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Foreword

Materials for School

These materials come from an exciting exhibition generously funded by the Community Development Foundation: Faiths in Action Grant, organised by the Diocese of Bristol and Bristol Muslim Cultural Society. It was hosted by Bristol City Council in the Central Library.

The exhibition was the culmination of a project that brought together young Muslims and Christians aged 11-17 to make art, to discuss their faith, and to examine what is shared, what is unique and what it is like to be a young person of faith living in today's world.

At the outset we had no real way of knowing the outcome of the project and what its legacy might be. The project was taken in different directions and was shaped by the views and artistic expressions of the participants. One important aspect we had not envisaged was the power of the shared canvas - by physically negotiating the same space young people were obliged to compromise and work together pragmatically as well as through words and ideas.

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The first section of materials 'goldfish-bowls' the artwork made, inviting students and young people to follow the same process and encouraging dialogues similar to ones held by those involved in the project.

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The second section of materials forms something of a postscript. These materials place this dialogue and exhibition within the context of modern Britain, where religious commitments can be difficult to hold and are contentious to some people with secular world views.

The young people involved in the project found that one shared experience was that of being bullied and picked on for holding a faith. The materials explore those experiences. The visitors' book revealed that some people felt an art exhibition with religious themes should not be shown in a publicly funded space. Letters of complaint were also sent to the Library. These first-hand comments provide a rich insight into the vibrant national debate about the place of belief in modern Britain and provide for a potentially lively enquiry.

It is anticipated that these materials could sit well within a weekly timetabled lesson or as part of a whole 'creative encounter' day. Unless we can stimulate in our young a critical pride in their own beliefs, an openness, curiosity and even affection towards the beliefs of others, we will fail to secure a peaceful future for our world.

It is hoped that these materials can help to equip young people to create a more informed understanding and respect for difference.

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