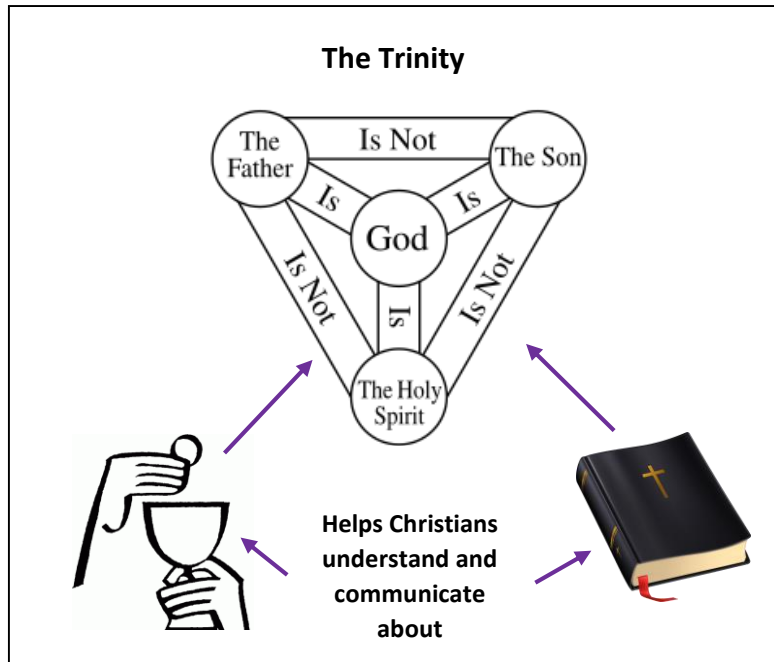
What should we know?

That Christians believe:

- in one **God** who created the world
- in one **God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit** (the **Trinity**)

That Christians express their beliefs:

- through **symbols** (e.g. the **triquetra**)
- through **language** (e.g. the account of Jesus' **baptism**, the **Grace** or the **Nicene Creed**)
- through **worship** (e.g. **Holy Communion**)



What should we be able to do?

- Explain that the **Bible** is a key source of authority for Christians and it helps them understand **God** as **Trinity**
- Explain that the Christian understanding of **God** as **Trinity** is connected with the Christian understanding of **Jesus** as **God incarnate**
- Explain that texts and **symbols** used during **Holy Communion** help Christians understand **God** as **Trinity**, including some specific examples
- Give a personal opinion on the evidence that supports the idea that **God** is **Trinity**

What words should we understand and be able to use?

God	The all-powerful and all-loving being that Christians believe created the world and everything in it
Trinity	The Christian belief that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit ; three in one
Jesus	The second person of the Trinity or the Son ; God in the flesh
Incarnation	'in the flesh'; Christians believe Jesus is God 'in the flesh', or God incarnate
Symbol	A thing that represents or stands for something else; e.g. the triquetra is a symbol of the Christian belief that God is Trinity
Triquetra	A Celtic symbol for the Trinity
Authority	To power to tell someone how things are; e.g. the Bible is an authority for Christians because it explains to them how the world is and how they should act in it
Bible	The holy book of Christianity; a key source of authority for Christians
Holy Communion	An act of worship; a shared meal that remembers Jesus' last meal with his disciples

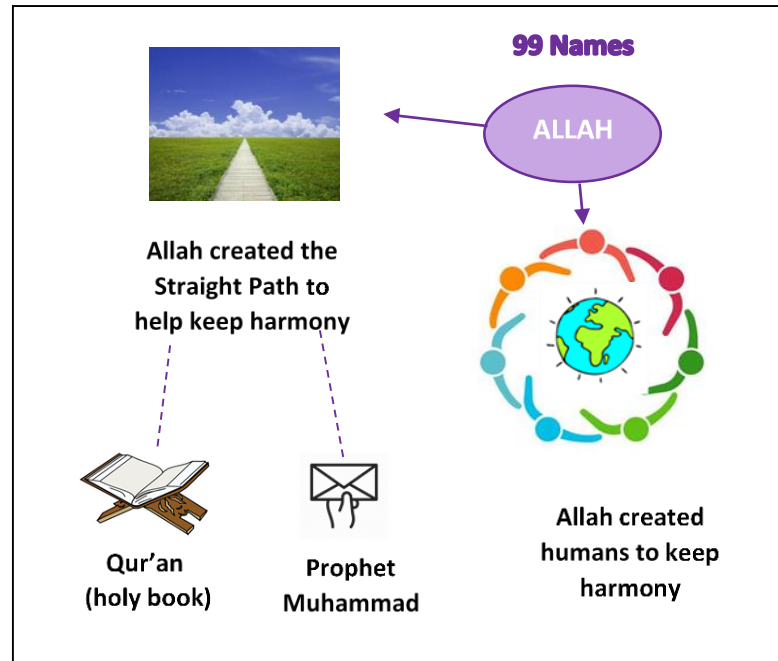
KS1 Compulsory: God (Islam)

How is **Allah** described in the **Qur'an**? What do Muslims learn about **Allah** and their faith through the **Qur'an**?

What should we know?

That Muslims believe:

- in One God (**Allah**) who created the universe in harmony
- that humans were created to keep the universe in **harmony**
- that **Allah** provided the **straight path** (**shariah**) to keep the universe in **harmony**
- that there is **guidance** to help Muslims follow the straight path (**Qur'an**, **prophets**, **natural world**)
- That there are **99 names of Allah** that help them understand what **Allah** is like
- that **Prophet Muhammad** is the final **prophet** and helps Muslims follow the **straight path**
- that the **Qur'an** is the **holy book** of Islam and helps Muslims follow the **straight path**



What should we be able to do?

- Explain that Muslims believe there is one God (**Allah**), who is loving and powerful
- Describe the Muslim story of God (**Allah**) creating the world in **harmony** and creating human beings to help keep it in **harmony**.
- Explain that the Muslim story of creation is similar to the Christian and Jewish story of creation.
- Explain that the word **guidance** means 'providing help to do something or get somewhere' and explain that Muslims believe the **Qur'an** and the **Prophet Muhammad** provide them with **guidance** on how to keep the world in **harmony**
- Retell the story of the **Night of Power**, a story about how the **Qur'an** was given to the **Prophet Muhammad**

What words should we understand and be able to use?

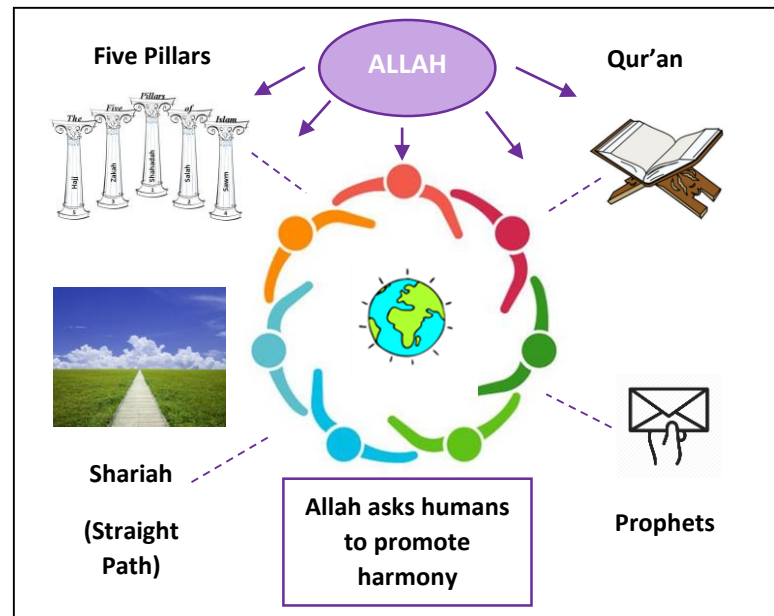
Allah	God
Tawhid	The oneness/wholeness of Allah (God)
Harmony	All things living together peacefully; the way Allah (God) created the world to be
Shariah	The straight path ; if humans follow this path, the world will be in harmony
Guidance	Something that helps you do something or get somewhere
Qur'an	The holy book of Islam; offers guidance on how to follow the shariah (straight path)
Prophet	Messenger of Allah (God)
Night of Power	The night the Prophet Muhammad was given the Qur'an

KS2 Compulsory God (Islam)

What do 'tawhid' and 'harmony' tell us about Muslim beliefs about God? How do symbols in a mosque help us understand this?

What should we know?

- That Muslims believe in one, whole God (**tawhid** = the oneness of God)
- That Muslims believe God created the world in **harmony** and that he wants it to stay that way
- That Muslims believe humans have a special role in helping to create and keep **harmony**
- That there is **guidance** to help Muslims promote harmony (**Qur'an, Five Pillars, Prophets**)
- That worship (including in a **mosque**) is one way in which Muslims believe they can help create and keep **harmony**



What should we be able to do?

- Explain that the Qur'an is important to Muslims because it gives the guidance on how to follow the **shariah (straight path)**
- Explain that Muslims believe Allah created the world in harmony and wants humans to keep it in harmony
- Explain that there is a difference between *believing* something and *knowing* something
- Describe different types of evidence used by Muslims to support their beliefs about God, humanity and the world, e.g. the Qur'an, the Prophets, personal experience

What words should we understand and be able to use?

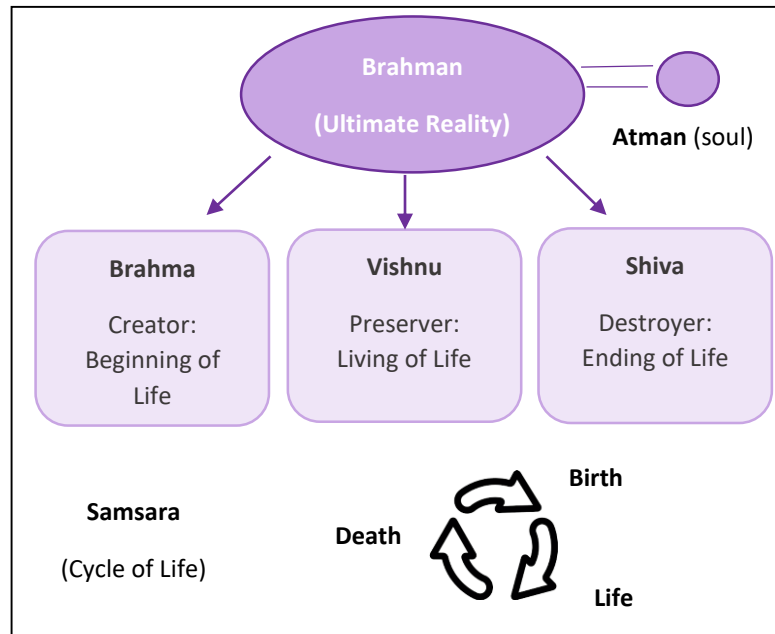
Allah	God	Prophet	Messenger of Allah (God)	Sawm	Fasting during the month of Ramadan; fourth pillar of Islam
Tawhid	The oneness/wholeness of Allah (God)	Iman	Faith	Hajj	Pilgrimage; fifth pillar of Islam
Harmony	All things living together peacefully, as Allah (God) originally intended	Ummah	The global community of Muslims	Masjid or Mosque	Place of worship for Muslims
'Abd	Servant; humans as Allah's (God's) servants	Ibadah	Worship	Qibla	Shows the correct direction of prayer
Khalifa	Regent; humans as ruling on behalf of Allah (God)	Shahadah	Statement of faith; first pillar of Islam	Minaret	Tower attached to a mosque; place where the call to prayer is shared
Shariah	The straight path; if humans follow this path, things will be in harmony	Salat	Prayer; second pillar of Islam	Minbar	Place in a mosque where the imam (prayer leader) speaks to the believers
Qur'an	The holy book of Islam; offers guidance on how to follow the shariah (straight path)	Zakat	Giving in charity; third pillar of Islam	Wudu	Ritual washing before prayer

KS2 Compulsory God (Hinduism)

What are **deities** and how do they connect with Hindu beliefs about God or the Ultimate Reality?

What should we know?

- That 'Hinduism' is an umbrella term for a collection of ways of living and is **monotheistic**. **Brahman** is the ultimate reality or life force
- That the Hindu **Trimurti** represents the cycle of life and helps Hindus worship **Brahman**. Other **deities** help Hindus understand more about **Brahman**.
- That the **atman** (soul) is a bit of **Brahman**; each living thing has an **atman**.
- The **atman** travels on the cycle of **samsara** (birth, death and reincarnation).
- The ultimate goal for Hindus is to break free from the cycle of **samsara** and reach **Moksha** (freedom from the cycle).
- Hindus believe they will get their **atman** (soul) closer to **Moksha** by fulfilling their **dharma** (duty).



What should we be able to do?

- Explain that the Ramayana is an important story for Hindus because it helps them understand why fulfilling your **dharma** (duty) is important
- Know that **moksha** is freedom from **samsara** and that it can be achieved by fulfilling your **dharma** by carrying out good **karma**
- Understand that Hindus get information about **Brahman**, the **atman**, **dharma** and **moksha** from a range of sources, including holy texts, religious leaders and family members

What words should we understand and be able to use?



Brahman	The Ultimate Reality or life force; there is a bit of Brahman in every living thing (atman)	Brahma	One of the Trimurti . The creator. Represents the beginning of life	Atman	The eternal soul. A bit of Brahman , the ultimate reality, that can be found in every living things
Monotheistic	Belief in one Ultimate Reality/God	Vishnu	One of the Trimurti . The preserver. Represents the preserving of life	Samsara	The cycle of birth, life, death and reincarnation that every atman travels on
Deity (plural = deities)	A god or goddess; a word used to refer to the different beings that represent different aspects of Brahman , the Ultimate Reality	Shiva	One of the Trimurti . The destroyer. Represents the ending of life	Moksha	The ultimate goal. Freedom from the endless cycle of samsara
Murti	An image of one of the deities	Lakshmi	Deity that represents good fortune and the good things in life. Companion of Vishnu	Dharma	Duty. By fulfilling their duty, Hindus believe they will achieve moksha
Trimurti	Three important deities that represent the cycle of life and enable Hindus to worship Brahman	Aum	Hindus believe this is the first sound made at creation. It is used in meditation and is a sacred symbol	Karma	Action - good actions help to fulfil dharma (duty) and this helps the atman (soul) to achieve moksha ; bad actions prevent humans from fulfilling their dharma (duty), which prevents them from reaching moksha