

Concept cracking is a technique used for making religious stories, festivals, practices, biography and concepts accessible to children. In this magazine, the technique is applied to Christian material, but it works with a wide variety of subjects, including topics from other religions. The technique focuses the pupils' attention on one main idea (two at the most). Activities are then designed to explore that idea.

It also gives continuity and progression as it allows pupils to revisit material at different levels, which is particularly useful with stories which are told

many times. As only one or two ideas are explored at any time, the teacher can revisit the same subject focusing on a different idea.

Concept cracking has four main stages which can be remembered by the acronym U.S.E.R. (see the example below).

Concept cracking is a planning structure, it is not necessarily the order in which material is taught. For example, teachers can start with the religious material and then move to the experience section, or start with the reflection and then go to the relevance section.

Concept Cracking a Christian Teaching: 'Shine like a star in space' (page 26)

U npack

The teacher unpacks and lists the religious ideas contained in the teaching.

Example: Being different / standing out for the right reasons / setting an example.

S elect

The teacher selects one idea, or at the most two, on which to focus. These can be rephrased as learning outcomes.

Example: To understand that Christians believe they should be different / stand out for the right reasons.

E xperience of the child

The teacher explores the children's experience as an introduction to the idea. This could mean talking about something which has happened, reading a story, using drama or poetry on the subject. Whatever is done should relate the idea to the children's experience.

Example: Shopkeepers make 'diamonds' noticeable by placing them on dark velvet (demonstrate with costume jewellery). Talk about stars and how they show up on a dark night.

R eligious material

The teacher introduces the religious material (in this case the Christian teaching) and designs a learning activity which explores the idea being taught.

Example: Read the biblical material. Explain its meaning (see pages 25-26).

Activity: Paint a star against a dark background.

Underneath write the verse and explain its meaning.

R elevance

Link the biblical material to Christian belief and practice today.

Example: Christians believe that they should do what is right, even if other people do not. This might make them stand out, but it is better to be noticed for doing right rather than wrong.

R eflexion (Personal search/response)

Give pupils time and the opportunity to respond at whatever level is appropriate for them. This might be private, as a time of open sharing can be intimidating. On the activity sheets there are 'Think about it' sections, which fulfil the same function. These do not require a written or spoken response: they are purely personal reflections.

Example: Think about a time when everyone around you was doing wrong and you did not join in. The Bible calls that 'shining like a star'.