

A Roman Temple in The Ancient City of Petra

Yr. 6

Theme: Who or what is God?

Context: exploration of a ritual in an ancient temple in the ruined city of Petra, Jordan.

Overview of learning:

- To investigate Ancient Roman beliefs and rituals relating to their gods.
- To explore the specific ritual of sacrifice to the Roman gods.
- To understand that the Jewish people of the time worshipped one god and had a different set of beliefs to the Romans.

Interesting aspects:

- That some religions worship one god and others many gods.
- That the ritual of live sacrifice is used in some religions to honour / placate their deities.
- That people from different religions can live alongside each other, but in unequal circumstances.
- That a group of people might have to hide / suppress their beliefs through fear of persecution or punishment.

Inquiry questions:

- Why do some religions worship multiple gods and some one god?
- Why do religions have special rituals, ceremonies, clothes and places of worship?
- What was involved in an Ancient Roman ritual of a live sacrifice ?
- How can the beliefs of one group of people upset or offend the beliefs of another?

Narrative:

The year is AD 150. The date is October 15th, the date of the annual Great Chariot Race in Petra. A noble Roman family are celebrating the victory of their chariot. They know that one of the winning horses in their chariot team must now be sacrificed to Mars, the god of war, one of the most powerful gods. They are proud that their horse is to be sacrificed as it will bring them good fortune. Part of their household comprises a family of Jewish slaves. They have served in this household for generations. One of the

slaves is a boy who works in the stables, looking after the horses. His favourite horse is Mercury, a horse he has cared for since it was a foal. This is the horse that will be sacrificed at the Temple of Mars.

The noble family prepare for the sacrificial ceremony - their slaves have many jobs to do to get ready for the procession, the ritual at the temple and the banquet after the ceremony. It is the stable boy's duty to prepare his horse - washing, grooming and decorating it ready for the ceremony. He must then lead the horse in the procession and into the temple and follow the rituals for the preparation for its death.

Tasks:

1. Create words for the Roman gods, stating the sacrifice they demand and their reward for doing this.
2. Devise and describe the jobs for the slaves to do in preparation for the sacrificial ceremony.
3. Co-create how the horse is prepared for sacrifice, using the role of the stable boy.
4. Co-create the temple and the people in it using words / pictures / roles.
5. Enact the build up to the sacrifice using Teacher in Role to direct the proceedings and Children in Role as participants. Create ritual words / prayers.
6. Co-create the thoughts and feelings of the stable boy as he leaves the temple.
7. Discuss the philosophical, moral, and religious implications of what has happened, particularly in reference to the stable boy's beliefs.

Links to curriculum:

- **RE:** provoke challenging questions about the nature of reality and the being of god; develop awareness and understanding of different religious beliefs and practices; develop awareness of the influence of religion on individuals.
- **English:** create short pieces of writing in a specific style (ritual words / prayers); to read outloud using a formal tone.
- **History:** a short background to the early history of Petra; names of Roman gods; a Roman religious ritual.
- **Geography:** where Petra / Jordan are located on a world map.

Steps:

Step 1: Show image of steps - modern people going up - what are we noticing? Show image of doorway. What could this place be - how was it built and by who? 'The visitors to this place are not allowed to enter - they can only look through the doorway into a huge room that has been carved into the rock, like a cave. It is very dark inside - it takes a while for them to get used to the darkness. The bright sun outside makes it difficult to see what lies inside - it is so dark in there, but you can make out a few things amongst the shadows. There seems to be markings of some sort on the wall - words or inscriptions, maybe pictures? And at the very back of the room a large, rectangular block of stone.'

Step 2: 'Of course this place wasn't always like this. There was a time long ago, in fact over 2000 years ago, when that stone block was covered in blood, fresh blood - not human blood but the blood of an animal.' Ask students to offer ideas as to what the stone might be and what it might be used for? (*Show image of ancient altar if necessary - compare with image of modern altar*).

'The date is October 15th, 105AD. We are in the famous city of Petra in Jordan (*show on map if necessary*). This land is currently ruled by the Romans.' Ask students if they know anything about the Roman gods - names etc? Explain that the gods and goddesses demanded sacrifices to be made for them. These were often things like plants, food or drink, but sometimes animal sacrifices were made (Roman gods did not demand human sacrifices). In return for the sacrifice that god or goddess brought you good fortune in your life.

Give small groups slips of paper with the names of some of the gods and the animal sacrifice associated with them. Ask the group to come up with the words of the god, using an outline: "I am, the god of I am (*virtues e.g. strong, brave, wise*). I demand that you sacrifice a in my honour. If you do this you will have (*see template below*). Ask a member of the group or the group together to read the gods' words to the rest of the class. Choose the last group to read out the sacrifice that the god Mars demands.

Step 3: The place we have looked at in the picture is the Temple of Mars, the god of war, in Petra. Everyone that lives in Petra knows that October 15th is the day of the Great Chariot Race. Every noble family in the city has entered a chariot in the race. The winning family will receive a prize of 100 gold coins. The family also knows that one of

the horses on the winning team will be sacrificed on the next day at the Temple of Mars. This is a great honour.'

'We're going to have a look at a room in the house of the noble family whose chariot won the race.' Use two chairs to represent where the heads of the family are sitting. This family has people serving and working for them. They are not servants, but slaves, some of them Jewish slaves. Their parents and grandparents were slaves before them. It is the only life they know. There is one family of slaves who has served the family for many generations. They have to work hard but have always been treated kindly by their master and mistress. They have been secretly brought up in the Jewish faith, told to them by their mothers and fathers, but are not allowed to worship or follow the ways of their religion. Unlike the Romans, they believe in one god who created the world and who is with them, guiding them through every day. They find the beliefs and many gods of the Romans hard to understand.'

Choose a small number of CIR to be put into position of slaves, summoned to their owners to hear instructions for the day. TIR and AIR as heads of noble family. How are the slaves positioned? TIR to instruct slaves to prepare for the sacrificial ceremony. The house must be cleaned and made beautiful. Preparations must be made for the family to be bathed and their ceremonial clothes prepared. The sedan chairs must be prepared and decorated for the procession. (*Show images if necessary*). And finally a great banquet must be prepared for their return after the sacrifice. (*Don't mention preparation of horse yet!*)

Ask students to think about some of the jobs the slaves will need to do - talk with partner. TIR as chief slave of the household - slaves sit in circle and are asked to report back as to what they have done that morning.

Step 3: 'There is one slave we have not yet seen. He is a Jewish stable boy, the youngest son of his family who all serve in this house. It is his job to prepare one of the winning horses from the chariot team for the sacrifice. It is his favourite horse, Mercury. He has known the horse since he was a foal and has loved him and cared for him ever since. He is waiting to receive his instructions as to how to prepare Mercury for the sacrificial procession. His Jewish religion has taught him that animals are God's creation and should be cared for and respected. No man or woman should ever cause an animal needless pain. The master of the stable (TIR) will tell him what he needs to do.'

CIR to take it in turns to enact each instruction. *(Talk first about how he will be feeling as he does these tasks)*. *Instructions*: The horse will be carefully washed with a sponge. Then his coat is brushed. His tail and mane are combed, then tied into plaits, with coloured ribbons woven in. His hooves are clipped, then painted with gold. His eyes, nostrils and mouth are gently cleaned with a rag soaked in warm water. His bridle is placed on his head with further ribbons tied onto it. Finally a richly embroidered ornamental blanket is placed over his back. *(At this point the students could speak to the horse as they perform their job or voice their thoughts)*.

Step 4: We are going to look at the scene in the temple, building up to the sacrifice. Who is there? Who is conducting the ceremony? *(Look at images of Roman priests / priestesses - compare with images of modern Catholic priests)*. What writing / pictures are carved into the walls? *If time students could create an inscription or picture for the wall)*. Use dramatic imagination: What sort of lighting is there? What parts of the temple are in darkness; What sounds can be heard? What is moving? What is still? What will be the words / prayers of the priest before the sacrifice? *If time students could write down some of the words the priest might say - or just speak out ideas in role of priest*.

Create a circle of participants in the ceremony. TIR as high priest - stands with two other priests / priestesses (CIR). CIR as noble family, standing in prime position *(negotiate)*. Other attendees are placed around the temple. The stable boy (CIR) stands holding the horse's bridle - how will he be standing in relation to his horse? The high priest lights the fire in the fire bowl. He speaks his words and prayers (use as many ideas from students as possible), holding his hands together, palms up. He washes his hands and calls for silence. He covers his head with his robe and instructs the boy to remove the blanket and the ribbons from the horse. He then tells him to pull on the bridle to make the horse kneel. He hands the sacrificial knife to the boy and asks him to draw it across the horse's spine and then return it to him.

He asks the boy to now leave the temple. Group watch the boy walk slowly out. The door is closed behind him so he cannot see what is happening. Co-construct the position the boy takes as the door closes. What thoughts are going through his head? Can he hear anything from the temple behind? Students to take it in turns to stand behind the boy and speak his thoughts.

If time, reflect on what has happened. What will happen to the boy in the future?

Resources:

Slides showing various images: steps to temple; entrance to temple; Roman priests etc.

List of Roman gods and their chosen sacrifices (see below).

Outline templates of the words of the gods for students to fill in.

Words / prayers of the high priest (see below).

Background:

Petra is an ancient, ruined city in the country of Jordan. It consists of a series of beautifully carved temples and tombs, among other buildings, , carved into the rose coloured rock - hence also known as 'Rose City'. The site remained unknown to the western world until 1812.

It is now a famous tourist site, visited by thousands of people every year. Visitors are not allowed inside the tombs and temples, but can look in through the doorways. In 312 BC Petra was the capital city of the Arab Nabateans (nomadic Arabs) and an important place on one of the great trading routes from the East to the West. The Nabateans worshipped Arab gods and goddesses. Petra is also important to the Jews - it is said to be the place where Moses struck a rock with his staff and water came forth.

In 106 AD Petra was absorbed into the Roman Empire.

For details about Roman sacrificial rituals, see the steps above.

Websites:

www.roman-empire.net/religion/sacrifice.

www.romanarmy.net/sacrifices

http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism/jewishethics/animals_1.shtml

Ideas for future activities:

Talk about own beliefs in god: what have you been taught? How do our own beliefs differ?

Talk about other religions' belief in god/s. Do they all involve some sort of judgement on their life and some sort of afterlife? How do we know which one is 'right'?

What about people who don't believe in god? Do they have an afterlife? Do they lead better / worse lives as a result of not believing in god?

Write a description of the sacrificial ceremony (using elements of dramatic imagination).

Write in full the words accompanying the ceremony.

Write down instructions for how the horse was groomed / prepared for the ceremony.

Listen to the type of music that might accompany the ceremony (it was traditionally flute music) .Great website for music clips: www.audionetwork.com

Design the ceremonial blanket that was put on the horse.

Find out how the animals were finally killed and what happened to their bodies.

Find out about food that would be served at a Roman feast: design the banquet.

Draw pictures / write about the Roman Gods.

Find out more about Ancient Roman beliefs / Jewish beliefs.

How did the Jews migrate from Ancient Egypt and find their 'promised land'?

Find out about why Jews were enslaved in the Roman Empire.

Look at map of Jordan in relation to other countries. What is Jordan like now?
Landscape / climate / cities?

What is the city of Petra like now? Why do so many people visit it?

Continue the narrative: what did the boy do next? What happened to him? (This could be done using drama strategies or written as a story.) Go back to the time when the boy was told by his family about Jewish beliefs - secret conversations - secret prayers / observances.

Jupiter - King of the gods.

A bull.

Juno - a goddess who is a protector and adviser.

A white cow.

Neptune - god of the sea.

A fish.

Venus - goddess of love.

A dove.

Apollo - god of the sun.

Nine lambs.

Pluto - god of death. *A goat.*

Saturn - god of time. *A goose.*

Diana - goddess of the moon and
hunting. *A deer.*

Minerva - goddess of wisdom.

A lamb.

Mars - god of war.

A bull. But on October 15th of each year the sacrifice must be a horse from the leading team that won the Great Chariot Race.

Template for words of the gods:

I am, the god / goddess of

.....

I am (*strong, brave , wise etc*)

I demand that you sacrifice a in my honour.

Details about animal:

.....

.....

If you do this you will be:

.....

.....

Idea for words of high priest:

'Today we make a sacrifice to Mars, the great and powerful god of war. He demands the sacrifice of a horse from the winning team in the Great Chariot Race. The horse has been duly prepared and is grateful to die on this day. His owners will be rewarded by good fortune and victory in any future battles. Mars will lay his blessings on us all for this deed. Praise be to the great god Mars.'

