

# Learning to fly in Religion, Philosophy and Ethics (RPE)

RPE can be explored and enjoyed in a variety of ways outside of the classroom. This subject is always in the news and is vital to understanding the world. To get the most out of your studies in RPE, you will need to be interested in both the big questions and the small details – from **'What is the meaning of life?'** to **'Why would someone tie a box to their head in order to pray?'** To follow up these questions and to inspire more, you need to keep your eyes open and your ear to the ground. Hopefully this will show you how to do that.

These are the skills and habits which outstanding students of RPE develop. Do as many of these as possible to become completely independent in the subject and to develop the skills and knowledge needed to attain 8/9 at GCSE and A\* at A Level. **Remember that just doing what your teacher tells you - in your lessons and beyond - is not enough to develop your full potential in the subject.**

## In your lessons

- Asking questions is a positive thing! Try asking more questions in lessons.
- Contributing to class discussion – volunteer your ideas/opinions and comment on those of others to help to develop your thinking skills.
- Think carefully about your opinions and try to justify them with reasoning and argument.
- Think critically about ideas – try to identify strengths, weaknesses and contradictions.
- Make thorough notes. Whether you have a powerpoint/handout to annotate or are working on lined paper, always jot down additional information/ideas that your teacher or classmates raise during the lesson.
- Make connections with other topics/subjects or news items.
- RPE involves lots of pair and group work. This is a crucial part of your learning and not an opportunity for a rest! Experiment with different ideas and stay on task.

## Between your lessons

- **Reading** - Don't rely purely on one textbook. You will be provided with additional reading materials in class and via email. Always read these fully and make notes on them. Try to bring up this wider reading in class and in your essays.
- Ensure you have a list of **practice questions** for each topic from your teacher, the exam board website or from the textbook. Identify the most challenging and **produce plans or write the essays** out to ensure you are prepared for even the trickiest questions. Hand these plans and essays to your teachers for marking. They will be more than happy to do so.
- When you receive marked work, **improve it until it would receive full marks**. If you don't know how, ask your teacher or another student whom you consider an 'expert'.
- **Review and analyse model answers**. Identify strengths and weaknesses of the essays and use them the next time you are completing an answer.
- Always start your homework in good time so that you have time and space to think about the ideas and discuss with family and friends.

## Beyond your lessons

- Be tenacious in asking your teachers for extra help and asking for an appointment to see them outside of lessons.
- Visit the well-stocked RPE section of the school library. Ask Mrs Cheyne for details of new arrivals and your teachers for recommendations which suit your particular interests.
- Watch **Ted talks** by contemporary philosophers such as **Peter Singer** or **Sam Harris**.

- Listen to podcasts such as **Panpsycast** or **Philosophy Bites**.
- Attend free lectures in London such as those run by the **Royal Society of Philosophy**.
- There are a couple of great journals for RPE A Level – you could either subscribe yourselves or back copies are kept in the library: **Dialogue**, **RS Review**, **Philosophy Now**.
- Read news article and try to spot stories with a religious, ethical or philosophical angle. Try to use them as examples in your essays.
- Discuss your ideas with family and friends. See if you can persuade them to agree with you

### Taking your learning further

In RPE we acknowledge that no one learns alone. We need to be enthusiastic listeners, disciplined thinkers and fair evaluators. We need to meet new ideas, different people and fresh outlooks if we are to grow as human beings, let alone do well in exams! This subject belongs to us all.

Newstead is made up of **Sikhs, feminists, atheists, humanists, Muslims, Christians, existentialists, Buddhists, materialists, Jews, political activists and Hindus**, as well as combinations of those labels that you may not realise were possible.

Perhaps one of the first ways you can develop your understanding further is to look up one of those labels to discover something about those around you. Welcome to the adventure that is RPE! One of the most popular books is **The Philosophy Files series by Stephen Law**. Law provides an excellent introduction to ideas that we study all the way through school, even up to Y13. Don't let that daunt you! Stephen Law writes in an incredibly engaging way and the cartoons are often the reason why you may see a gently chuckling philosopher in the library.

Ethical issues can be discovered in all subjects from Science to PE and are all around us in the media. Film, Cinema and DVD's can prompt you to ponder philosophical, religious and ethical themes.

**The Life of Pi** is a fabulous film which explores one boy's adventures through the world of ideas and faiths in a warm, colourful and visually entrancing way.

For those of you who like the cinema, you might be surprised how many films have an ethical, religious or philosophical element. **The Imitation Game** is a fascinating historical film about the work of **Alan Turing** in the breaking of the Enigma code in WW2 which covers some meaty ethical topics.

**The Truman Show** is an excellent introduction to thinking about whether we merely accept reality as it first appears to us, or whether we yearn to question and to be free. These are just a few films that are age appropriate. As you get older, there are even more films open to you. Perhaps you could keep a film journal and record your thoughts.

### Listen to the Radio

- **BBC Radio 4 Beyond Belief** is a discussion programme that looks at various religions and philosophical themes.
- **BBC Radio 4 In Our Time** is a must for A'level students of any subject. In Our Time can be challenging. The quality of speakers is superb. Explore the archive and expand your mind.
- **BBC Radio 4 Moral Maze** As the title suggests, this is a debate programme about moral issues. The moral issues surrounding medical ethics, responses to poverty and suffering, equality, justice etc. are all argued out.

### Follow these on Twitter

- **@alaindebotton** – writer, mostly of 'Religion for Atheists'

- **@IslamicThinking** – Updates on Islamic charities, scripture quotes and general encouragement and wisdom for Muslims on Twitter.
- **@BHAhumanists** – British Humanist Association. A national charity working on behalf of non-religious people who seek to live ethical and fulfilling lives based on reason and humanity
- **@ABCJustin** – Archbishop of Canterbury, with others encourages flourishing, reconciled churches which love and worship Jesus and seek to change the world.
- **@RevRichardColes** – Cleric and broadcaster, former Communion, co presenter of Saturday Live, Parish Priest of Finedon.
- **@Microphilosophy** – follow the website of writer and philosopher Julian Baggini
- **@giles\_fraser** - English Anglican priest, journalist and broadcaster. He is currently the priest-in-charge at St Mary's, Newington, near the Elephant and Castle, south London, and writes a weekly Friday column for The Guardian, as well as appearing frequently on BBC Radio 4.
- **@StephenLaw60** - Dr Stephen Law philosopher; author, The War for Children's Minds. Dr Stephen Law is a humanist and author of the Oxford University Press Very Short Introduction to Humanism.
- **@DalaiLama** – The official feed of the Office of His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama.