

## **Religious Studies – Y11 to Y12 Transition Work**

A Religious Studies A level usually comes in three parts, depending on your college would be dependent on the topics you will study. These are Philosophy, Ethics and Theology. If you are considering a Religious Studies A Level here are some different activities and exercises for you to try from home. Please note that some of the topics can be quite sensitive, so if the activity involves an issue that might upset you – please choose a different one.

### **Interesting Books**

The Brothers Karamazov – Fyodor Dostoevsky: a huge and important ‘classic’ book, which takes time and effort and is well worth both. Raises issues of God, evil, rivalry, loyalty ...

The Puzzle of... - Peter Vardy – this series of non-fiction books is about issues in religion and philosophy, very readable and you don’t have to be an expert to enjoy them. You can dip in and out of different chapters rather than having to start at the beginning and work through to the end.

Candide – Voltaire – another ‘classic’, this one takes a philosophical view of people’s approaches to evil and natural disaster. It’s a great book but the topics might be too difficult for you to cope with in the current circumstances, so try it if you want to but save it for more stable times if you don’t.

### **Critical thinking skills**

Here are a couple of activities to try, to start you off, and then a selection of other directions you might like to take:

#### **Activity 1:**

This is the first episode of a documentary about attitudes towards homosexuality.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMPI25oraVc>

This is the first episode of Stephen Fry’s series ‘Out There’, where he explores attitudes to homosexuality in different parts of the world.

Questions to think about and/or write about – try to support your answers with reasoning:

1. Do you think there is a ‘right’ attitude and a ‘wrong’ attitude towards homosexuality? What is it that makes these attitudes right or wrong?
2. Some people might argue that different cultures have different ideas about morality, and that these different cultural beliefs should be respected even if we don’t agree with them. Do you think we should always respect the beliefs and attitudes of cultures different from our own, or should we try to persuade them to adopt our own beliefs instead?
3. What do you think are the aims of this television series? Do you think they are good aims? Do you think this first episode is successful in achieving its aims?
4. What religious reasons do people sometimes give for opposing homosexual relationships? How would you support or oppose these views?

**Activity 2:** Watch this documentary, ‘Barra Boy’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhGX1YCsvAM>

1. Do you think the story provides convincing evidence for reincarnation? Why, or why not?

2. What do you think counts as 'convincing evidence' for life after death (e.g. scripture, near death experiences, nothing)? What makes evidence convincing or unconvincing?
3. Read the accounts in the gospels of the resurrection of Jesus (you could use [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) if you don't have a Bible at home):

- Matthew 28:1 – 10
- Mark 16: 1 – 8
- Luke 24: 1 – 10
- John 20: 1 – 18

4. Do you find these stories convincing? Why, or why not?

5. Do you think the stories contradict each other, or are they just told from different points of view, in your opinion? What might account for the differences and the similarities between the stories?

**Activity 3:** This is an online ethics textbook, Ethics for A Level by Mark Dimmock and Andrew Fisher. It will be a useful support throughout your course, so add it to your favourites!

**Read the introduction chapter and answer the questions at the end of the chapter. You can type or use lined paper.**

<https://www.openbookpublishers.com/reader/639#page/1/mode/2up>

**Activity 4:** As part of your A level course, you will most likely study Christian theology and it is therefore recommended that you know Jesus' story. Therefore you should read one of the 4 gospels of the Bible (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). I recommend Mark as it is the shortest! Or you could watch the Miracle Maker film.

### **Critical Thinking Reading List**

- The pig that wants to be eaten – Julian Baggini
- 50 Philosophy Ideas you must know -
- Think – Simon Blackburn
- The Blind Watchmaker, and/or The God Delusion – Richard Dawkins

These suggestions are only a few of the very many available, so don't worry if you can't get hold of these specific titles.

### **And some online resources:**

The Philosophy Man - [www.thephilosophyman.com](http://www.thephilosophyman.com) This website gives you lots of different ideas to think about. Some are for younger children but you could try the 'brainsqueezers'. These are good if you don't have too much time, or if you're finding it difficult to settle to anything more concentrated.

Philosophers Magazine – [www.philosophersmag.com](http://www.philosophersmag.com) Try the games on this website, and read the commentaries that go with them. Lots to think about!

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1A\\_CAKYt3GY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1A_CAKYt3GY) – Crash course philosophy: what is philosophy

### **Some things to watch and think about:**

All kinds of films and series have philosophical and religious ideas in them, so follow your own interests! You could try these, or choose something else, but try and use them as a stimulus for thinking and writing, rather than just sitting in front of them:

- The Good Place
- The Matrix
- Unorthodox
- Twelve Angry Men
- TED talks – these are usually wonderful, with plenty to stimulate your questioning and reasoning skills.

**Some interesting ones:**

- Elizabeth Loftus – how reliable is your memory?
- Dan Gilbert – why we make bad decisions
- Richard Dawkins – militant atheism
- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie – We should all be feminists
- Damon Horowitz – Philosophy in prison

There are loads of talks on here, so use the search engine to find topics that interest you. Practise note-taking; write notes as you listen, just as you would if you were listening to a real-life lecture, and practise the skill of jotting down key points at speed. Ask yourself questions when you get to the end: what were the speaker’s key messages? Do you agree with the speaker? What might someone who disagreed say, and what might their reasons be?

**Research skills**

There are all kinds of resources online and in books to help you, if you want to start to learn a little more about some of the philosophers you will meet in your A level course.

Use Wikipedia as a starting point and follow some of the links in the articles. You could do some research about:

- Plato
- Aristotle
- Aquinas
- Bentham
- Mill
- Hume
- Kant

Practice using a range of sources to find out about a single person. When you have gathered together range of information, try and produce it into a single piece of writing of your own.

**The BBC has some great podcasts available:**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01f0vzr> (They are quite long and heavyweight, don’t worry if this activity isn’t for you)

Practice your note-making skills by pausing and writing a summary of what you’ve heard so far. Think about whether you agree with what the philosopher is saying.

Listen to whatever takes your interest. For RS specifically, you could concentrate on the ones starred, and/or move onto others from this list:

- Plato’s Republic
- St Thomas Aquinas
- Augustine
- The Ontological Argument
- The Soul
- Redemption
- Kant
- Relativism
- Utilitarianism
- William James
- Nietzsche
- Al-Ghazali
- Good and Evil
- Altruism
- Feminism
- Evil
- Empiricism
- David Hume
- Logical Positivism
- Mill