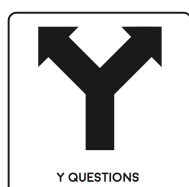


Tragic Hymns

Many hymns glorify God, praising and worshipping God. Carolyn Gillette uses melodies from existing hymns but rewriting the words to fit today's world. Hymns about mass killings, disasters and other events that test people's faith. The hymns are not always uplifting, and can be sung to express grief, anxiety and confusion. It's an interesting way to approach philosophical questions over evil and suffering in our world. Many resources on the topic contain a bit too much angry rhetoric for primary pupils.



Ask pupils to represent hymns through mime or freeze-frames. If they are familiar with hymns through assembly or worship, you could give them specific ones. If not, hymns in general. Reflect as a group on the kind of poses pulled.



Play an audio of the hymn here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xv3r4kuvhKw> A video has yet to be uploaded of it in a Church, but when it is, I'd think it would be even more moving. The text does contain some unfamiliar words for young ears, so you may wish to talk them through the meaning of certain lines, or pick out certain passages to help explain the overall message.

A good starting point is to ask pupils what they think the hymn is about. After this, explain the background to it. The hymn doesn't directly refer to the classic 'Problem of Evil' but it will most probably raise it. You could start them off with a simple question of why God would allow evil in our world.



Philosophy of religion rarely fails to capture imaginations. Children are like adults on this topic – they all tend to have an opinion. If you want to give pupils control over the first questions, ask them about the meaning of the hymn. These can be turned into questions. For example: *God can help us fight against evil = Does God help us against evil?*

The scope for discussion on the problem of evil itself is endless. You might want to introduce the problem itself. My old GCSE RS group deemed this the best diagram to explain it: <http://i.imgur.com/G2l21Pj.jpg>

You could ask pupils to come up with reasons why evil exists when God is said to be all-good, all-powerful and all-knowing. They could then vote on which are the best defences, or rank them in order of strength. Be sure to maintain space for pupils to argue that evil disproves God's existence.

NEXT STEPS

If it hasn't already been raised, the question of prayer, hymns and free-will is interesting to explore. If God knows everything, including what we ask for, is there a need to ask it?

A hymn after the mass killings in Orlando

To a Place of Celebration

To a place of celebration filled with laughter, dancing, joy,
Came such violent devastation — one man's efforts to destroy.
God, we grieve for loved ones taken; we lament, "What can we do?"
Now, we're feeling lost and shaken; heal our nation! Make us new!

Weapons kill — and so does silence; hear our prayer as we confess:
We have given in to violence, we have bowed to hopelessness.
God, we've lost our sense of vision of a world where there will be
Plowshares made from violent weapons, justice in society.

Give our leaders strength for action, give them minds to mend our flaws,
Give them courage and compassion, and the will to change our laws.
May we work for legislation that will curb guns' awful toll.
God, renew our dedication to a world that's just and whole.

Give us love to change our vision; give us love to cast out fear.
Give us love to speak with wisdom — love to work for justice here.
Give us love to welcome difference — love no hatred can destroy.
Only love can stop the violence; only love will bring back joy.

Carolyn Gillette

http://www.carolynshymns.com/to_a_place_of_celebration.html