

THE BIG FRIEZE

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UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIANITY

TEXT IMPACT CONNECTIONS



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the *Understanding Christianity: Text Impact Connections* Big Frieze!

Artist Emma Yarlett has created a wall frieze to illustrate seven of the eight core concepts that are explored in the *Understanding Christianity* materials. Effectively, this presents a view of the 'big story' of the Bible – an artist's response to the approach used in the *Understanding Christianity* materials.

The following pages take you through each panel of the frieze, making connections with the core concepts. Some features are pointed out, along with some discussion points and age-related questions for use in the classroom.

A rough timeline is included to help you to show pupils where the frieze fits with the Bible texts, and with the historical context.

The Big Frieze is designed to give you the opportunity to make pupils aware of the wider context of each concept, unit and text studied in *Understanding Christianity*. Reminding pupils regularly of where a particular text occurs within the 'big story', by pointing it out on the Big Frieze, helps to build up a coherent understanding of the core concepts and the relationship between them.

CORE CONCEPTS AND THE 'BIG STORY' OF THE BIBLE

The next double page spread gives brief outlines of the core concepts explored in *Understanding Christianity*, illustrated in the Big Frieze, as part of the 'big story' of salvation.

The account on p.2-3 and the concepts included represent one way to make sense of Christian belief and practice. The brief version below is necessarily simplified, and there are other ways of understanding Christian teaching. Many Christians might prefer not to downgrade Jesus to a mere 'solution' to the problem of sin, and argue that Jesus' incarnation represents the boundless love of the Creator seeking the best for human beings, regardless of the cost. The *Understanding Christianity* resources indicate some areas of disagreement and diversity.

The Big Frieze artwork illustrates these concepts, from Creation to Kingdom of God, presenting this view of the Bible as more than a collection of different texts – one which has an overarching coherence.

The timeline overleaf offers a simple way of putting the ideas into context within this idea of a 'salvation narrative'.

THE BIG FRIEZE: BIBLE TIMELINE

CREATION

The universe and human life are God's good creation. Humans are made in the image of God.

FALL

Humans have a tendency to go their own way rather than keep their place in relation to their creator. This attitude is called sin, and Genesis 3 gives an account of this rebellion, popularly called 'the Fall'. This describes a catastrophic separation between God and humans, between humans and each other, and between humans and the environment. This idea that humans are 'fallen' and in need of rescue (or salvation) sets out the root cause of many problems for humanity.

PEOPLE OF GOD

The Old Testament tells the story of God's plan to reverse the impact of the Fall, to save humanity. It involves choosing a people who will model a restored relationship with God, who will attract all other people back to God. The Bible narrative includes the ups and downs of this plan, including the message of the prophets who tried to persuade people to stick with God. The plan appears to end in failure with the people of God exiled, and then returning, awaiting a 'messiah' - a rescuer.



Genesis 1-2

Genesis 3

Genesis 4
Deuteronomy

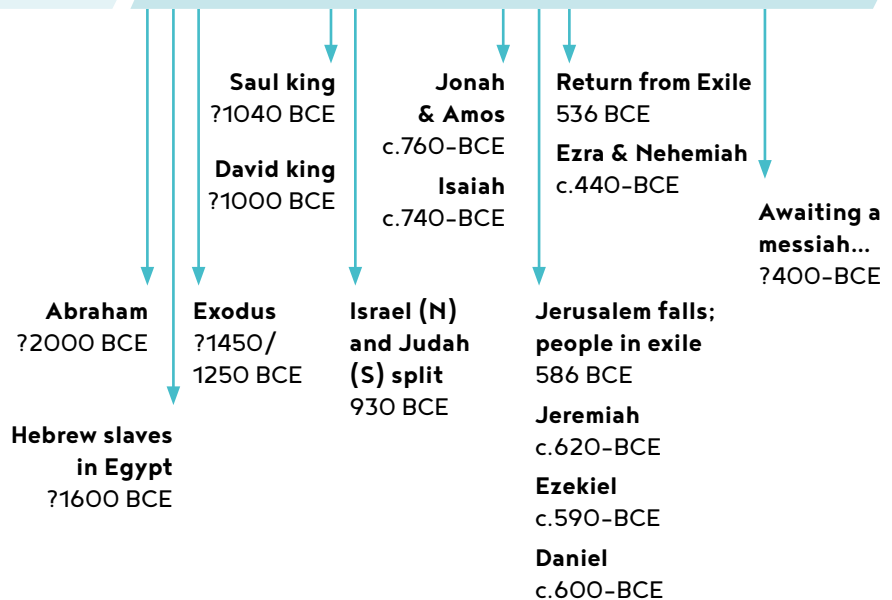
Joshua-Malachi

OLD TESTAMENT

Pre-history?

- Timeline dates are approximate; scholars disagree about most of these, apart from the Exile and return; some scholars dispute the historical reality behind the text, but this gives an indication of how the text tells the 'big story'.
- The books were not necessarily written in this order.
- Note that concepts are not limited to the sections above: they are not separate concepts but are all interlinked.

Timeline is not to scale!



INCARNATION

The New Testament presents Jesus as the answer: the Messiah and Saviour, who will repair the effects of sin and the Fall and offer a way for humans to be at one with God again. Incarnation means that Jesus is God in the flesh, and that, in Jesus, God came to live among humans.

GOSPEL

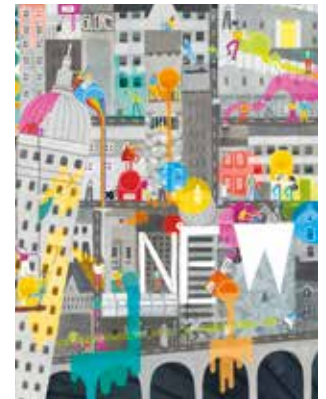
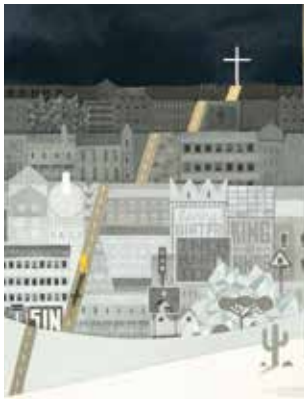
Jesus' incarnation is 'good news' for all people. ('Gospel' means 'good news'.) His life, teaching and ministry embody what it is like to be one of the people of God, what it means to live in relationship with God. Jesus' example and teaching emphasise loving one's neighbour - particularly the weak and vulnerable - as part of loving God.

SALVATION

Jesus' death and resurrection effect the rescue (or salvation) of humans. He opens the way back to God. Through Jesus, sin is dealt with, forgiveness offered, and the relationship between God and humans is restored.

KINGDOM OF GOD

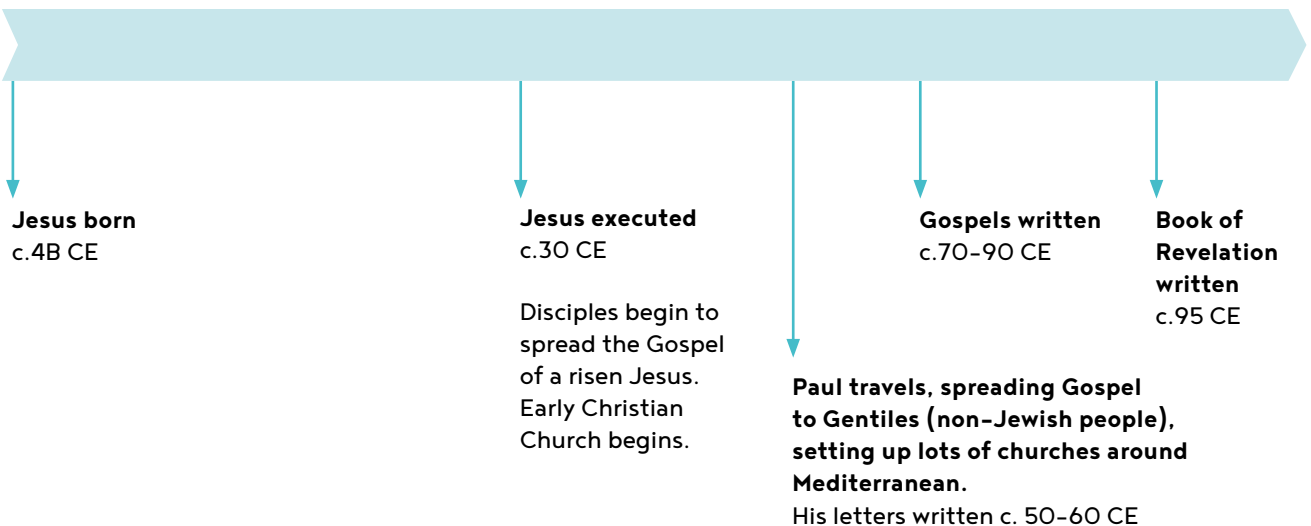
This does not mean that no one sins any more! The Bible talks in terms of God's 'Kingdom' having begun in human hearts through Jesus. The idea of the 'Kingdom of God' reflects God's ideal for human life in the world - a vision of life lived in the way God intended for human beings. Christians look forward to a time when God's rule is fulfilled at some future point, in a restored, transformed Heaven and Earth. Meanwhile, they seek to live this attractive life as in God's Kingdom, following Jesus' example, inspired and empowered by God's Spirit.



Gospels - Acts - Letters

Revelation

NEW TESTAMENT



PANEL 1: CREATION



JUST LOOKING

The Bible uses poetic and metaphorical language to describe God's creative acts. The book of Job offers an extended metaphor as if God were an architect or builder: 'Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations? ... Who marked off its dimensions? ... Who stretched a measuring line across it?' (Job 38:4-5 NIV). This panel from the frieze takes that idea and presents the palette of the Creator - for example, pots of light, stars, rocks, sea, fish.

The pots are manufactured by God, whose name in the Old Testament is given as *YHWH* (often pronounced *Yahweh*, and written in English translations as *LORD God*) and *Elohim* (translated as *God*).

This panel focuses on the extraordinary scale and diversity of the Creation, from planets to worms, from oceans to leaves, from clouds to humans. For Christians, this helps to set the context for daily living: a great Creator is responsible for sustaining all things and has a personal interest in human lives.

JUST ASKING

- What are your favourite things in the natural world? What would you include in one of these paint pots and why?
- What things in the world and in human beings are good and creative? How long is your list?
- What difference would it make to believe that the universe is a creative project of a good God instead of the universe just happening on its own?
- If someone believed that this passage really describes a divine Creator, what might they say or do in response?
- Just from looking at the world, if there is a creator, what would that creator be like and how could you tell?

JUST SAYING

Emma says: *I have tried to convey the artistic fun of creation - re-imagining in a pictorial, joyful and practical way how I envisage creation could have happened. I wanted to communicate some of the huge contrast in size of the things created by God, from the very tiny to the planetary huge. I also tried to show the joy of Adam and Eve pre-'Fall' as well as hinting at what was soon to come.*

CAN YOU SPOT...?



Adam and Eve?



Some fish?



A serpent?

PANEL 2: FALL



JUST LOOKING

This panel takes a rather more literal interpretation of the idea of a 'fall'. The colour, creativity and boundless potential of the Creation panel are lost in this dark moment. The 'Police: Do Not Cross' tape at the top indicates a crime has been committed ... and the result is a headlong journey away from the joy and peace of a close relationship with the Creator. Note that the colour is drained away from next few panels too. For most Christians the Fall is not a single event but an ongoing reality of human existence. The colour is not entirely changed, however, as Christians believe that humans are still made in the image of God, and humanity is still at the centre of God's ongoing love and concern.

For Christians, this balance is important in the 'big story'. Belief in 'fallen' human nature means that the world is not as it should be; *humans* are not as they should be, but seem to have an in-built tendency to selfishness and lack of love; humans are thus in need of rescue – of salvation. Christians argue that belief in a 'fall' also implies that humans are free to choose, for good or ill, and that the God of the Bible does not impose his will on people, even though that means that humans do choose to do bad things. The Genesis account also suggests that evil and suffering are not the intention for Creation; instead, people should resist and overcome them as far as they can. The frieze indicates that the Fall is not the end of all goodness in Creation, and the 'big story' shows Christian belief that God works to overcome the effects of the Fall, in particular through the Salvation offered in Jesus.

JUST ASKING

- If you have ever been tempted, and given in to temptation, how did it feel? Where was this feeling – in your mind alone or did it affect your body too? Why does it have this effect?
- Why do you think people do bad things?
- Is everybody bad, or are some people completely good? Why do some people do so much more bad than good?
- How satisfactory is the idea that humans choose to do bad things – and that it is not the fault of a good Creator God?
- What other explanations are there for the mixture of good and bad in human nature, beside the Christian idea of being in God's image and yet 'fallen'?

JUST SAYING

Emma says: *Here I have drained much of the colour as a stark contrast between the joy of 'before the Fall' to the separation of 'after the Fall'. I've used the dark moody blues and greys to encompass the idea that sin is within the world and infiltrated into its very core. The waterfall represents a cascade of sin unleashed. The progression at the bottom of the image from river into pavement shows how the world becomes and remains sinful.*

PANEL 3-4: PEOPLE OF GOD



JUST LOOKING

In the 'big story', lots happens here - covering many generations of the People of God. The panel hints at the journey they travel, from Noah to Nehemiah. You can find reference to Joseph and slavery in Egypt (pyramids), Moses (the mountain and the tablets with the Ten Commandments), as the People of God cross over into the 'Promised Land'.

As the nation of Israel try to maintain their side of the relationship as God's Chosen People, they wrestle with how to live - facing so many idols, gods and other temptations. The warnings from the prophets

sometimes lead to repentance, turning back to God, only for them then to then sin again, so the cycle goes on. The image indicates this cycle and the distractions they face. It also shows that even through the darkest parts of this journey (and there are some very dark parts in Israel's history), God's image is still visible, and notable individuals - whether kings like David or ordinary individuals like Naomi, Ruth and Boaz (from the book of Ruth) - show Christians that living the way God wants is the best way to live.

JUST ASKING

- Why do people need to have rules for living? Can you think of some really important ones?
- Why do people find it so hard to be good?
- What are the benefits for Israel of being in a relationship with their Creator and Saviour?
- The Bible tells stories of people who repeatedly fail to live up to the standards expected of them. How might this be helpful, encouraging and challenging to Christians today?
- How important is it for these Bible texts to be historically accurate, for the Bible to be a credible guide for living?

JUST SAYING

Emma says: *In the first part of this panel I wanted to show hints of some Old Testament stories, such as the Exodus. Once the city begins I tried to present a slightly confusing piece of art, where there is no clear idea of which way is the right way to go – with people helpfully and unhelpfully pointing in all directions. I hid a rather large word (can you spot it?) within the image to show the extent to which sin has infiltrated into both society and culture – so that it's almost unnoticeable.*

CAN YOU SPOT...?



David and Goliath? (1 Samuel 17)



David dancing in front of the Ark of the Covenant? (2 Samuel 6)



David spying on Bathsheba? (2 Samuel 11)



Jonah, under his tree? (Jonah 4)



Amos challenging the 'cows of Bashan', drinking wine on ivory beds? (Amos 4:1 and 6:4)



Elijah facing down the priests of Baal? (1 Kings 18)



A sacrificial lamb?



The word 'sin' looming large among the People of God?



Some of the many occupying forces who ruled the land of Israel and Judah?

PANEL 5: INCARNATION



JUST LOOKING

This panel focuses on the purpose of the coming of Jesus. *Understanding Christianity* offers a way of looking at the Bible not as a collection of books, but as one book which tells an overall 'salvation narrative'. The People of God fail to overcome the effects of the Fall. Instead of all people being drawn back to God, they continue to sin and turn away from him. So God puts the next phase of the 'rescue operation' into motion, as it were, by sending Jesus, God 'incarnate', in human form.

In a dark world, Christians believe Jesus does more than tell people how to live - he shows them. The Gospels indicate that Jesus gradually recognises his role, which will culminate in an act of self-sacrifice. The illustration presents the necessity of this path, from the poverty and simplicity of a human birth to death on a cross. The desert reflects the story of Jesus' temptation, but also links to the background of the children of Israel in the wilderness too (see the first People of God panel). Some of the names Jesus is given are shown, along with signs of his role as King. The golden colour of the lonely figure of Jesus, and the path he is on, hints at the riches that will be available to people if Jesus completes his mission.

JUST ASKING

- From the stories, what kind of man was Jesus?
- What ideas are there in the Bible to suggest that Jesus was more than an ordinary human?
- If this Christian account is right, why do you think God would be born as a baby and die on a cross?
- Why is it important for Christians to believe that Jesus is God incarnate?
- Christians believe Jesus lived, died and rose again, but what if the Bible did not include Jesus living on Earth? What would the world be like?

JUST SAYING

Emma says: *Here I have tried to portray Jesus' path towards his destiny. Everything was always planned, with the cross behind him in his shadow, and the cross ahead of him in his future.*

**CAN YOU
SPOT...?**



A nativity scene?



Hints of kingly status?



The shadow of the cross?

PANEL 6: GOSPEL

JUST LOOKING

At the heart of the Christian Gospel is the message of love. To Christians, Jesus demonstrates God's love for all people. The commandments require people to love God, their neighbours and themselves. Jesus' teachings show that this way of love is the best way for everyone to live.

The panel expresses the idea that Jesus brings back the intended colours of Creation, with an emphasis on gold, showing the richness and goodness of the

Gospel. Key elements of Jesus' life and teachings - which together provide the 'good news' of the Gospel - are shown, including some events (for example, baptism), some of his miracles or signs (water into wine), some actions (washing the disciples' feet), some names ('I am the Door'), some claims (to fulfil the Law), some stories (the lost sheep). This reflects the Christian belief that Jesus does not simply bring a message of good news, he *is* the good news.

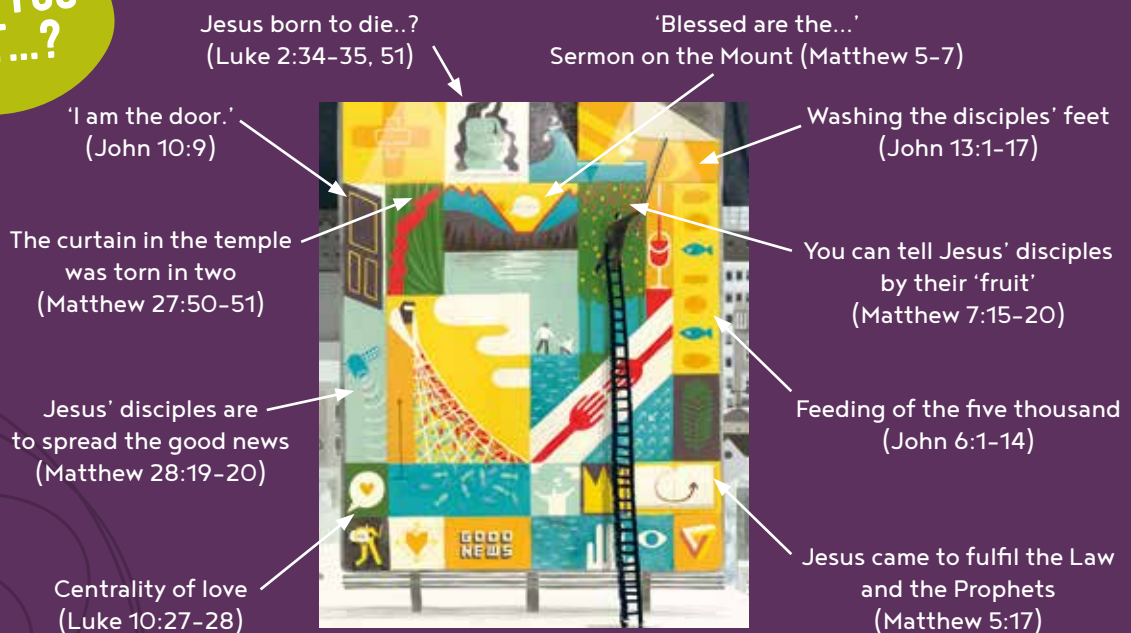
JUST ASKING

- Which of the stories of Jesus do you like most and why?
- What do you think people find so amazing about Jesus that they still follow his ideas today?
- If Jesus is 'good news' - for whom? Why?
- Christians say that Jesus shows people how to live. So what is different about the 'good news' of Jesus' compared with the guidelines given in the Old Testament?
- How far is it possible to live out the 'Gospel' of Jesus? Do people really need to, even in the twenty-first century?

JUST SAYING

Emma says: *I wanted this panel to be really bright, to show the bright and life-giving gospel and message of Jesus.*

CAN YOU SPOT...?



PANEL 7: SALVATION



JUST LOOKING

In the context of the 'big story' that many Christians see in the Bible, humans are in need of rescue. This is because of an in-built tendency for humans to go their own way, resisting the will and guidance of the good Creator. Christians believe that sin separates people from God and that this is an unbridgeable divide unless God offers forgiveness and cleansing himself. Enter Jesus. Jesus expresses God's love for his Creation, bringing the forgiveness needed to heal the divide with God.

Exactly how Jesus' death and resurrection heals the divide is not explained simply in the Bible, and the Church has not settled on a single doctrine of Salvation. There are many ways of explaining this idea, with various theories of 'atonement' (which makes humans 'at one' with God) - but there is almost universal agreement among Christians that Jesus offers peace with God. The variety of explanations indicate what a rich idea it is.

This panel reflects the Christian idea that it is through Jesus (specifically through the cross) that God saves, and that this Salvation brings back the colour - the goodness, the creativity, the extravagance - of the original purpose of being human.

JUST ASKING

- How did Jesus show love for people?
- Why is it important to say sorry when you've done something bad? Why does it feel good to be forgiven?
- How does Jesus fit into the 'big story' of the Bible?
- Christians believe Jesus lived, died and rose again, but what was it all for?
- How do Christians make sense of the idea that Jesus' death and resurrection bring Salvation?

JUST SAYING

Emma says: *Here I wanted to show how Jesus and the cross are the bridge between Creator and the Earth. Jesus is the Way, and gives us access to the bright vitality of the Kingdom. I used the same water/river symbolism as in The Fall to show that it is sin that separates people from God.*

PANEL 8: KINGDOM OF GOD



JUST LOOKING

This panel shows the impact of Jesus. Christians believe his Incarnation repairs the damage of sin. He sends the Holy Spirit to empower people to bring the 'good news' of love, peace and justice. It is the task of the Church to spread the good news, to make the world look more like the Kingdom of God, in anticipation of a future restored Kingdom - Heaven.

The image shows that followers of Jesus can help to make the world as it should be. Here they are spilling out into the world the values of freedom, truth and justice and the virtues of love, joy and hope. There are some specific characters (Peter, Saul - who became Paul after his conversion) but the figures represent any people who are prepared to live in the light of God's commands.

The image also shows a focus on the Kingdom of God as transforming this world. This is not to reduce the importance of eternal life in Christian belief, and the golden gate gives a hint of the wonders that await - St Paul describes it in terms of an 'eternal glory' that far outweighs the suffering of this world (2 Corinthians 4:17).

JUST ASKING

- How should people behave if we want the world to be a better place?
- If people all followed the teachings of Jesus, what would be different in the world?
- If Jesus was on Earth today, what would please him and what would make him sad or angry?
- What kind of impact have the teachings of Jesus had on the world so far?
- This artwork emphasises the Kingdom of God on Earth - this life; what difference would it make if Christians were only concerned with Heaven?

JUST SAYING

Emma says: *I've hidden some of the biblical characters that appear in the 'People of God' panel here as well as other characters. I've used bright colour to portray those who are 'Kingdom carriers'. There is a little hint of a gate towards Heaven, but here I felt it was important to show that the Kingdom is accessible on Earth, and that Christians can bring the kingdom to earth to transform generations, society, culture and life as we know it. At the bottom of the image sin still remains in the form of the dark waters, but paint drips over it and transforms it.*

CAN YOU SPOT...?



Peter healing the lame beggar?
(Acts 3)



Paul writing from prison?
(For example, Philippians 1:12-14)



Gates to the future Kingdom of God, heaven?
(Revelation 21)

STRATEGIES FOR USING THE BIG FRIEZE

The Big Frieze is included in the *Understanding Christianity* materials to help pupils make sense of the core concepts and how they fit with the biblical narrative. Regular and repeated use of the frieze will help pupils to get to grips with the wider theological message that many Christians find in the Bible.

<p>1. Mix and match</p> <p>Give pupils a copy of the core concepts on separate pieces of card. Ask them to match the concepts to the panel on the Big Frieze, explaining the connections. (Link this to a brief overview of the move from Creation-Fall through to Salvation and Kingdom of God.)</p>	<p>2. Making sense of the story</p> <p>Cut up the panels (or print thumbnails from the website). Ask pupils to match them to the correct concept, and then place them in the correct order, explaining why they are making the link and why they are putting them into this order.</p>
<p>3. Framing</p> <p>Give pupils a copy of a panel from the Big Frieze, and also a small cardboard frame (a simple cut-out from some card).</p> <p>Ask pupils to place the frame over the part of the image that they think is...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most interesting • Most holy • Most puzzling <p>They could find the part of the painting that best sums up the concept, explaining why.</p> <p>Compare these with the small icons the artist produced (see page 14). Is the pupils' choice better at communicating the core concept, or the icon?</p>	<p>4. Questions, questions</p> <p>Encourage pupils to ask questions about the concepts, the texts, and the frieze – underlining the connections between them as a way of supporting pupils in gaining a coherent understanding of the 'salvation narrative'.</p> <p>The classic 'who/what/where/when/how/why?' stems offer a good starting-point. Getting pupils to sort, group and rank their questions; for example, according to closed/open; one right answer/many possible answers; religious/philosophical/personal; behind/ inside/in front of the text questions (see <i>Teacher's Handbook</i> p.42).</p>
<p>5. Interpreting the imagery</p> <p>You might ask pupils to use the panels to give them a clue about the concepts, or, once they have learned about a concept, ask them how the panel expresses the ideas.</p> <p>They might consider ideas such as the use of colour, contrasting the paint pots with the blue-grey of sin, spilt out of the paint can of disobedience, and its reappearance in the Kingdom of God, or some of the symbols used in the Gospel panel.</p>	<p>6. Where's Zadok?</p> <p>(Using Zadok, High Priest at the time of King David, in the absence of any biblical name beginning with W, let alone a Wally.)</p> <p>There are a few specific characters in the frieze (e.g. Adam and Eve, David and Goliath, David and Bathsheba, the prophet Amos, Jesus, St Peter and St Paul). You might ask pupils to find them.</p> <p>Alternatively, there are many figures who are not depicting particular characters, but pupils might like to see if they could find any reason to link a figure with a character, explaining why.</p>

7. Filling in the gaps

Separate the panels, leaving space for pupils to create sketches or write suggestions for what has happened to get from one panel to the next. For example, the story of Noah through to Joseph, then to Moses and the Exodus is hinted at between the Fall and the People of God panel. Pupils could fill in the missing detail.

This also allows for the exploration of additional stories and texts to those studied in the units.

You might adapt this to see if pupils can decide what characters, stories or events are missing from the panels. What would they include? Can they draw or label extra scenes or replacements that relate to the concepts?

As pupils become more familiar with the Big Frieze as a whole, you might challenge them to create their own version for their classroom display.



INTRODUCTORY READING LIST

There are many books on the Bible, theology and Christian living, from a whole range of 'insider' and 'outsider' perspectives. Here are some suggestions. They are short and straightforward, and can lead you to much more detailed, demanding and perhaps contentious information.

Getting started:

Simon Jenkins, *The Bible from Scratch: A Lightning Tour from Genesis to Revelation* (Lion, 2009). A witty, graphic guide to the individual books of the Bible, their key themes and stories.

Paula Gooder, *The Bible: A Beginner's Guide* (Oneworld Books, 2013). A short but comprehensive guide including the history, genre, translation and interpretation of the Bible.

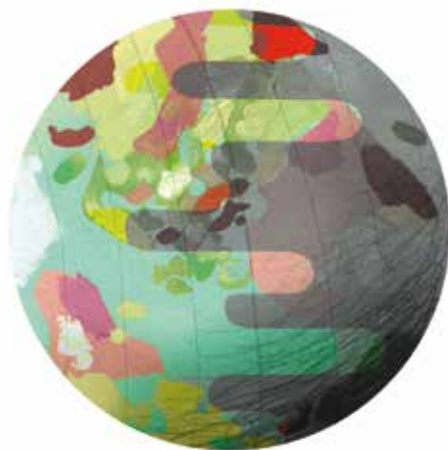
Taking it further:

David Ford, *Theology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2013). It is very short, but it contains a rich account of theology, placing it in a wide historical and cultural context, focusing on thinking about God, facing evil, about Jesus and Salvation, and exploring the skills, disciplines and methods of theology.

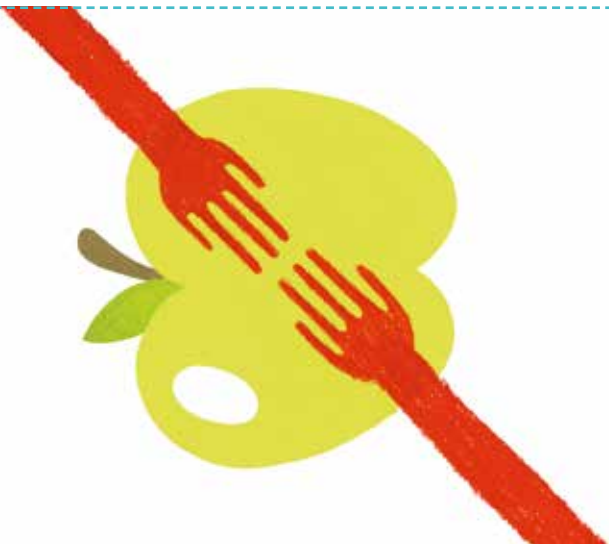
Keith Ward, *Christianity: A Beginner's Guide* (Oneworld Books, 2000). A more technical book, this takes big concepts (including Creation, Fall, Incarnation, atonement, Trinity) and presents three ways in which each is understood within Christianity, showing the diversity of understanding within the Christian tradition.



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