



### Christian Life and Worship trail – teachers’ notes

Thank you for downloading this resource. We hope that it will be a useful teaching tool during your visit to Westminster Abbey.

As we continue to grow our free catalogue of teaching resources, we’d really appreciate a few minutes of your time to let us know what you liked and what could be improved. Please complete this [five-question survey](#).

All Bible references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

#### 1) The cloisters

Circle – God is eternal and has no beginning and no end

Trefoil – The Trinity: one God worshipped as three distinct persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit)

Quatrefoil – The four Gospels - books in the Bible about the life of Jesus

Westminster Abbey is full of shapes with special meanings. As you move through the Abbey, encourage pupils to look all around them to spot examples of these and other interesting shapes. You may find them in the windows, walls, ceilings and amongst the monuments.

‘Sacred geometry’ is the term used for giving sacred or special meaning to geometric shapes used in the design and building of holy places. These shapes reflect the perfection of God.

*Enter the Abbey.*

#### 2) The nave

Pupils could lift their arms up towards the ceiling, bringing their hands together to make a tall, pointed arch.

How does this space make you feel? Encourage pupils to be still for a moment, to look around and be aware of how they feel standing in this space. You might want to provide prompts such as, ‘My first impression is ...’ or ‘This building makes me feel ...’

Can you think of any other reasons why coloured glass may have been used?

- To create a special atmosphere – you might see the effect of sunlight shining through coloured glass. To Christians, this reflects the magnificence of God.
- The use of different colours also communicates idea and meanings to people. For example, blue can represent heaven and green can represent growth and rebirth.

For some, their first experience of the Abbey can be overwhelming. Pupils may wish to talk to a trusted adult about any emotions they are feeling.

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# Westminster Abbey

## Learning



### 3) The Coronation Chair and Richard II portrait

What clue in the portrait tells us that a coronation is a Christian ceremony? (Students should look at the full portrait rather than the cropped image on the trail to answer this question) **King Richard II is holding the orb, one of the famous Crown Jewels used during coronations. The sphere of the orb represents the Earth and the cross above it represents God's authority over the world.**

Richard II was only ten years old when he was crowned. Depending on the age of your pupils, this can be a nice link to make. You could ask how they would feel being crowned.

A coronation is a religious ceremony – this is why it takes place in a church. The monarch makes important promises to both the people they serve, and to God. They also receive Holy Communion, which is explained in more detail at stop 7) 'The High Altar', where coronations take place. The Coronation Chair has been used at nearly every coronation since 1308 (over 700 years).

*Ask to be let through the barrier by one of the Abbey Marshals.*

### 4) Unknown Warrior

Do you recognise the red flowers? What do they make you think of? **These are poppies. They may remind pupils of Remembrance Day (11th November), when people wear poppies to remember those who have died in war.**

Fill in the missing word: **'In Christ, shall all be made ... alive.'**

You could explain to pupils that although visitors are allowed to walk on other graves in the Abbey, no-one is allowed to walk on this grave. You could ask them to consider why. The Unknown Warrior represents all who have died in armed conflict – one person represents millions of people. No-one walks on this grave as mark of respect for all those killed in battle.

'In Christ, shall all be made alive' comes from the Bible (1 Corinthians 15:22). Christians believe that Jesus died in order that everyone else might be saved and have everlasting life (life after death). Jesus' death was a sacrifice in the same way that the Unknown Warrior represents those who sacrifice their lives for others during times of conflict.

### 5) Candles

**Pupils are welcome to light a candle with adult supervision (please remind pupils to be careful of sleeves and long hair) or you could light one candle as a group.**

In the Bible, Jesus says, 'I am the Light of the World.' Discuss: What might he have meant by this? You could ask pupils what they associate with light, for example guiding us in the dark, keeping us safe, allowing us to see and celebrations. Christians believe that Jesus is the light of the world; that he came to light up a dark world with his promise of love and peace (John 8:12).

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# Westminster Abbey

## Learning



Westminster Abbey is a Christian place of worship, but all are welcome to light a candle regardless of personal belief. You might wish to ask pupils if light is important in their own belief or other religions they might know about.

Candles can also be a symbol of prayer. The flame going upwards reminds Christians of their prayers being lifted up to God. The two candle stations each have an icon (a devotional painting of a religious figure) hanging above them. They represent Mary (the mother of Jesus) with baby Jesus, and the adult Jesus. These panels remind visitors that Westminster Abbey is a working and worshipping church.

*Make your way to the golden quire screen and walk through.*

### 6) The quire

Can you spot the large organ that sometimes accompanies them? (Clue: look up for grey pipes). **The organ can be found above the golden screen that you just walked through. You may notice the grey organ pipes against the walls.**

Discuss: Do you like singing? What is your favourite song? **You could ask pupils if any of them are part of a choir. You can also ask them to each share their favourite song.**

Colours are used to remind Christians of important ideas.

- Blue - heaven
- Gold - God
- Red - royalty

Tick off each colour as you find it. **There are lots of examples of these colours in the quire.**

Remind pupils that as well as colours having special meanings in churches, shapes also have special meanings. This area of the Abbey is a good place to look for the circles, trefoils and quatrefoils mentioned previously. Decorative features inside a church are usually designed to remind Christians of important ideas.

Music has always been a very important part of daily worship at the Abbey. The organ is played at the daily choral services and the choir sing in the Abbey's daily services.

### 7) The High Altar

How might his friends have felt? How might Jesus have felt? Write your ideas in the thought bubbles. **You might wish to facilitate discussion by asking each pupil for their thoughts.**

# Westminster Abbey

## Learning



Can you find the ...



**Pulpit** – the priest speaks from here

**Altar** – a special table used during Holy Communion

**Lectern** – the Bible is read from here

Christians remember Jesus' sacrifice and his Last Supper by eating bread and drinking wine during Holy Communion. The events of the Last Supper are told in the four Gospels - you might like to read one of the accounts back at school (Matthew 26: 17-30, Mark 14: 12-26, Luke 22: 7-38, John 13: 1-32).

Holy Communion is a **sacrament** where people receive God's special blessing. A sacrament is defined as 'an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace'. Some churches teach that taking part in the sacraments brings Christians closer to God. The Church of England teaches that there are two sacraments: The Eucharist (Holy Communion) and baptism.

Encourage pupils to look up to understand that they are standing in the centre of a cross-shaped church. The cross is the key symbol of Christianity.

You might like to continue thinking about colour at the High Altar. The colour of the altar cloths changes according to the Christian calendar. You could ask pupils to look at the High Altar and work out the time of the church year in which you are visiting:

- Gold is used at the two most special celebrations in the church year: Easter and Christmas.
- Green marks 'Ordinary Time', which is any time that falls outside Christmastide, Eastertide, Advent and Lent. Green represents growth and rebirth.
- Dark red is often seen to represent Advent – the time used to prepare for Christmas.
- Red marks 'Pentecost', Palm Sunday and 'Holy Week'. Some churches use blue.
- Plain cloth marks the time of Lent, usually covering the altar and surrounding decorations. Ask your pupils why decorations might be covered during Lent. As the period before Easter, Lent is a sombre time of reflection and preparation.

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# Westminster Abbey

## Learning



### 8) The Queen's Window

Look around and choose your favourite stained-glass window. **Ask pupils to describe the window they like best and explain why. Do they prefer modern or traditional windows?**

Design your own special window here. **Encourage pupils to think about some of their favourite shapes or patterns in general, or perhaps those they have seen on their visit.**

The artist David Hockney was asked to design a new stained-glass window – it was unveiled in 2018. As a living church, art is still being added to the Abbey today. Hockney chose to use vibrant colours and described the window as “a celebration.” This activity could lead into a bigger piece of work back at school where pupils design their own window for the Abbey.

### 9) St Edward's Shrine

Discuss: Have you ever been on a pilgrimage or made a special journey to somewhere important to you? **Pupils might have been to a holy place such as Iona, Lourdes, Jerusalem, Mecca or Varanasi. Lots of faiths take part in pilgrimages and have different pilgrimage sites. Pupils may have been on a special journey to places that are important to them. For example, a football stadium, Disneyland or a place linked to their family.**

Please note that the Shrine is not open to the general public as it is very old and fragile. However, prayers are offered here several times a day.

King Edward the Confessor built Westminster Abbey and was buried here in 1066. In 1161 he was canonised (made a saint). When the Abbey was rebuilt from the 1240s onward, St Edward's body was moved into this new Shrine. Later kings and queens chose to be buried as close to him as possible because of their belief that the closer you were to a saint, the closer you would be to God. You can spot the tombs, buried in a semi-circle around the Shrine, including Edward I, Henry III, Eleanor of Castille and Henry V.

### 10) The Lady Chapel

Which 'lady' in the Bible do you think the Lady Chapel is named after? **It is named after 'Our Lady' Mary, the mother of Jesus. The chapel has an altar with a painting of Mary, which can help pupils with the answer. A lady chapel is found in most large churches.**

Why do you think the font might be placed near the entrance? **Fonts are traditionally placed at the entrance to a church (or chapel) because baptism marks the start of the Christian journey. Those being baptised are welcomed into the Christian faith. When Christians enter the chapel to pray, the font may remind them of their own baptism into the faith.**

The entrance to the Lady Chapel gets very crowded, so ask pupils to have a quick look at the font and then move forwards into the chapel. The beautiful ceiling represents heaven. Encourage pupils to look up at the walls and see if they can spot rows of carved saints and angels. A fun fact to

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# Westminster Abbey

## Learning



share is that employees of Westminster Abbey are allowed to get married in this chapel and have their children baptised here too!

As previously mentioned, baptism is a **sacrament**. Christians believe it's an important ceremony because Jesus was baptised. Jesus' baptism is told in three Gospels – you might like to read one of the accounts back at school (Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11 and Luke 3:21-22). Some Christian parents choose to have their child baptised as a baby, while others prefer to wait until a child is old enough to choose to be baptised for themselves.

### 11) Poets' Corner

Is there anything you believe in that you can't see? **Ask pupils what they think. Answers could include scientific or natural things such as gravity, sound, electricity, wind and heat, or emotional concepts such as love, peace, justice, goodness and truth.**

The Bible tells us that St Thomas would not believe that Jesus had really come back to life until he had seen him with his own eyes. Jesus invited Thomas to touch him to prove he was really alive. When you get back to school you could look up the Bible story (John 20: 24-29).

During the medieval period, the Abbey would have been filled with wall paintings like this one. Most people couldn't read, so these paintings reminded people of important Christian stories. Many have been lost, but these paintings (which are over 700 years old) survived because they were hidden behind monuments for centuries. They were rediscovered by a cleaner in 1934.

### 12) The cloisters

*Return to the cloisters.*

If you have time at the end of your visit, you could sit in the cloisters sketching and reflecting. Encourage pupils to look for interesting shapes. They can also write down their favourite thing about their visit, something that surprised them or that they want to find out more about.