

Activity ideas – Deadly sins and Acts of Mercy

Visit the Rosslyn Chapel website for a virtual reality tour of the Chapel: www.rosslynchapel.com

Background info	Activity	What you will need	Curriculum
<p>In amongst the sins is placed one act of mercy (giving water to the thirsty), and in amongst the acts of mercy is placed one sin (greed). This may have been a simple mistake on the part of the original stone carvers, or it may have been a deliberate choice, or it may have been a mistake made by the Victorian restoration team when they reassembled the pieces of the architrave. We will never know for sure. Whether or not it was deliberate, the 'mistake' gives us a wonderful opportunity to think about and debate the moral issue of good and bad behaviour.</p> <p>In Christianity, our behaviour affects our relationship with God and, ultimately, what happens to us after we die. For medieval people this was a very serious issue indeed. They believed that by carrying out good deeds, such as the seven acts of mercy, they could earn themselves a place in Heaven. Nowadays there is dispute amongst different types of Christians on whether or not we can 'earn' a place in Heaven, but in medieval times this was what the Church taught.</p>	<p>In groups, consider the following statements and decide which one (or more) you think is expressed by the 'mistake' in the Chapel stone. You could also add a statement of your own if you have more ideas. Hold a debate on the statement(s) you choose.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> There is no such thing as good and bad Good and bad do exist There are good people and there are bad people No one can be wholly good, and no one can be wholly bad <p>There is a popular expression, 'the road to Hell is paved with good intentions'. Think about this statement and what it means. Can you think of a time when it applied to you or someone you know? If someone intends a good thing but it turns out badly, does this mean that they are a good person or a bad person, both or neither?</p>	<p>Just yourselves! Although it may be helpful to have pencil and paper to make notes.</p>	<p>Values and issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adaptable to different levels within RME 02a, RME 02b <p>Development of beliefs and values:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adaptable to different levels within RME 09b, RME 09c, also RME 4-09e Also adaptable to different levels within LIT 02a

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<p>Some of the words that are used to describe the seven deadly sins are a bit old-fashioned. This is because they have been used for a very long time and have become part of tradition. It might be easier to understand them today if we used different words instead.</p> <p>The words describe a general feeling, even though they are often shown in art using specific scenarios. For example, 'pride' doesn't just mean being proud of owning expensive clothes like the man in the stone carving – you could be excessively proud of your own achievements or which family or community you belong to. Equally, although 'lust' is often shown by a romantic couple desiring each other, it can also be applied to any excessive desire – for example you could lust after a new X-box or a new hairstyle. The point is, that when you feel the feeling of pride or lust and it becomes strong enough to have control over you and your thoughts, then you could describe yourself as committing a deadly sin.</p>	<p>Use the Seven Deadly Sins exercise sheet to explore how the sins might appear in modern life.</p> <p>Look at the definition of the sins, and at the pictures of the seven deadly sins from the medieval Rosslyn stone carvings. The carvings show the best way medieval people could imagine people committing the seven deadly sins in their time. What would be the best way to show them being committed today? Can you think of some modern day scenarios for each sin?</p> <p>In groups, discuss what you think the long term consequences might be for people committing the sins in your scenarios. Use your imagination, what you have seen of life and your own self knowledge to predict some long term consequences for both the people sinning and the other people who might be affected. For example, think if you have ever felt envious of someone. Was it a momentary feeling or did it last a long time? Did it change your behaviour in any way? Did it affect your decisions and actions, and for the positive or the negative? What if you went on feeling that way and couldn't stop? You don't have to share your own experiences with the others in your group, but bring your knowledge and insight to the group activity.</p> <p>Do you agree that these sins are 'deadly'? Are they even 'sins' at all?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free downloadable seven deadly sins exercise sheet • Dictionary and thesaurus (hard copy or online) 	<p>Values and issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaptable to different levels within RME 02a, RME 02b • Also adaptable to different levels within SOC 04a, LIT 14a, LIT 15a

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<p>The stone carvers lived in the 15th century, and their scenes showing the sins and acts of mercy are set in their own time, showing the world they knew. The person full of pride is wearing a medieval tunic, cloak and hat, the woman tending the sick person is wearing a large medieval headdress, and the prison is a medieval castle. These pictures are valuable in showing us how medieval people lived and what they looked like.</p> <p>However, the sins and acts of mercy themselves are timeless. You can be as greedy today as people were in the 15th century, and you can also give to those in need.</p>	<p>Draw a picture of someone demonstrating an act of mercy in the modern day. Think about how we do some of the acts of mercy in our society – e.g. taking clothes to a charity shop or putting food in the food bank trolley at the supermarket. How would you show this to someone living 500 years from now?</p> <p>As a class, put your drawings together to make a modern day 'seven acts of mercy'. You could put them above your classroom door or windows, to imitate a real architrave.</p> <p>If you want a harder challenge, draw a picture expressing one of the seven deadly sins. A sin is an abstract concept rather than an act, which makes it more difficult to portray in art. Think about your own life for some inspiration. Have there been times when you have felt angry, lazy or greedy? Can you show that feeling in a drawing? You don't have to draw a scene with characters – just try to draw or paint the feeling use colour and shape. How does it make you feel to try?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper • Pencils, crayons or paint 	<p>Values and issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaptable to different levels within RME 02a, RME 08a • Also adaptable to different levels within SOC 04a – comparing past societies with our own

Seven Deadly Sins Exercise Sheet

Sin	Definition (look these words up yourself to see if you can define them better)	Medieval scenario (in Rosslyn carvings)	Modern day scenario(s)	Long term consequences
Pride	Extremely high opinion of oneself – could also be external material things that you associate with yourself, not just your own person	Man showing off fancy clothes – tunic, cloak and hat		
Greed	Excessive desire for things especially wealth or possessions	Man grasping bag (of money?) to himself		
Anger (sometimes called <i>wrath</i>)	Strong and energetic feeling of displeasure	Man brandishing a halberd (medieval weapon that combined spear and battle axe)		
Envy	A feeling of discontent with your situation compared with someone else's	Man kneeling with arms crossed over chest (why do you think this might be?)		
Lust	An overpowering desire or craving for something	Man and woman embracing		
Gluttony	Excessive consumption of something – usually food or drink but it could apply to anything that can be consumed	Man drinking straight from a flagon (presumably wine or beer)		
Sloth	Habitual laziness and disinclination to exert yourself	Man standing limp, thin and ragged		

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<p>It is sometimes difficult to see how an individual can carry out an act of mercy effectively by themselves. It can be easier to do it through an organisation which has greater resources in one place – people, money, infrastructure.</p> <p>In medieval times many of the Acts of Mercy would have been carried out through the agency of the Church: for example, a person’s way of ‘burying the dead’ would have been to pay money to a priest to carry it out, and very often people would give money to the church with the intention that it would be spent as ‘alms to the poor’ – food, clothing, medicine etc.</p> <p>Nowadays the acts of mercy are often carried out by charities. Each charity has a specialisation – a specific thing it does, for specific people who need it. A charity will have staff (or volunteers) with expertise who can carry out the act of mercy effectively, and it will have people whose job it is to manage their resources so that they can go to the right people in the right place at the right time. These charities depend on financial donations and volunteers, and giving money or time to a charity is one way in which ordinary people can contribute to a modern act of mercy.</p>	<p>Research charities that carry out acts of mercy today. For example, there are charities like Friends of the Elderly that contribute to funeral expenses for those who can’t afford it – this is the modern equivalent of ‘burying the dead’.</p> <p>Use the acts of mercy exercise sheet to help you. Find a charity for each act of mercy. Research the charity and find out exactly what it does and who it helps.</p> <p>As a class, choose a charity from your list and decide how you can help it carry out a modern act of mercy. Will you hold a fundraising event? If so, what will you do? Hold your event and see how much you can raise for the charity of your choice!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free downloadable seven acts of mercy exercise sheet • Internet 	<p>Values and issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaptable to different levels within RME 02a, RME 02b, RME 09d • Also adaptable to different levels within SOC 04a, LIT 14a

Seven Acts of Mercy Exercise Sheet

Act of Mercy	Charity	What the charity does and where (is it local, national, international?)	Plan your act of mercy here! Choose your charity and plan an event or action to support it.
Burying the dead	Friends of the Elderly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributes to funeral expenses for elderly people (amongst other things) • UK nationwide charity 	
Feeding the hungry			
Giving water to the thirsty			
Clothing the naked			
Sheltering the homeless			
Visiting the sick			
Visiting those in prison			