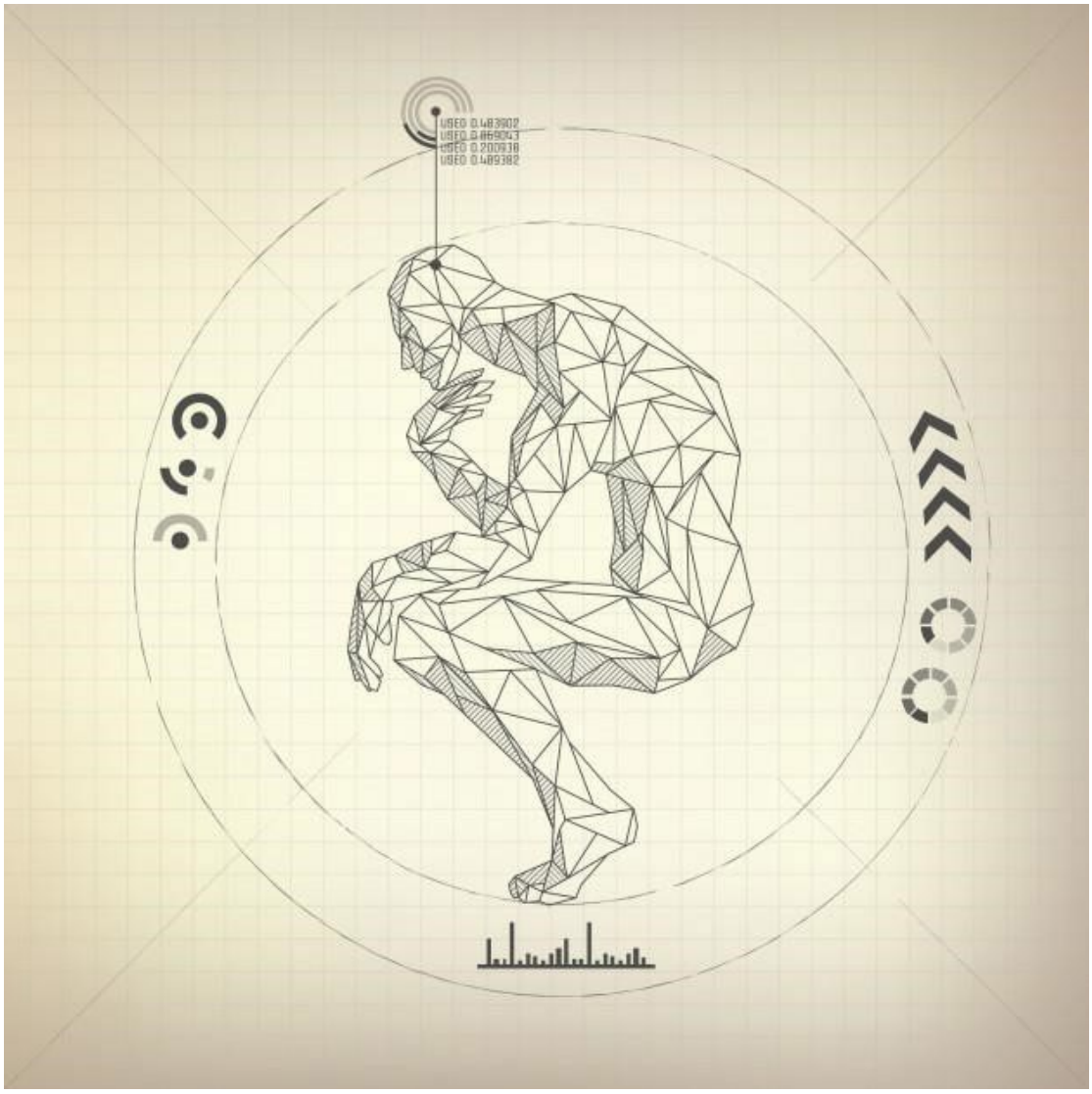
A Level Religious Studies Taster Pack



A modern interpretation of Auguste Rodin's sculpture 'The Thinker'.

Planning on starting or continuing A level Religious Studies next year?

Religious Studies is a great subject to help you build a wide range of skills, including improving your skills as a writer, speaker and thinker.

Reading good quality writing is the best way of improving your own writing. As you read a good writer, you will gain a better understanding of the meanings of new words and the ways in which carefully chosen words and punctuation can add real emphasis to someone's argument. Different writers express themselves in different ways, and by reading them you will develop your own 'voice'. Reading also helps with more basic skills such as spelling, because if you see a word written down often enough, you will know when it 'looks right' when you write the same word yourself.

Thinking skills can be developed if you try to take a questioning attitude to the things you watch, hear and read. Do you agree with what's being said? If you watch a film or documentary where people have different attitudes towards something, which do you agree with most, or least, and why?

The expectation is that you complete four activities and submit written evidence of the over the summer.

Week 1- Watch a Tedtalk and complete the activity.
Week 2 – Listen to a podcast and write a response.
Week 3 – Read a magazine article and write a review.
Week 4 – Complete a critical thinking activity: 1, 2, 3 or 4.

There are some topics which might interest you more than others, focus on these.

Work must be submitted by Friday 5th September at 5pm to kmoore@trinityacademy.org.uk#

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Some talks to watch and think about:

1. Watch at least 3 of the Ted Talks.
2. Take notes as you watch and listen.
3. Write down discussion points/questions.
4. Draft possible answers.
5. Some questions to get you thinking: what were the speaker's key messages? Do you agree with the speaker? What might someone who disagreed say, and what might their reasons be?

TED talks – these are usually wonderful, with plenty to stimulate your questioning and reasoning skills.

Elizabeth Loftus – how reliable is your memory?
https://www.ted.com/talks/elizabeth_loftus_how_reliable_is_your_memory

Dan Gilbert – why we make bad decisions
https://www.ted.com/talks/dan_gilbert_why_we_make_bad_decisions

Richard Dawkins – militant atheism
https://www.ted.com/talks/richard_dawkins_militant_atheism

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie – We should all be feminists
https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_we_should_all_be_feminists

Damon Horowitz – Philosophy in prison
https://www.ted.com/talks/damon_horowitz_philosophy_in_prison We Need a Moral Operating System
https://www.ted.com/talks/damon_horowitz/transcript

Kwame Anthony Appiah – Is religion good or bad? (this is a trick question)
https://www.ted.com/talks/kwame_anthony_appiah_is_religion_good_or_bad_this_is_a_trick_question

Tom Honey – _Why Would God Create A Tsunami?
https://www.ted.com/talks/tom_honey_on_god_and_the_tsunami/transcript

Some podcasts to listen to and think about:

The BBC has some great podcasts available:
https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01f0vzr

Practice your note-making skills by pausing and writing a summary of what you've heard so far. Think about whether you agree with what the philosopher is saying.

Listen to whatever takes your interest. For RS specifically, you could concentrate on the ones starred, and/or move onto others from this list:

Plato's Republic	**Duty	Logical Positivism
**Augustine	**Good and Evil	**Mill
** The Soul	Altruism	The Ontological Argument
**Kant	**Feminism	** St Thomas Aquinas
**Utilitarianism	**Evil	**Redemption
Nietzsche	Empiricism	**Relativism
Al-Ghazali	**David Hume	
William James		

Audio Resources:
Listen to 'The Moral Maze' _on BBC Radio 4. (Available programmes vary over time)
https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qk11
Note down the key points of argument. Create a flow chart of the main points of discussion. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the argument? Do you agree?

Listen to this episode of 'In Our Time'.
http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01mwx64
Based on these arguments, is it possible to argue that God necessarily exists?

Listen to this episode of 'Thinking Allowed'.
https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b099ypqf How should we help people who are dying?

Listen to this podcast from 'Philosophy Now'.
https://philosophynow.org/podcasts/Free_Will_and_the_Brain
To what extent can we exercise free will? List ten examples of choices you have made in the last seven days. For each one, consider what factors influenced your choice (habit, parents, media, friends, consideration of consequences, etc).

Some articles to read and think about (Choose at least one)

The Philosopher's Magazine
The Ethics of Social Distancing

http://www.philosophersmag.com/essays/213-the-ethics-of-social-distancing

Think Magazine

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1TYRr7rZPrV7NFfiMic5azeeO0Cq7xlhF?usp

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Chris Byron, Jesse Lopes

1. Read the article
2. Take notes.
3. Write down discussion points/questions.
4. Draft possible answers.
5. Some questions to get you thinking: what were the speaker's key messages? Do you agree with the speaker? What might someone who disagreed say, and what might their reasons be?

Some activities to build your critical thinking skills

Here are some activities to try, to start you off.

Activity 1

This is the first episode of a documentary about attitudes towards homosexuality.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMPl25oraVc

This is the first episode of Stephen Fry's series 'Out There', where he explores attitudes to homosexuality in different parts of the world.

Questions to write about – try to support your answers with reasoning:

1. Do you think there is a 'right' attitude and a 'wrong' attitude towards homosexuality? What is it that makes these attitudes right or wrong?

2. Some people might argue that different cultures have different ideas about morality, and that these different cultural beliefs should be respected even if we don't agree with them. Do you think we should always respect the beliefs and attitudes of cultures different from our own, or should we try to persuade them to adopt our own beliefs instead?

3. What do you think are the aims of this television series? Do you think they are good aims? Do you think this first episode is successful in achieving its aims?

4. What religious reasons do people sometimes give for opposing homosexual relationships? How would you support or oppose these views?

Activity 2

Watch this documentary, 'Barra Boy'

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhGX1YCsvAM

1. Do you think the story provides convincing evidence for reincarnation? Why, or why not?

2. What do you think counts as 'convincing evidence' for life after death (e.g. scripture, near death experiences, nothing)? What makes evidence convincing or unconvincing?

3. Read the accounts in the gospels of the resurrection of Jesus (you could use biblegateway.com if you don't have a Bible at home)

   Matthew 28:1 – 10

   Mark 16: 1 – 8

   Luke 24: 1 – 10

   John 20: 1 – 18

4. Do you find these stories convincing? Why, or why not?

5. Do you think the stories contradict each other, or are they just told from different points of view, in your opinion? What might account for the differences and the similarities between the stories?

Activity 3

Choose one of the following tasks or combine two.

a) Consider your definitions of the following terms:

- Truth
- Reality
- Good
- Evil
- Moral
- God
- Time

For each concept, try to argue against your own definition. Can you see any flaws in your ideas? How might they be criticised? What conclusions can you reach about how we define these concepts?

b) List five facts that you know to be true. For each one, explain how you know it to be true. Are any of your "facts" uncertain? What would have to happen to prove them irrefutably (without question)?

c) Create a fact file of the philosophers Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas. Include pictures, key facts and a brief outline of their philosophical ideas.

d) Choose a story from the news that includes one of the following themes:

➢ Abortion
➢ Euthanasia
➢ Capital punishment
➢ Humans' treatment of animals

Write a response to the story, considering several different points of view. To help with this, you could consider the points of view of:

- An atheist (someone who fervently believes there is no God)
- An agnostic (someone unsure about religion and faith in God)
- A committed Christian
- A dying man
- A child

Activity 4

Answer ONE of the questions below:

A. Watch this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBdfcR-8hEY&t=732s

Write your own response to the following question:

"How should we decide the right thing to do?"

In your answer you should:
- Include a range of different opinions
- Conduct your own research to find possible answers from different fields of thinking (philosophy, psychology, sociology, religion, etc.)
- Justify your answer with a range of reasons
- Include examples to illustrate your point
- Reach a justified conclusion
- Include a bibliography (a list of sources) to demonstrate your own research

B. Watch this: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVEuQg_Mglw&t=11s

Write a response to the following question:

"Should people believe in God?"

In your answer you should:
- Demonstrate understanding of several different viewpoints
- Show evidence of having discussed the question with at least three other people, and analyse their comments, including similarities and differences
- Give clear reasons for each perspective
- Give examples to justify your answer
- Reach a clear and justified conclusion
- Include a bibliography (a list of sources), if required