

19. What makes a good society?

INTRODUCTION

Ask the children:

- What is your understanding of 'society'?
- What do you think 'good society' means?

Record responses to refer to in the activity sections later.

Explain that many people in history have tried to design an ideal or perfect society – these are sometimes called 'Utopias', after a book written by Sir Thomas More in the time of Henry VIII. The word 'Utopia' means 'No place'. Thomas More's book is an account of an ideal society but it appears that More himself thought that such a society was impossible, at least at the time when he lived.

If a perfect society cannot be achieved, perhaps a 'good' one can. One definition of a good society is that it is a place where everyone can live safely and be treated fairly.

Explain that people often remark on the way people in society act and you want the children to consider some examples and see how far they agree with what people say.

ACTIVITY

Ask them to put themselves somewhere along a continuum line, stretching across the room, with one end standing for 'totally agree' and the other end standing for 'totally disagree', according to their views about the following statements. Ask for volunteers to read each statement in turn:

"You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty" (Mahatma Gandhi).

"We must stop thinking of the individual and start thinking about what is best for society" (Hilary Clinton).

"I say what I want to say and I do what I want to do. There's no in between. People either love you for it or hate you for it" (Eminem).

After each statement, ask a few children on each side to explain their position. Keep this quite pacy. Then invite them to change their position on the line if they are persuaded by the arguments

and opinions of others and spend a bit of time exploring reasons for changing their minds.

Ask them to say which of the three statements they find most inspiring, and why.

Explain that part of the role of Government is to make laws to make society safe and fair for everyone. Local councils often work to improve areas and make them better places for people to live and work. This suggests that there are improvements that could be made to society.

ACTIVITY

Encourage the children to imagine that they are part of a team of people deciding who can go to a new planet to start a new society. Ask:

- Who do you want in your team?
- I wonder how you could make it a good society?

Provide the children with a list of people who have applied to start a society on the new planet with you. Which FIVE will you ask to join you? Note, the characters might turn out to be male or female, we are not told in advance!:

- 30 year old nurse, doesn't have much money.
- 25 year old fashion model.
- 38 year old pilot, has the flu.
- 35 year old Christian Aid charity worker, successful history of fund raising.
- 8 year old orphan, enjoys playing games.
- 50 year old MP, good leadership qualities, usually gets his/her own way.
- 21 year old builder, works hard to provide for her/his young family.
- 78 year old space enthusiast, very knowledgeable, hasn't flown before.
- 17 year old, got good exam results, is studying to be a police officer.
- 41 year old surgeon, has earned lots of money from successful operations.

Explain that this is all the information they have got to go on. They can choose just five of the above to start their good society on the

new planet. Let them know that they must be able to explain who they would chose to take and why, based on this information.

Allow time for them to present their argument to the other groups and time for each to question one of the others choices.

CONCLUSION

Religions and non-religious worldviews have offered many ideas for making the world a better place.

Share the idea of 'The Golden Rule' with the children:

'One should treat others as one would like others to treat oneself'.

In many religions and philosophies this is expressed as:
'Love your neighbour as yourself'.

Ask the children to reflect on (a) what the world would be like if people kept to the Golden Rule and (b) what factors appear to prevent people from doing so.

The session could be followed up with consideration of how society appears to value people differently. Are people like footballers or entertainers more valuable that those who take our rubbish away?